

**Report to General Manager**

Attachments: Community Ward Forums Pilot Program - Evaluation Summary

**SUBJECT:** Community Ward Forums - Evaluation of Pilot Program**AUTHOR:** Jenny Gleeson, A/Manager Corporate Planning & Governance, 25 August 2009**SUMMARY:**

This report provides an evaluation of the pilot program of community ward forums held throughout 2008/09. The pilot program originated as a strategy of the Precinct System Implementation Plan, implementing the recommendations of the 2006 Precincts Review. The aim of the Ward Forums was to provide an opportunity to promote the Community Precinct System to residents who were not necessarily aware of its role and function, as well as to trial a complementary community engagement model in line with Council's Open Government policy.

An evaluation survey was conducted at the conclusion of each forum. The key findings were:

- 97% of survey respondents would attend future forums; with 63% preferring forums be held biannually, i.e. two (2) times a year per ward; while 20% prefer forums be held annually i.e. one (1) forum per year per ward.
- Attendees most enjoyed hearing from community/volunteer groups, having the opportunity to interact with Councillors and staff and to raise local issues during the question and answer session; and finding out about key Council projects.
- The key areas for improvement in the planning of future forums include shorter Council presentations, greater involvement of Councillors, more time for residents to raise issues and less promotion of the Precinct System.
- 90% of survey respondents were aware of the Precinct System prior to attending the forums.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

**THAT** the Community Ward Forum Program continues in 2009/10, with one (1) forum being held per Ward.

**THAT** the two (2) forums per year per Ward be budgeted for in 2010/11.

**Financial Implications**

There are no additional financial implications.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_

**ORIGINAL SIGNED**

Endorsed by \_\_\_\_\_

**DIRECTOR CORPORATE SERVICES**

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## DETAIL

Throughout 2008/09 Council conducted a pilot series of community forums, rotating per Ward, per quarter. The forums were hosted by the Mayor and General Manager and provided overviews of key projects underway within each Ward. 255 local residents participated in the pilot program.

The aim of the pilot series was to provide an opportunity to promote the Community Precinct System to residents who were not necessarily aware of its role and function, as well as to trial a complementary community engagement model in line with Council's Open Government policy. Council staff showcased and discussed key projects and issues happening within each ward. Residents also had the opportunity to raise local issues and ask questions of Council. All questions were recorded and summaries were published on Council's website within 2 to 3 weeks of each event. Efforts were made to hold the forum within each Ward. This occurred for all except Cremorne Ward as there were no suitable venues available.

The Tunks Ward forum held on 17 June 2008 at Cammeray Public School showcased the Cammeray Dam water re-use project, Tunks Park and Long Bay boat facilities and the Cammeray Skate Plaza.

The Wollstonecraft Ward forum held on 21 October 2008 at Crows Nest Community Centre showcased the Coal Loader/Caltex parklands and facilities, Council's Open Space Provision Strategy, Men's Shed project and Community Garden projects as well as an update from Hayberry Precinct Committee.

The Cremorne Ward forum held on 31 March 2009 in the Hutley Hall, Council Chambers showcased the Cremorne Point Foreshore Walk footpath upgrade, local parking and traffic management issues, community sustainability initiatives including the Climate Challenge and Green Business Energy Saving Program and an update from the Cremorne Point Bushcare Group.

The Victoria Ward forum held on 16 June 2009 in the Hutley Hall, showcased Bradfield Park upgrade, local parking management issues, Milson Park community garden, updates from Hayberry and Lavender Bay Precinct Committees as well as discussion on the possible reactivation of the CBD Precinct.

An evaluation survey was conducted after each forum. 69 evaluation surveys were completed, representing 27% of total attendees across all four (4) events. In the summary the key findings were:

- 97% of survey respondents would attend future forums.
  - 63% of survey respondents prefer future forums be held biannually, i.e. two (2) times a year per ward; whilst only 20% prefer future forums be held annually i.e. one (1) forum per year per ward.
  - Letterboxed flyers were the most effective means of promoting each forum.
  - Attendees most enjoyed hearing from community/volunteer groups, the interaction between Council and residents and the opportunity to raise local issues via the
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questions & answers session; and finding out about key Council projects.

- The key areas for improvement in the planning of future forums include shorter presentations by Council, greater involvement of Councillors, more time for residents to raise issues and less promotion of the Precinct System.
- 90% of survey respondents were aware of the Precinct System prior to attending the forums.

The Ward Forums were a cost effective means of engaging with the local community. The cost of the pilot program was approximately \$5500. The following table details expenditure.

Flyer Printing	\$2856
Flyer Distribution - letter box drop	\$1196
Advertisements in Local Papers	\$1220
Venue Hire - external	\$194
Refreshments	\$65
TOTAL	\$5531

It is proposed that the Ward Forums Program continue, with one (1) forum per Ward in 2009/10; although feedback has suggested that the frequency of forums could increase to two (2) per Ward per year, it is recommended that only four (4) forums be held in this financial year because we are already part way through the financial year and because there are a number of other community engagement opportunities already scheduled for this coming year, including the opportunities related to the review of the 2020 Vision, Community Strategic Plan. These four (4) events have been allocated for in the current 2009/10 budget.

In 2009/10 a series of Business Community Forums will also be trialled. Two (2) to three (3) forums will be held in conjunction with the Harbourside Chamber Group. These activities have been allocated for in the current 2009/10 budget.

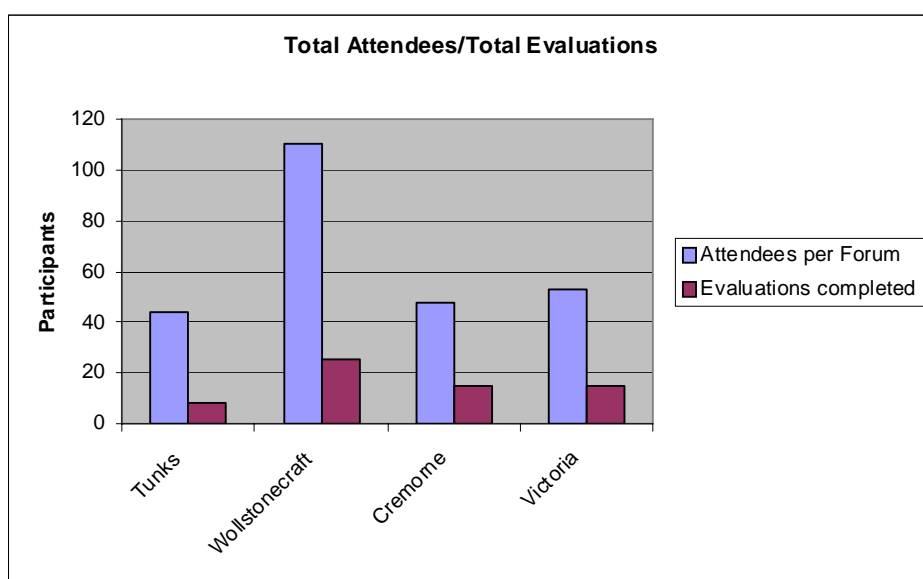
From 2010/11 it is proposed that the frequency of the Community Ward Forums program increases to two (2) forums per Ward; and that the forums be aligned with the communication strategy for the new 2020 Vision, Community Strategic Plan. The forums will provide a mechanism for Council to regularly communicate the objectives and strategies of the Community Strategic Plan.



## Community Forums 2008/09 Pilot Program Evaluation Results Summary

Throughout 2008/09 Council conducted a pilot series of community forums, rotating per Ward, per quarter. The forums were hosted by the Mayor and General Manager, providing overviews of key projects underway within each Ward. Residents were informed of changes in their local area, to share information with other residents and to participate in the delivery of Council services and facilities.

Forums were held in Tunks Ward (June 08), Wollstonecraft Ward (October 08), Cremorne Ward (March 09) and Victoria Ward (June 09). Of the 255 participants, 69 evaluation surveys were completed, representing 27% of total attendees across all four (4) pilot events. The following graphs reflect the number of completed evaluations:



**Figure 1: Comparison between total number of attendees and completed evaluations**

The following data provides details of who attended the pilot series. The summarised results of the evaluation survey are as follows:

1. Age: The majority of attendees were aged between 51 to 71 years plus.

	16 - 30	31 - 40	41 - 50	51 - 60	61 - 70	71+
<b>Tunks</b>		1	1	2	2	2
<b>Wollstonecraft</b>			3	7	6	9
<b>Cremorne</b>	1		3	2	4	5
<b>Victoria</b>			1	7	9	3
<b>TOTAL</b>	1	1	8	<b>18</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>19</b>

2. Attendees were asked how long they had lived in the North Sydney local government area: Over 50% of attendees have lived in the North Sydney local area for more than 20 years.

	a) Less than 5 years	b) 5 to 10 years	c) 11 to 20 years	d) 20 years +
<b>Tunks</b>		2	1	5
<b>Wollstonecraft</b>	3	4	6	12
<b>Cremorne</b>	1	2	1	11
<b>Victoria</b>	1	5	7	7
<b>TOTAL</b>	5	13	15	<b>35</b>

3. Attendees were asked to detail how they heard about the forums: The most common form of communication was letterboxed flyers.

	a) Flyer in letter box	b) Local paper	c) Council's website	d) Word of Mouth	e) Other: including Precincts
<b>Tunks</b>	1	2	0	2	4
<b>Wollstonecraft</b>	19	3	0	3	2
<b>Cremorne</b>	13	0	0	1	1
<b>Victoria</b>	16	0	0	2	4
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>49</b>	5	0	8	11

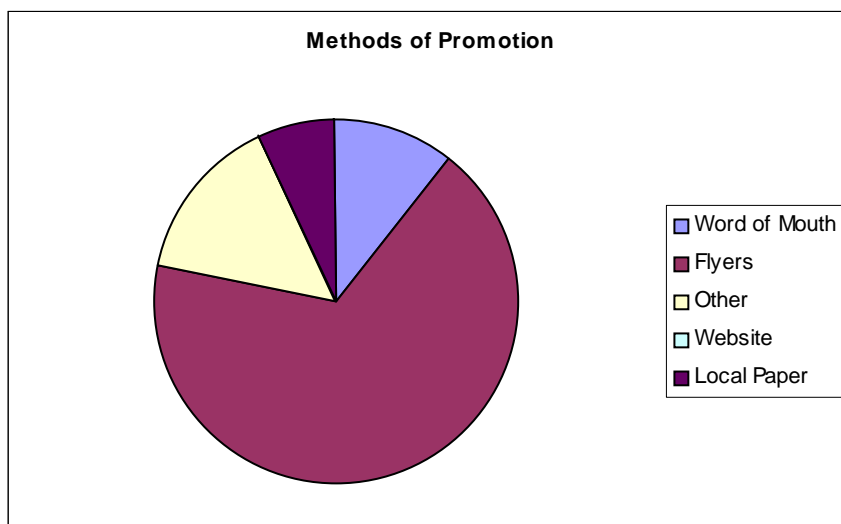


Figure 2: Showing how attendees hear about Ward Forums.

4. Attendees were asked to rate each of the following nine (9) questions out of five (5), the scores have been represented as percentages in the following table; 5 = strongly agree, 1 = strongly disagree.

Questions	5	4	3	2	1
4.1 The forum was well planned and structured	<b>47%</b>	37%	11%	5%	-
4.2 The forum content was very relevant to my personal interests	27%	<b>42%</b>	27%	3%	1%

4.3 The forum content was very relevant to my local area/Ward	36%	<b>41%</b>	11%	9%	3%
4.4 The forum provided valuable information	30%	<b>49%</b>	18%	3%	-
4.5 There was enough time allocated to cover the topics listed on the agenda	21%	<b>53%</b>	15%	10%	1%
4.6 Forum presentations were well structured and relevant	30%	<b>48%</b>	18%	3%	1%
4.7 Participants were given the opportunity to ask questions of Council	<b>52%</b>	35%	7%	3%	3%
4.8 Participants were given the opportunity to raise issues/concerns with Council	<b>46%</b>	31%	15%	3%	7%
4.9 The venue provided an appropriate facility for this forum	<b>58%</b>	33%	8%	1%	-

5. In summary, attendees most enjoyed the following parts of the forum program of events:

- Community/volunteer groups presentations - Precincts, Bushcare, community gardens
- General information and questions & answers/Open exchange of info and Q&A.
- Hearing of the issues and concerns of other residents.
- Interaction between council staff & residents.
- Meeting people
- Participation of council staff/councillors/mayor.
- Presentations followed by questions for discussion/Showcase current projects e.g. Coal Loader Site, Cremorne Point pathways upgrade, Cammeray Dam etc.
- Question time highlighted community interests.
- That it took place at all.
- The fact that the relevant council employee spoke about their own area. It was all well run and impressive.
- The information aspect.
- The opportunity to discuss matters bothering some people.
- Thought it was encouraging to see so many people along. Very useful evening.

6. In summary, the least useful parts of the program of events or areas for improvement were:

- Audience members raising local issues irrelevant to forum - a phone call to Council should resolve such issues.
- Councillors should be more involved
- Keep talks to 5 mins/ Preparedness of staff presenting/ Shorter, more concise presentations to allow more informal discussions & questions/ Presenters kept better to time/ Time restraints/ Feeling we were 'talked at'/ Short of snappy updates on key subjects.
- Less on non-ward initiatives
- Less time explaining what Precincts are about/Too much info on Precinct system
- Need to discuss problems that residents have/ Need to find out more about what issues people are concerned with
- Parking Management/Parking discussions.
- Provide refreshments

- Some questions from the floor are tiresome and/or nitpicking but there is no way to avoid this./ People with personal "grudges" pushing points for too long (unavoidable)/ Single issue' residents. Small issues raised that should be brought up via Precinct or directly to Council/ A few unduly parochial questions were asked by residents.
- Venues - Ensure venues are within ward and use roving microphone.

7. In summary, the following issues and focus areas were identified as suitable topics for future forums:

- Assets and infrastructure - underground cabling, pavement and road surfaces, street lighting
- Brief overview of North Sydney demographics, budget, history at start of meeting
- Community participation - information about ways in which people can take part in more Council affairs, community based programs, Stanton Library programs e.g. literature groups run by Stanton Library.
- Community safety - Pedestrian safety, alcohol problems, anti-social behaviour
- Council staff explaining how they made decisions and the weight (if any) put on public/precinct opinions - open government
- Council plans for next 12 months - Management Plan, Budget and 2020 Vision
- External projects and facilities - HMAS Platypus, The new medical buildings in Gillies St. and Rocklands Rd
- Information about community facilities - library, historical resources and development, child care, aged care etc.
- Introduction to the new councillors, given the proximity to the last election.
- Open Space and Parks & Gardens - nature strip policies, street trees, Streets Alive, foreshore development and repair
- Planning and development - DA's, CBD planning, investors and ratepayers/owner residents rights
- Sustainability - green issues, climate change, measures to reduce carbon emissions, "tidy town" issues and plans
- Traffic management/planning - park changing

8. Attendees were asked whether they would attend future forums: 97% of evaluation participants said they would attend future forums; whilst only 3% said they didn't know.

9. Attendees were asked how frequently forums should be held: 63% of evaluation participants said they preferred that future forums be held biannually, i.e. two (2) times a year per ward; whilst 20% preferred future forums be held annually and the remaining 17% preferred forums be held quarterly, i.e. four (4) times a year per ward.

The following questions were included in the evaluation survey because one of the aims of the Ward Forums pilot program was to promote the North Sydney Precinct System. The following data will be communicated with the Precinct Committees and will be collated with data collected from surveys undertaken at other community events regarding awareness.

10. Attendees were asked of their awareness of the Precinct System: 90% of attendees stated they were aware of the Precinct System prior to attending the forums. This question was based on the same question as asked in Council's biennial Customer Satisfaction Survey. In 2009, 69% of respondents of the Customer Satisfaction Survey were aware of the Precinct System.

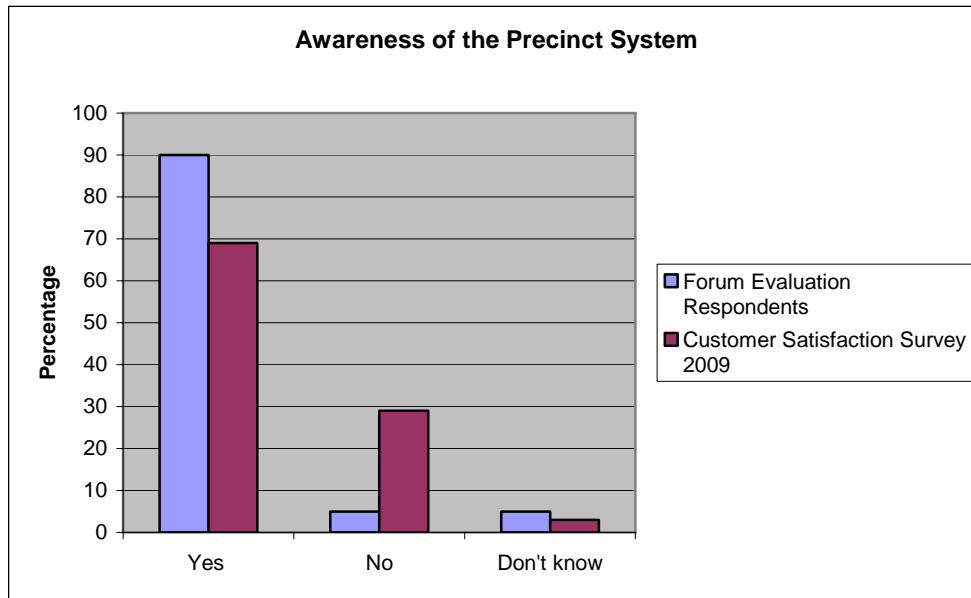


Figure 3: Comparison between Forum evaluation results and 2009 Customer Satisfaction Survey results per same question.

11. Attendees were asked how frequently they receive information regarding when and where their local Precinct meets: 70% of survey respondents regularly received information (e.g. letterboxed flyers) about their local Precinct meetings.

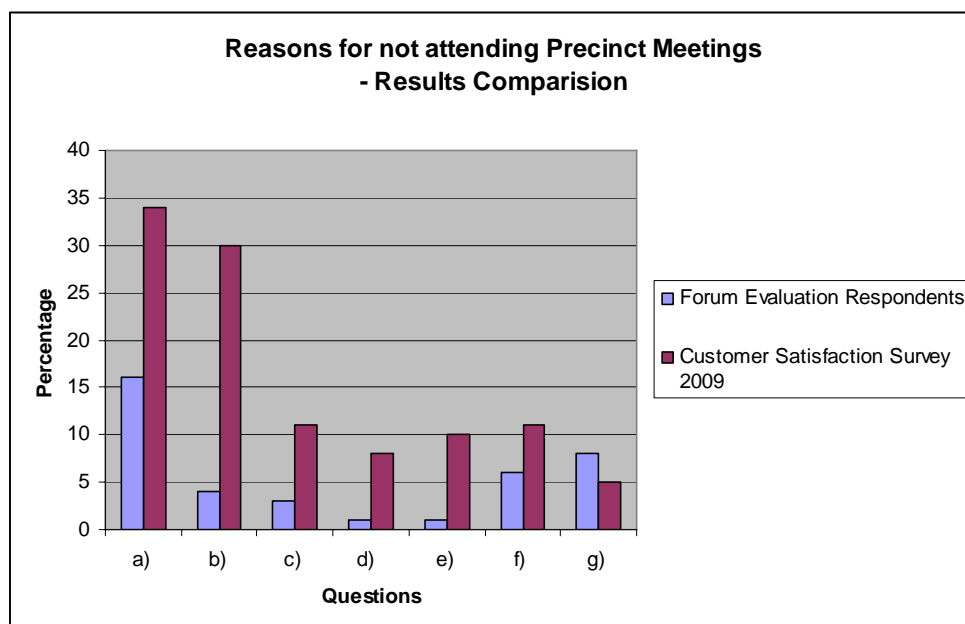
	a) Yes	b) No	c) Don't know
<b>Tunks</b>	4	6	0
<b>Wollstonecraft</b>	17	8	0
<b>Cremorne</b>	7	4	0
<b>Victoria</b>	16	2	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>44</b>	20	1

12. Attendees were asked how frequently they attended their local Precinct Committee meeting: 48% of survey respondents regularly attend their local Precinct Committee meetings, with 21% attending occasionally (more than twice a year).

	a) Regularly	b) Occasionally	c) Just once or twice	d) Not at all	e) Not aware
<b>Tunks</b>	4	2	0	1	0
<b>Wollstonecraft</b>	10	5	2	4	1
<b>Cremorne</b>	4	0	1	3	3
<b>Victoria</b>	12	6	1	0	3
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>30</b>	13	4	8	7

13. Attendees were asked their reasons for not attending Precinct meetings: The top three (3) reasons why survey respondents do not attend Precinct meetings were: 16% of survey respondents were “Too busy”; 8% were for “Other reasons, including local Precinct inactive”; and 6% said “Often don’t know that the meetings are on/not always informed”. This question was based on a similar question that is asked in Council’s biennial Customer Satisfaction Survey. A comparison against the results of the 2009 Customer Satisfaction Survey has been depicted as a graph below.

Questions	Total Responses
a) Too busy	<b>10</b>
b) There haven’t been any issues I felt strongly enough about/no interest	3
c) Time it’s on/venue/can’t get there at that time	2
d) It’s too much of a clique/vested interest/ratbag element	1
e) The meetings are useless nothing is achieved	1
f) Often I don’t know that the meetings are on - not always informed	4
g) Other - e.g. precinct inactive	5



**Figure 4: Comparison between Forum evaluation results and 2009 Customer Satisfaction Survey results per same question.**

13. Attendees were asked whether they were involved in any other Council volunteer programs: 48 % of survey respondents stated they were not involved in any of Council’s other volunteer programs; but of the 27% who are involved in other Council volunteer programs these included Streets Alive, Bushcare, Meals of Wheels and community centres.

14. Attendees were asked whether they were involved in any external (non-Council) volunteer programs: 43% are involved in other volunteer programs including Legacy, school education programs and the Australian Museum. 41% were not involved in other volunteer programs.

*Note: Not all questions were answered per completed survey.*