



Community Engagement Policy

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Introduction

Community engagement is an umbrella phrase that includes information, consultation, engagement and empowering activities. It can be said that it is at the heart of what a council is designed to do.

It supports public involvement in Council decision-making, relationship building and community strengthening and is successfully implemented when the community is and feels part of the process. Done well it ensures integrity and builds trust in Council processes.

This policy is Council's commitment to the community on the principles and values that guide our community engagement.

It will be supported internally by a Community Engagement Procedure and Guideline and suite of tools available for engagement with the public including Council's website.

This Policy

This Policy recognises communities today are increasingly seeking more direct ways to be involved around issues in which they have an interest and outlines Council's commitment to ensuring genuine opportunity for its community to participate in decision-making.

It reflects the strategic objectives and strategies of the 2017/2021 Council Plan - especially, strong leadership and healthy and inclusive communities - and will provide support and align with the Maribyrnong 2024 Community Plan.

This Policy also helps Council meet its legislative requirements and underpins a drive for sound planning and project development.

Legislative Environment

Council's engagement is guided by Victorian Government Legislation and we are obliged to follow some processes. These often relate to long term and strategic planning and finance, for example the Council Budget, developing the Community Vision, the four-year Council Plan or amending the planning scheme.

The Victorian Local Government Act 2020 outlines a set of overarching principles central to our engagement practice which broadly outline the need for community engagement to be transparent, accountable, meaningfully informed and representative.

Other relevant legislation includes the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities 2006, Local Government Act 1989 and Local Government Act 2020, and Planning and Environment Act 1987.

Purpose

This Policy outlines Council's position, role and commitment to build engagement practice into project and program planning and delivery to support decision-making, build relationships and strengthen communities.

It seeks to enhance community outcomes through a consistent approach that is audience appropriate utilising a myriad tools available to broaden reach and engage diverse members of our community.

It applies to the planning, design, implementation and evaluation of strategic community engagement activities which input into policy and planning decisions as directed by Council, recommended by staff, or legislated by the Victorian Local Government Act 2020.

Scope

This Policy defines the principles underpinning Council's engagement activities, the role of councillors and staff in engaging with the community, and the mechanisms which Council will use to engage.

It equally applies to staff, Councillors, and external consultants employed as representatives of Council who design and deliver community engagement activities for the community.

It should be applied at the planning stage of any project or initiative, when a change in service, activities or infrastructure is considered, when an issue is raised and requires a decision or when more information or evidence is required.

Statutory processes prescribed by other Acts, such as planning matters covered by the Planning and Environment Act are not covered by this Policy. Nor does it relate to interactions with Council such as service requests or complaints or the way in which community members should be notified about public meetings, including meetings of council, and details such as how and when they occur - which is governed by other legislation.

Principles and commitment

This Community Engagement Policy is designed to ensure anyone affected by a decision is given the opportunity to inform that decision and is built upon a commitment to 'open, honest and accountable' engagement.

Principle	Commitment
The purpose of any engagement will be clear, relevant, and methods used suited to the audience	We will develop Community Engagement Plans that clearly identify the purpose, scope and objectives of the community's participation

Principle	Commitment
	We will clearly communicate the reasons for engagement along with opportunities to participate that support audience needs
Information will be simple, concise, easy to understand and accessible	<p>We will ensure our community has the information necessary and in a way they can understand to participate meaningfully in engagement activities</p> <p>We will endeavour to provide information that is objective, relevant, timely, easy to access and to understand to meet our audience needs</p>
A variety of methods will be used to ensure anyone who wants to can have a say on matters of importance to them	<p>We will consider the needs and perspectives of all groups that may want to be involved in the process</p> <p>We will reduce physical, social and cultural barriers to participation</p> <p>We will talk to our community in a way they want to hear from us and go to places where our community wants to talk to us – not make them come to us</p>
Engagement will be undertaken in reasonable timeframes	<p>We will allow sufficient time for review of information and participation in varied engagement activities appropriate to audience needs</p> <p>We will do our best not to consult with our community during 15 December and 15 January when we appreciate they may be otherwise distracted</p>
Engagement will be both proactive and respectful	<p>We will engage with our audience in environments and ways that support their needs</p> <p>We will use available tools, including our website, to ensure our community understands what engagement activities are planned or occurring</p> <p>We will be conscious of the diverse make-up and background of our community in our approach, methods and language</p>
Community engagement includes the promise that the public's contribution is important	<p>We will be honest around the level of influence our community has in any engagement activity</p> <p>We will ensure they know the outcomes of any decisions made including how their feedback has been considered and influenced outcomes</p>
Deliberative engagement and deliberative democracy opportunities will be reflected appropriately in our engagement approach	<p>We will be guided by the recommendations of the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) in our engagement approach</p> <p>We will employ engagement tools that actively engage our citizens, residents, affected individuals in decision-</p>

Principle	Commitment
	making where this approach best encourages and facilitates community participation
Reporting and evaluation will support understanding of reach and provide for continuous improvement	<p>We will maintain an engagement register to record activities undertaken, community participation, and feedback</p> <p>We will evaluate the level of community representation, methods used, timing and information and report back internally and externally on engagement outcomes</p> <p>We will create a communication and consultation toolkit/framework to support consistency in the application of the policy</p>

What guides our engagement?

Council recognises engaging early ensures it is better informed to be able to develop strategies and policies as well as improving and delivering services and programs that support community needs and expectations across all areas.

This Policy recognises the significance, complexity and anticipated level of impact is critical in determining the appropriate level of engagement and approach.

The International Association for Public Participation's (IAP2) Public Participation Spectrum is the recognised tool to guide the range and extent of participation across five levels: Inform, Consult, Involve, Collaborate and Empower.

The appropriate level will be identified at the project planning stage with a community engagement plan identifying the most appropriate communication tool and timeframes to ensure affected/interested parties are well informed of both the issue and the engagement opportunities.

When we will engage

In broad terms Council will engage:

- Where members of our community may be impacted by a project or decision or proposed change to Council activities or strategic direction
- Where community input can improve a project or enhance decision making
- To help identify community needs not already known
- In response to expressions of community interest
- Where the Council resolves to consult with the community
- When required by law, policy or by agreement with a government agency or statutory body; and
- When there might be a high risk of impact on the community or Council

How we will engage

There is no one-size fits all approach to community engagement, and neither should there be. A variety of methods are needed to cater for different purposes of engagement as well as diverse audiences.

Best practice engagement supports the use of audience appropriate tools and methods to maximise opportunities for members of our community to be informed and supported to participate.

This Policy recognises the planning stage is critical to ensuring a successful and authentic engagement process. During this stage we will understand, outline and gain agreement on:

- Why we are engaging (purpose)
- What we are trying to achieve (engagement objectives)
- How results will be used (engagement outcomes)
- Who we want to engage with (stakeholder analysis)
- Level of engagement (engagement methods)
- When to engage (timeframe)
- How we will measure success (evaluation and monitoring requirement)

These elements will be incorporated into project specific Communication and Engagement plans that will guide implementation and delivery of engagement.

Submissions

After 1 July 2021, the 'formal submission process' under Section 223 of the Local Government Act 1989 will only apply to:

- *Section 157(5) – council decision to change system of valuation*
- *Sections 163A and 166(4) – special rates*
- *Section 169(1C) – rebates and concessions*
- *Section 179 – Regional Library agreements*
- *Section 199 – concentration or diversion of drainage*
- *Section 200 – drainage of land*
- *Section 207A – a range of traffic and road related matters*

The nature and type of engagement on new or changing local laws will also now depend on the scale and size of the change or impact. Notices will, however, still need to remain consistent with section 73 of the Act.

Council will engage on other matters previously governed by this section in a manner tailored appropriately to the project or issue at hand.

Approach

Engagement will be undertaken in a respectful way following the engagement principles outlined having regard to specific legislative requirements. It will broadly fall into two categories

Participatory engagement generally supports two levels of influence on the IAP2 spectrum, 'Inform' and 'Consult' and involves largely one-way information exchange either from Council to community or community to Council.

It typically occurs when feedback is invited on ideas, alternatives or draft documents. Examples of participatory practice include:

- Surveys and polls
- Submissions
- Gathering of ideas and feedback through the likes of focus groups

Deliberative engagement supports three levels of influence on the IAP2 spectrum, 'Involve', 'Collaborate' or 'Empower'. It requires a level of engagement that is measured, considered and has the involvement of others and can be scaled to fit the size and impact of the project.

Examples of a deliberative practice include:

- Use of advisory groups
- Panels of community members
- Workshops

The agreed approach will reflect the most appropriate ways of informing the defined audience ensuring activities and venues support community and stakeholder needs, are premised on clear and concise audience appropriate information, ensure input is considered, feedback provided and meets legislative requirements.

The agreed engagement approach, audience and activities will be documented in project specific Communications and Engagement Plans.

Issue/Decision	Approach
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Community Vision• Council Plan• Financial Plan• Asset Plan	Deliberative
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Budget• Making of a Local Law• Acquiring or selling land• Other statutory and non-statutory plans, strategies or policies, service planning and capital works projects	Participatory

Reporting

The results and outcomes of any engagement will be reported back to the community in a timely, accessible and informative way so that participants understand how their involvement has influenced the process and therefore the outcome or decision.

Evaluation

Evaluation will be planned at the beginning of a project so delivery can be effectively measured. The entire process will also be reviewed at the end to ensure we understand what happened and why. Lessons learnt will inform future engagement opportunities. Ideas for improvement will be shared across the organisation and inform future versions of the policy and Council's broader engagement planning.

Who will we engage?

Our community is anyone who lives, works, plays, visits, studies, or is invested in our City who may be impacted by Council decisions – whether individually or collectively.

This includes residents, ratepayers, landowners and members of the general public (including individuals, groups, organisations, government, industry and business) who have a stake and interest in the municipality.

Stakeholder mapping will identify those who may be affected or interested in a decision and best methods of engaging to support broad and diverse engagement.

Council recognises some groups, including youth and culturally and linguistically diverse communities, can face barriers to engagement and is committed to looking beyond traditional tools to enable and encourage their participation.

Where engagement may be limited

There are times where Council may only be able to inform the community and stakeholders of decisions and actions. Examples include when:

- an immediate resolution is required
- technical or other expertise is required
- an initiative involves confidential or commercial information
- there are clear and defined legislative responsibilities that must be met
- developing or reviewing internal policies and procedures
- Council is responding to an emergency
- there is a risk to public safety

Responsibility

Councillors, management and staff are responsible for ensuring projects, strategies, and decisions incorporate appropriate community engagement.

	Roles and responsibilities
Councillors	Commit to the principles of community engagement outlined in this policy
	Balance the range of stakeholder views and concerns on an issue when making a decision
Executive Management Team	Champion best practice engagement through policy, process and leadership
	Engage with Councillors around engagement opportunities and process
	Monitor implementation and compliance with this policy
Managers	Manage areas of responsibility to ensure community engagement is consistent with this policy
Customer Engagement Team	Establish the systems and processes to support Council's approach.
	Provide guidance and advice to ensure adherence to this policy.
	Develop Communications & Engagement Plans that deliver on the principles outlined.
Staff	Accountable for supporting the planning and undertaking of engagement activities consistent with this policy.

Review

This Policy will be reviewed three years from the date of approval, or whenever Council determines a need has arisen.

Project	Approach
Policy Adoption Date	
Next Review Date	December 2023
Policy Owner	Manager Customer Engagement
Related procedures	Community Engagement Management Procedure (in development) Community Engagement Toolkit (internal document)
Policies	
Other references	International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) Spectrum of Public Participation IAP2 Core values for the Practice of Public Participation
Superseded Policy	Maribyrnong Community Engagement Framework 20xx – 20xx

Definitions

Term	Definition
Community Engagement	As used in this Policy describes the process for meaningfully involving the community in the decision-making process of the Council
Community	Refers to anyone with a stake and interest in the City of Maribyrnong – including but not exclusive to residents, ratepayers, businesses, worker, community leaders, community groups and organisations, government agencies.
Stakeholder	An individual or group with a strong interest in the decision of Council who are directly impacted by their outcomes
Deliberation	An approach to decision-making in which citizens consider relevant facts from multiple points of view, converse with one another to think critically about options before them and enlarge their perspectives, opinions and understanding
IAP2	The International Association for Public Participation