

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT POLICY

Date Adopted:	10 February 2021
Adopted By:	Council
Review Due:	10 February 2022
Responsible Officer:	Manager Community Relations
Directorate:	Community & Corporate Services
EDRMS No:	D/21/13692

PURPOSE

The purpose of the Community Engagement policy is to outline the principles and Council's commitment to engaging with Southern Grampians Shire's many communities and stakeholders in a way that is purposeful, representative, inclusive and easy to be involved in.

The policy recognises the importance of designing community engagement methods to support maximum engagement and meet the specific outcomes of a particular initiative or project.

DEFINITIONS

Community

The Southern Grampians Shire Council '*community*' refers to all individuals or groups associated with the Southern Grampians Shire Local Government Area (LGA), including, but not limited to, residents, ratepayers, businesses, retailers and business associations, community groups and organisations, emergency services, schools and educational institutions and churches, investors and visitors.

Deliberative Engagement

Deliberative engagement allows a random and representative sample of participants to consider relevant facts from multiple points of view, talking with others to think critically about options before them and enlarging their perspectives, opinions and understandings.

Deliberative engagement is not defined in the *Local Government Act 2020* or supporting documents. Guidance from Local Government Victoria (LGV) specified that deliberative engagement is not a fixed notion. Rather it is grounded in the principles of engagement (below), is authentic and transparent.

Deliberative engagement places a greater expectation on Council to collaborate with the community.

IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation

The International Association for Public Participation, which helps define options for engaging the public in any participation process.

APPLICATION AND SCOPE

Under section 55 of the *Local Government Act 2020*, all Councils must adopt and maintain a Community Engagement Policy.

A community engagement policy must:

- Be developed in consultation with the municipal community; and
- Give effect to the community engagement principles; and
- Be capable of being applied to the making of the Council's Local Laws; and
- Be capable of being applied in relation to Council's budget and policy development;
- Describe the type and form of community engagement proposed, having regard to the significance and complexity of the matter and the level of resourcing required; and
- Specify a process for informing the municipal community of the outcomes of the community engagement; and
- Include deliberative engagement practices which must include and address any matters prescribed by the regulations for the purposes of this paragraph and be capable of being applied to the development of the;
 - Community Vision
 - Council Plan
 - Financial Plan
 - Asset Plan; and
- Include any other matters prescribed by the regulations.

Community engagement relating to planning permit applications and planning scheme amendments is outside the scope of this policy, as these processes are governed by the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* and associated regulations.

Section 56 of the *Local Government Act 2020* establishes five community engagement principles applicable to Council. As required by the Act, this policy gives effect to these principles. The community engagement principles contained in the Act outline a method of engagement that is defined, informed, representative, supported and democratic. The principles are outlined below.

Principle 1: A community engagement process must have a clearly defined objective and scope

- Understand the subject matter, purpose and context of the subject matter of the engagement.
- Consider the desired level of community participation, and what the promise is to them regarding the influence their input has on decision making.
- Clearly identify the negotiables and non-negotiables. Seek the community's input on matters where they can have influence in decision making.

Principle 2: Participants in community engagement must have access to objective, relevant and timely information to inform their participation

- To enable the community to participate in engagement they must be informed about the subject matter, the local context and choices they will weigh up.

- It is important to ensure the information provided to the community is accessible and appropriate for the section of the community whose views you are seeking.
- Communicate information to the community through channels they regularly use. This could be social media, website, direct mail, email, or harnessing the support of community groups to promote engagement through their communication channels.

Principle 3: Participants in community engagement must be representative of the persons and groups affected by the matter that is the subject of the community engagement

- Analyse stakeholders to determine the key people affected by the strategy, plan, or project.
- Consider the systems, organisations and structures that are already in place within the community that could assist you to reach key stakeholders.
- Communicate through channels that are familiar, easy to access, and widely used by key stakeholders.
- Consider the nuances and preferences of each geographic location to reach a broad cross section of representation.

Principle 4: Participants in community engagement are entitled to reasonable support to enable meaningful and informed engagement

- Each community engagement plan should ensure that participation is inclusive and accessible, to maximise reach by accessing a variety of methods to encourage participation by young people, community from diverse backgrounds, and underrepresented groups.
- Use a mix of engagement methods to seek feedback from key stakeholder to provide choice.
- A contact name and number should be provided on all communications material.
- This humanises the process and makes it more likely for people to reach out for assistance.
- In person engagements should be held at venues that are accessible for people with disabilities.

Principle 5: Participants in community engagement are informed of the ways in which the community engagement process will influence Council decision-making

- The decision-making process should take into account the views of a person, group or stakeholder that it will affect.
- Inform participants how decisions under consideration during engagement will be made.
- Be transparent regarding the influence community input will have over planning and decision-making.

This policy applies to Councillors, Council employees and to consultants engaged by Council.

GENERAL PROVISIONS

POLICY STATEMENT

Southern Grampians Shire Council is committed to fulfilling its minimum obligations under the Local Government Charter and recognises its obligations under the *Local Government Act 2020* as they pertain to participation, consultation and engagement.

It will implement robust and comprehensive community engagement practices to facilitate a dialogue that builds relationships and informs and improves decision-making.

It will continually improve its capacity and performance in community engagement through ongoing training, resource development, and review and evaluation.

Council will also work with communities to identify the most appropriate and effective engagement methods in order to continually improve relationships and understanding between all parties.

Council will undertake community engagement activities:

- When community input can enhance decision making or project outcomes
- To gain new information about community needs, aspirations and concerns
- When there will be a real or perceived change to existing services, programs or the use of public space and facilities
- When community members, business communities or other groups would have a particular interest in the outcome of a decision, project or development
- When council resolves to engage the community
- When legislation, policy or other agreement mandates

Council will seek participant feedback to evaluate engagement processes, and continue to adapt and improve our processes.

Type and form of community engagement

Council will utilise the IAP2 of Public Participation to inform community engagement approaches, and this will be documented in specific community engagement plans.

Council will assess the following when considering the selection of engagement level(s) and associated activities:

- The level of impact to the community
- The level of community and stakeholder interest
- The complexity and associated risks of the issue/project/topic
- The resources available to council.

Engagement level	Promise to the community	Role of community	Examples of activities
<p><u>Inform</u></p> <p>Provide news and information to the community to help them understand.</p>	Council will keep you informed	Receive information	<p>Information sessions</p> <p>Provide information by media</p> <p>Social media posts</p> <p>On-site signage</p> <p>Direct mail</p> <p>Project updates</p> <p>Public meetings</p>
<p><u>Consult</u></p> <p>Ask for feedback on a matter</p>	Council will listen to and acknowledge your concerns	Contribute opinions and ideas	<p>Surveys</p> <p>Focus groups</p> <p>Drop-in sessions</p> <p>Opinion Poll</p> <p>Submissions process</p> <p>Public Meetings</p>
<p><u>Involve</u></p> <p>Invite participation toward an outcome predetermined by Council</p>	Council will work with you to ensure your concerns and aspirations are considered in the decision-making	Participate in making plans and decisions	<p>Working/Reference groups</p> <p>Advisory groups</p> <p>Workshops</p> <p>Deliberative polling</p>
<p><u>Collaborate</u></p> <p>Work together with the community toward a jointly agreed outcome</p>	Council will look to the community for advice and innovation, incorporating into decisions where possible	Actively partner for an agreed outcome	<p>Citizens advisory committees</p> <p>Participatory decision making</p> <p>Community ownership project governance</p> <p>Deliberative processes</p>
<p><u>Empower</u></p> <p>Place final decision making in the hands of the public and build their capacity to deliver change</p>	Council will help you implement our mutual goals	Carry out a community-led initiative	<p>Citizens Jury</p> <p>Deliberative processes</p> <p>Ballots</p>

*Adapted from IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation

Community engagement plans

Community engagement plans will include the following:

- The purpose and objective of the exercise (why and how)
- The intended outcomes (what will be achieved)
- The scope of the engagement
- The people who should be involved and their potentially different needs and aspirations
- The context (social, political, historical, policy) into which the process will fit
- The methods for informing the community of the outcome of engagement

Process for informing the community of the outcome of the engagement

In determining the methods for informing the community of the outcome of engagement processes, Council will consider:

- The relevant community engagement plan
- The stakeholders involved
- The relevance to, and the interest level of the broader community.

Council will use a variety of methods to inform the community of the outcomes of the engagement processes. These will include;

- Publication on council's website
- Posts on council's social media
- Print media
- Direct communication with individuals or groups that have participated in the process or requested to be notified of the outcome
- Formal in person announcements.

Deliberative engagement

Council will undertake deliberative engagement for the following;

- Where it has a legislated obligation (including Community Vision, Council Plan, Financial Plan and Asset Plan); or
- Where it resolves that it wants its decision making on a matter, initiative or project to be informed by deliberative engagement.

RESOURCING

Southern Grampians Shire Council will ensure that all engagement exercises are carefully and transparently costed.

ASSOCIATED POLICIES/DOCUMENTS

- Brisbane Declaration on Community Engagement adopted at the first International Conference on Engaging Communities, held in Brisbane, Australia, August 2005.
- International Association of Public Participation's Spectrum of Community Participation

The Community Engagement guidelines are available from Council's intranet website for all Council staff to use when planning community engagement projects. It includes practical resources, templates, examples and checklists to assist Council officers when implementing their community engagement projects.

CHARTER OF HUMAN RIGHTS COMPLIANCE

It is considered that this policy is compatible with the relevant human rights identified in the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (Vic)*.

REFERENCES

- The Victorian Local Government Act 1989
- The Victorian Local Government Act 2020
- The Victorian Equal Opportunity Act 2010
- The Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008
- The Victorian Planning and Environment Act 1987
- The Victorian Public Administration Act 2004
- The Victorian Child Safety Act 2015
- The Victorian Road Management Act 2004
- The Victorian Commission for Children and Young People Child Safe Standards

REVIEW

This Policy must be reviewed a minimum of 12 months.

This Policy was adopted by Council at its meeting of 10 February 2021.

END