

# Community Engagement Policy 2021–24

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## Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>5</b>
1.1	What is community engagement?	5
1.2	Purpose of the Community Engagement Policy	5
1.3	Scope of the Community Engagement Policy	5
<b>2</b>	<b>Community engagement guiding principles and frameworks</b>	<b>6</b>
2.1	Community engagement model	6
2.2	Engagement values	7
2.3	VAGO public participation principles	8
<b>3</b>	<b>Community engagement planning and delivery</b>	<b>9</b>
3.1	When will Council undertake community engagement?	9
3.2	Who will Council engage?	10
3.3	Ensuring inclusiveness	10
3.4	How will Council engage?	10
3.5	Local Government Act 2020	11
3.6	Deliberative engagement	12
<b>4</b>	<b>Responsibilities</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>Legislative requirements</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>Evaluation and review</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>Related documents</b>	<b>14</b>

## Definitions

### **Community**

Individuals who have a connection to Cardinia Shire through living, working or regularly recreating within the municipality.

### **Community engagement**

Community engagement the process Council undergoes using a variety of mediums to exchange information with the community with the aim of gathering data and ideas to make decisions or take action to solve problems.

### **Engagement handbook**

Council's Engagement Handbook is an operational document that contains further guidance, templates and tools for planning, delivering and evaluating community engagement activities to meet the requirements of this policy.

### **IAP2 (International Association for Public Participation Australasia)**

IAP2 is an international member association which seeks to promote and improve the practice of public participation or community and stakeholder engagement, incorporating individuals, governments, institutions and other entities that affect the public interest.

### **Stakeholders**

Groups, individuals or organisations that would be affected by or highly interested in a decision made by Council.

### **VAGO (Victorian Auditor General's Office)**

VAGO regularly undertakes audits of functions of Council, including community engagement activities.

# **1 Introduction**

## **1.1 What is community engagement?**

Community engagement is a process whereby Council uses a variety of methods to proactively seek out information from the community, including their values, concerns, ideas and aspirations. Where possible Council will include the community in the development of solutions and work together with them on the delivery of identified initiatives. This establishes an ongoing partnership, ensuring that community members continue to shape Council's decision making and implementation process.

Engagement assists in establishing relationships that facilitate meaningful dialogue and outcomes in communities such as improved services, facilities, policy and infrastructure.

Council recognises that councillors, staff and volunteers engage with the community continually and often informally.

Community engagement requires the involvement of those affected by a decision in the decision-making process. The level of involvement will depend on the decision that is being made and varies from information provision through to delegating a decision to community.

## **1.2 Purpose of the Community Engagement Policy**

Council's *Community Engagement Policy* is the overarching document that provides guidance, structure and accountability to Cardinia Shire Council's community engagement practice.

The policy articulates our commitment to undertaking high quality community engagement activities to receive input, feedback and ideas from community members on Council projects, services, plans, policies, strategies, and other Council decisions that affect them.

It also establishes guiding principles to ensure all community members have the opportunity to contribute to the conversation to assist Council in making more informed decisions that are responsive, representative and relevant to the Cardinia Shire community.

## **1.3 Scope of the Community Engagement Policy**

This policy applies to all areas of Council operations and covers all community engagement activities undertaken by councillors, senior management, staff, volunteers and contractors or consultants acting as representatives of Council.

## 2 Community engagement guiding principles and frameworks

### 2.1 Community engagement model

Cardinia Shire Council uses the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation as the core model for its community engagement activities.

The spectrum depicts 5 levels of increasing influence that the public can have on an outcome or decision. Council recognises that community engagement can occur at any or all of the levels contained in the spectrum.

	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GOAL	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problems, alternatives and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decision.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public issues and concerns are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision-making in the hands of the public.
PROMISE TO THE PUBLIC	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and issues are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for direct advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.
EXAMPLE TOOLS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fact sheets</li> <li>• Websites</li> <li>• Open houses</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public comment</li> <li>• Focus groups</li> <li>• Surveys</li> <li>• Public meetings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Workshops</li> <li>• Deliberate polling</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Citizen Advisory committees</li> <li>• Consensus building</li> <li>• Participatory</li> <li>• Decision-making</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Citizen juries</li> <li>• Ballots</li> <li>• Delegated</li> <li>• Decisions</li> </ul>

**Commented [MH1]:** Several errors in the image below:  
 Row 1, col 6: decision-making should not have a hyphen  
 Row 2, col 5: your advise should be your advice  
 Row 3, col 5: Citizen Advisory committees has an extra bullet in front of committees and I suspect Participatory decision-making should also not have a bullet in front of decision making?  
 Same cell: Advisory should be lower case a  
 Same cell: Delete hyphen in decision making  
 Row 3, col 6: Delegated decisions has an extra bullet as well - should be Delegated decisions?

Source: IAP2 Australasia

## 2.2 Engagement values

Alongside the IAP2 Spectrum a set of core values underpin the IAP2 spectrum and the way in which Council undertakes community engagement. These include:

Public participation is based on the belief that those who are affected by a decision have a right to be involved in the decision-making process.

Public participation includes the promise that the public's contribution will influence the decision.

Public participation promotes sustainable decisions by recognising and communicating the needs and interests of all participants, including decision makers.

Public participation seeks out and facilitates the involvement of those potentially affected by or interested in a decision.

Public participation provides participants with the information they need to participate in a meaningful way.

Public participation communicates to participants how their input affected the decision.

Source IAP2 Australasia

## 2.3 VAGO public participation principles

The VAGO *Public Participation in Government Decision-making Better Practice Guide* also sets out key public participation principles which further inform the process of development and delivery of Council's community engagement practice, including:

### Responsiveness

- Identified impacts of decisions on the community and stakeholders are identified
- Opportunities and challenges are identified to assist in creating higher participation
- Engagement input is utilised and responded to in a timely and constructive manner
- Continual improvement of engagement practice

### Transparency and integrity

- Ensure those affected by the decision understand the scope of the engagement activity and any constraints
- Address community and stakeholder concerns in an honest and forthright way and communicate results back to the community in a way they understand.

### Openness

- Embed all decision-making processes an openness to appropriately understand and incorporate the views of those affected by decisions.
- Provide access to all relevant information about the decision in a manner that participants can understand, so that their contributions can be fully informed.

### Accountability

- Be clear about the scope and objectives of the engagement process.
- Demonstrate that the results and outcomes are consistent with the commitment made at the outset
- Be clear about the contribution participants will be asked to make and their responsibilities.
- Provide appropriate time and resources to ensure those affected can participate in a meaningful way.

### Inclusiveness

- Make every reasonable effort to include the stakeholder groups and community members affected by a pending decision.
- Make reasonable adjustments where necessary to remove barriers to participation and ensure an inclusive approach.
- Provide appropriate time and resources to ensure those who are affected can participate in a meaningful way.
- Be aware and take into account the needs of diverse communities to be able to participate in a meaningful way.

### Awareness

- Being aware and taking into account any legislation that should shape the community engagement approach

The IAP2 spectrum, IAP2 values and the VAGO public participation principles underpin the development of engagement activities undertaken by Council.



## 3 Community engagement planning and delivery

### 3.1 When will Council undertake community engagement?

Council undertakes community engagement on a regular basis both formally and informally.

While it is not practical to engage with the community on every issue, Council resolves to ensure the community is as well informed as they can be on major issues, plans and projects. Ensuring a community is informed means they have the necessary information to form an opinion and provide input through a community engagement process. This direct input from residents enhances Council's decision-making processes making it more relevant and transparent for the community.

To ensure Council engages consistently, the following circumstances have been identified as triggers for when community engagement should occur.

When there is a proposed change which will significantly affect the community.

When a proposed change or action is likely to generate community concern

When additional information is required by Council to make a decision

When it is a legislative requirement

Specific examples where community engagement will occur include but are not limited to:

Development of strategic documents including the *Community Vision*, *Council Plan*, *Financial Plan* and *Asset Plan*

Development of Council budgets

Creation of Local Laws

Undertaking significant service level changes

Planning and delivery of significant infrastructure or asset projects

In addition, Council may elect to schedule a set number of general engagement activities throughout the year that are not project-specific, as a way of gathering community feedback that can be of use to the whole organisation.

The following are some circumstances where community engagement may not occur.

An emergency or situation which impacts public safety, where an immediate resolution is required

Situations which are strictly confidential in nature

When there is a ministerial exemption

Day-to-day operational decisions which have minimal to no impact on the community

### 3.2 Who will Council engage?

It is important for Council to understand who should be engaged. Although most engagement processes undertaken will be open to the wider community to ensure they are transparent, accessible and inclusive, there are also instances where there is a need to focus on a particular group or groups. Some considerations are:

Who is directly or indirectly impacted?

Who has a vested interest or potential level of concern?

Who would provide valuable insight and input?

Who is the initiative, project or decision aimed at?

Council's *Community Engagement Handbook* includes tools to assist Council officers to identify who may require focussed engagement, including particular community demographics and key stakeholder groups.

These tools are used along with discussion with Council's community engagement facilitator to identify the 'target audiences' for Council's engagement activities, alongside opening up opportunities for the broader community to contribute and have their voices heard.

A key to securing broad participation in engagement process is effective communication of the opportunity to contribute. Regular formal and informal consultation assists Council to identify how to promote more efficiently and effectively to all segments of the community.

### 3.3 Ensuring inclusiveness

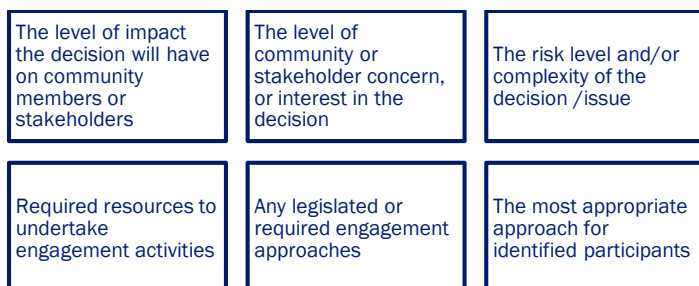
Council will ensure that all reasonable measures are put in place to assist in securing participation from all sections of the community including but not limited to: children, young people, seniors, people with a disability, community members who identify as LGBTIQ+, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, or those who belong to culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities. In many instances, this will include adapting communication and engagement activities to better suit the needs of particular groups and increase participation.

### 3.4 How will Council engage?

Consideration of the IAP2 Spectrum level and methods of engagement will be undertaken by Council as part of the completion of a community engagement plan. The exact nature and details of the engagement will depend on the issue or policy being considered, the objectives of the engagement, timeframes, resources and levels of concern or interest in the decision under consideration.

Community engagement involves a variety of engagement methods and communication techniques suited to the individual or group involved. These can range from informal discussions to formal community meetings, focus groups, workshops, online feedback, deliberative processes and other creative approaches. In some circumstances, Council will also support community members advocating on issues themselves.

Careful consideration is undertaken as part of the engagement plan process to decide on the most appropriate level of engagement and methods based on the following.



### 3.5 Local Government Act 2020

The *Local Government Act 2020* sets out five key principles for councils to undertake community engagement activities. Council commits to undertaking actions to ensure these principles are met, including:

#### Community engagement process must have a clearly defined objective and scope

- Community engagement plans clearly define the purpose and outcomes sought from the engagement process.
- The scope of the engagement is well defined throughout the engagement plan, all engagement activities, and within appropriate communication material to articulate the level to which the community can contribute to and influence the decision making process.

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

- Council provides sufficient time for community members and stakeholders to receive information about the opportunity to contribute and provide their input.
- Community members receive clear, relevant and timely information about the decision being made to better inform their participation.
- Engagement processes use a variety of communication methods to better reach all target groups, stakeholders and general community.

#### Participants in community engagement must be representative of the persons and groups affected by the matter that is the subject of the community engagement.

- Undertake a process of identifying target cohorts and key stakeholders using Council's *Community Engagement Handbook* tools, supported by the community engagement officer.
- Support the inclusion of all affected groups in the community wherever possible including (but not limited to) children, young people, seniors, people with a disability, community members who identify as LGBTIQ+, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, or those who belong to culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities. In many instances this may require providing targeted communication and engagement approaches for these groups, informed by consultation.
- Where appropriate Council will consult with representative groups and committees in the community to receive their input or a particular issue or decision.

**Participants in community engagement are entitled to reasonable support to enable meaningful and informed engagement**

- Formal and informal consultation with community members is undertaken to better understand preferred communication and engagement methods to improve levels of participation from all sectors?? of the community.
- Council identifies, considers and responds to potential barriers to participation in community by adapting communication materials and engagement methods or providing additional supports as required. Where possible, Council will remove any identified access, literacy, cultural or other barriers that could affect participation from community members.

**Participants in community engagement are informed of the ways in which the community engagement process will influence Council decision making**

- Council clearly explains the scope of the engagement to community members through promotional material and engagement activities, including the level to which they can influence the decision being made.
- A variety of communication methods are used to inform participants and the wider community of the final outcome and in which ways their input informed the final decision.

### **3.6 Deliberative engagement**

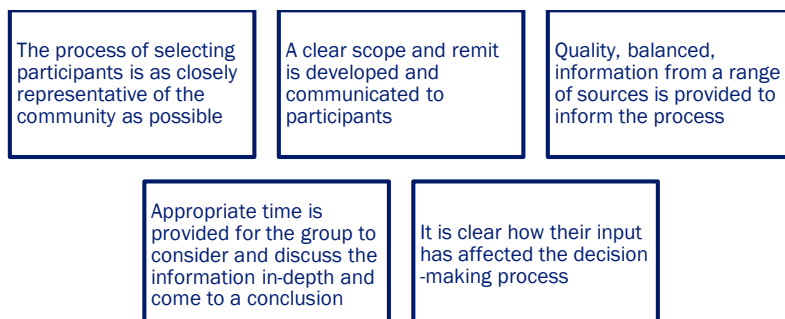
Deliberative engagement is the process of bringing together a group of individuals who are as closely representative of the demographics of the general population of the community as practically possible. This group considers relevant facts from multiple points of view over a set period of time, identifying options, and coming to a group decision.

Deliberative engagement is a method used in the higher levels of the IAP2 spectrum (involve, collaborate and empower). Participants within a deliberative engagement process will be provided with a defined scope and remit for their activities and will be provided with a clear understanding of how their involvement shaped the decision-making process.

Deliberative engagement practices will be applied by Council as part of requirements under the *Local Government Act 2020*, including consultation on the *Community Vision*, *Council Plan*, *Financial Plan* and *Asset Plan*.

Deliberative engagement may also be identified by Council as an appropriate method to engage with the community on other decisions to be made.

A range of deliberative engagement methods are available and each process will be developed to meet the specific need, taking into consideration available resources, timing and applying the IAP2 spectrum to identify the level to which the community can influence the final decision. Any use of deliberative engagement activities will be outlined in the community engagement plan and will include the following elements.



## 4 Responsibilities

All Council staff, councillors, volunteers and contractors or consultants are required to undertake the development of a community engagement plan including consultation with the community engagement facilitator when an engagement is required.

The community engagement plan and any accompanying communication plan must be approved by the appropriate line manager before commencement of the activities.

The *Community Engagement Handbook* is made available to all councillors, senior management, staff, volunteers and contractors and consultants acting as representatives of Council. The handbook provides in-depth guidance on how to undertake community engagement activities including templates, resources, tools and further information on when, how and who to engage.

## 5 Legislative requirements

Community engagement is mandated under the following legislation:

- *Local Government Act 2020*
- *Planning and Environment Act 1987*
- *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008*
- *Road Management Act 2004*
- *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*
- *Child Safety Act 2015*
- *Public Administration Act 2004*
- *Equal Opportunity Act 2010*
- The Commission for Children and Young People Child Safe Standards

Where community engagement is mandated, Council will adhere to the requirements as set out in the relevant act but where possible, Council commits to going above and beyond the minimum standard to achieve best practice.

## 6 Evaluation and review

Through the adoption of this policy, Council commits to undertaking regular and consistent evaluation and review of community engagement promotion, activities and processes through:

- ongoing implementation of the evaluation methodology and associated engagement planning, evaluation and reporting

- continual monitoring of community engagement plans submitted for approval, their delivery and outcomes
- undertaking informal and formal consultation to receive feedback from the community about the communication and engagement approaches undertaken by council to assist in implementing continual improvement.

## **7 Related documents**

Type of document	Title
Guidelines / Procedure	Community engagement handbook