

Community Engagement Policy



Endorsed by Council: 1 March 2021



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Community Engagement Policy



Council Policy

Responsible officer	Manager Government Relations, Engagement & Advocacy
Functional area	Office of the CEO
Date adopted by Council	1 March 2021
Review date	1 March 2025

Purpose

This Community Engagement policy ('this policy') outlines the principles Council commits to community members to increase their participation in Council planning and decision-making as required under sections 55 and 56 of the *Local Government Act 2020* ('the Act').

Background

Five overarching principles have guided the development of the Act:

1. Community Engagement
2. Strategic Planning
3. Financial Management
4. Public Transparency
5. Service Performance

This policy refers to the overarching principle of Community Engagement.

Application

The Act requires that community engagement principles be applied to the making of Council's local laws, budget and policies and deliberative engagement practices be applied to the development of the Community Vision, Council Plan, Financial Plan and Asset Plan and any other prescribed matters.

Scope

This policy outlines how Council employees, Councillors, contractors or any other representative of Northern Grampians Shire Council ('we') provide persons and groups of the municipal community ('the community') of Northern Grampians Shire with opportunities for engagement in Council planning and decision-making.

Note

This policy does not apply to community engagement processes that are subject to prescribed processes imposed by other Victorian legislation such as land-use planning applications or other Council processes such as service requests or complaints.

On matters where the only form of community participation is an invitation to make submissions, and engagement on the matter was formerly governed by sections 189 and 223 of the *Local Government Act 1989*, Council will continue to proceed in a manner modelled on sections 189 and 223 of the *Local Government Act 1989*.

Policy Objective

The objective of this policy is to increase the participation of community members in Council planning and decision-making. To achieve this Council commits to the application of the following as required:

Community Engagement Principles

Section 56 of the Act requires community engagement principles are applied to the making of Council's local laws, budget and policies.

We commit to the following community engagement principles:

Principle 1 – Engagement Planning

- a) Allocating appropriate funding, time and resourcing to community engagement planning and implementation;
- b) Developing community engagement plans in accordance with this policy;
- c) Ensuring a community engagement process has a clearly defined objective and scope.

Principle 2 – Information Access

- a) Providing the community with access to objective, relevant and timely information to inform their participation;
- b) Providing this information with sufficient notice for the community to consider how they may be affected by proposed decisions or plans and to make subsequent arrangements to be involved in engagement processes;
- c) Providing opportunities, as appropriate, for the community members to come together to learn and share information and deliberate plans or required decisions in a meaningful and informed way.

Principle 3 – Representative Participation

- a) Identifying the different members of the community at the commencement of all relevant planning or decision-making processes and determining the level to which they may be affected by the decisions or plans;
- b) Ensuring the community members identified are representative of the persons and groups affected by the matter that is the subject of the community engagement, being mindful how characteristics like gender, ethnicity/cultural background, socio-economic status, ability, sexual orientation, religion, age and geographic location can:
 - i. Interact on multiple levels to compound impact
 - ii. Create overlapping forms of discrimination and prejudice
 - iii. Increase service barriers and social and economic disadvantage;
- c) Using communication methods and other initiatives that are appropriate and accessible to the community members identified to encourage representative participation.

Principle 4 – Reasonable Support

- a) Identifying the barriers that may exist to community members' participation in engagement processes, including accessibility needs, information formats, communication channels, languages or other barriers that may limit participation;
- b) Providing reasonable support to enable community members to participate in meaningful and informed engagement, which may include developing specific plans that respond to identified barriers and needs or other support initiatives;

- c) Encouraging broad participation, active listening and due consideration of the views of participants in the community engagement process.

Principle 5 – Level of Engagement

- a) Using the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) Framework as a basis, inform community members of the level of engagement they can expect to play in each community engagement process as relevant to the significance and complexity of the matter requiring planning or decision-making;
- b) Articulating how community perspectives will be incorporated into planning or decision-making and the nature of decisions to be made where legislation permits negotiable elements;
- c) Sharing with the community what has been learned and what actions or decisions have resulted from the engagement process.

Deliberative Engagement Practices

Section 55 of the Act requires deliberative engagement practices be applied to the development of the Community Vision, Council Plan, Financial Plan and Asset Plan and any other matters prescribed by the regulations.

The Act does not specify what constitutes deliberative engagement practices.

We consider deliberative engagement to refer to engagement processes that enable representative persons and groups affected by the matter to participate to reach conclusions based on in-depth consideration of relevant facts from multiple points of view, conversations with others and critical thinking about alternative perspectives, opinions, understandings and trade-offs.

We commit to providing for the following additional provisions to application of the Community Engagement Principles to enable the best opportunity for deliberative engagement with the community:

Principle 1 – Engagement Planning

- i. Additional funding, time and resourcing to identify, plan and deliver deliberative engagement practices.

Principle 2 – Information Access

- i. Increasing communication frequency with the community to provide ample opportunity to access information and deliberate their participation;
- ii. Additional time for participants to deliberate complex information, weigh up options and discuss ideas;
- iii. Additional opportunities for participants to have in-depth conversation and understand the issues involved.

Principle 3 – Representative Participation

- i. Additional funding to provide for subject matter expertise (where required) to assist in identifying persons or groups affected by the matter;
- ii. Additional funding to inform communications (as appropriate) to the persons or groups affected by the matter to facilitate understanding and encourage representative participation.

Principle 4 – Reasonable Support

- i. Additional support to enable community members' participation in engagement processes.

Principle 5 – Level of Engagement

- i. Additional levels of engagement with the community to increase their deliberative remit as far as practicable.

Community Engagement

Council understands that we make better decisions when we fully understand the needs, priorities and concerns of individuals and groups within our community, and that some of our decisions affect the entire community, but may affect some people more than others.

Our community engagement goals and corresponding levels of engagement that we are able to offer the community are based on best-practice community engagement frameworks, including that from the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2).

Three guides accompany this policy to help Council staff understand more about how to identify stakeholders, manage communications and manage community engagement. These are also found in the 'Managing Stakeholders' activity of Council's Project Management Framework.

Community Engagement Goals & Engagement Activities

We will identify engagement goals with the community relevant to each stage of each project Council undertakes that is informed by the scope and potential impact the community can have on a decision.

Table 1: Community Engagement Goals & Engagement Activities

INFORM 	CONSULT 	INVOLVE 	COLLABORATE 	EMPOWER 
To provide balanced and objective information to make our community aware of something that has happened or will happen.	To listen to our community and other key stakeholders feedback on options or a potential decision and take their input into account.	To seek input to identify issues, concerns and aspirations to inform planning and decision-making and show how that input has informed the plan or decision.	To work with our community and other key stakeholders to develop a detailed understanding of all the issues and opportunities and identify agreed solutions at every step of the process.	To partner with our community and other key stakeholders to identify solutions and/or lead change, and place final decision making in their hands.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Information sessions ● Social media posts ● On-site signage ● Direct mail ● Project updates ● Public meetings 	Survey Focus groups Drop-in sessions Opinion poll Submission processes	Working groups Reference groups Advisory groups Workshops Deliberative polling	Citizen's advisory committees Participatory decision making Community ownership Deliberative processes	Citizens juries Deliberative processes Ballots

Levels of Engagement

We will provide the community with a level of engagement to meet or exceed our engagement goals, that is informed by the scope and potential impact of a decision and the type of influence the community can have on a decision.

Table 2: Levels of Engagement

 <p>INFORM</p>	 <p>CONSULT</p>	 <p>INVOLVE</p>	 <p>COLLABORATE</p>	 <p>EMPOWER</p>
		<p>The Local Government Act requires deliberative engagement practices for the:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Vision • Council Plan • Financial Plan • Asset Plan <p>On long term and significant impact projects like these, we will provide this level of engagement to partner with the community.</p>		
		<p>High impact and complex projects, for example, major park upgrades, precinct master planning or annual budget planning require extra levels of interaction and often happen over several stages.</p>		
	<p>Decisions carrying a lower impact still require community input but less time and resource-intensive methods.</p>			
	<p>Sometimes options are limited for practical reasons for example work must be carried out but we will ask you how and when it should happen.</p>			
<p>Sometimes, we may need to inform you of a decision where there is no opportunity for community input. For example where there are public safety issues that need to be addressed, we are not the decision-making authority, or there are no real</p>				

options available. In these cases, we will keep you informed.				
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Informing the Community

Council will utilise a variety of methods to inform the community of the outcome of engagement processes. These will be outlined in specific community engagement plans and will include, but not be limited to:

- Publication on Council's website
- Posts on Council's social media sites
- Print media
- Direct communication with individuals or groups that have participated in the process or requested to be notified of the outcomes (e.g. phone, email or post)
- Formal in-person announcements (e.g. community meeting).

References

Relevant Legislation

- [Local Government Act 2020](#)
- [Local Government Act 1989](#)

Related Policies

- [Northern Grampians Shire Public Transparency Policy August 2020](#)
- Media & Communications Policy 2020

Related Guides

- [PMF Activity – Managing Stakeholders: Stakeholder Management Plan - GUIDE](#)
- [PMF Activity – Managing Stakeholders: Communication Management Plan – GUIDE](#)
- [PMF Activity – Managing Stakeholders: Community Engagement Plan – GUIDE](#)

Other references

- [International Association for Public Participation](#)
- [Diverse Communities and Intersectionality Working Group](#)
- [Rural Councils Victoria: Community Engagement Toolkit](#)
- [Engage Vic: Community Engagement Workshop](#)

Compliance

[Select the checkboxes that this policy requires relevant State Government legislative compliance with.]

- Local Government Act 2020*
- Gender Equality Act 2020*
- Child Safety Act 2015*
- Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014*
- Equal Opportunity Act 2010*
- Fair Work Act 2009*
- Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*
- Health Records Act 2001*
- Local Government Act 1989*
- Freedom of Information Act 1982*
- Other

Appendix A: Engagement Principles

Principle 1 – Engagement Planning

- i. Funding, time and resourcing to identify, plan and deliver required engagement.

Principle 2 – Information Access

- i. Increasing communication frequency with the community to provide ample opportunity to access information and deliberate their participation;
- ii. Additional time for participants to deliberate complex information, weigh up options and discuss ideas;
- iii. Additional opportunities for participants to have in-depth conversation and understand the issues involved.

Principle 3 – Representative Participation

- i. Additional funding to provide for subject matter expertise (where required) to assist in identifying persons or groups affected by the matter;
- ii. Additional funding to inform communications (as appropriate) to the persons or groups affected by the matter to facilitate understanding and encourage representative participation.

Principle 4 – Reasonable Support

- i. Additional support to enable community members' participation in engagement processes.

Principle 5 – Level of Engagement

- i. A level of engagement with the community relevant to community perspective and project context perspective.

Appendix B: Engagement Principles in the context of deliberate engagement practice requirements

Principle 1 – Engagement Planning

- i. Additional funding, time and resourcing to identify, plan and deliver deliberative engagement practices.

Principle 2 – Information Access

- i. Increasing communication frequency with the community to provide ample opportunity to access information and deliberate their participation;
- ii. Additional time for participants to deliberate complex information, weigh up options and discuss ideas;
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Principle 4 – Reasonable Support

- i. Additional support to enable community members' participation in engagement processes.

Principle 5 – Level of Engagement

- i. Additional levels of engagement with the community to increase their deliberative remit as far as practicable.

Appendix C: Community Engagement Principles checklist

Principle 1 – Engagement Planning

- Allocating appropriate funding, time and resourcing to community engagement planning and implementation;
- Developing community engagement plans in accordance with this policy;
- Ensuring a community engagement process has a clearly defined objective and scope.

Principle 2 – Information Access

- Providing the community with access to objective, relevant and timely information to inform their participation;
- Providing this information with sufficient notice for the community to consider how they may be affected by proposed decisions or plans and to make subsequent arrangements to be involved in engagement processes;
- Providing opportunities, as appropriate, for the community members to come together to learn and share information, and deliberate plans or required decisions in a meaningful and informed way.

Principle 3 – Representative Participation

- Identifying the different members of the community at the commencement of all relevant planning or decision-making processes and determining the level to which they may be affected by the decisions or plans;
- Ensuring the community members identified are representative of the persons and groups affected by the matter that is the subject of the community engagement
- Using communication methods and other initiatives that are appropriate and accessible to the community members identified to encourage representative participation.

Principle 4 – Reasonable Support

- Identifying the barriers that may exist to community members' participation in engagement processes, including accessibility needs, information formats, communication channels, languages or other barriers that may limit participation;
- Providing reasonable support to enable community members to participate in meaningful and informed engagement, which may include developing specific plans that respond to identified barriers and needs or other support initiatives;
- Encouraging broad participation, active listening and due consideration of the views of participants in the community engagement process.

Principle 5 – Level of Engagement

- Using the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) Framework as a basis, inform community members of the level of engagement they can expect to play in each community engagement process as relevant to the significance and complexity of the matter requiring planning or decision-making;
- Articulating how community perspectives will be incorporated into planning or decision-making and the nature of decisions to be made where legislation permits negotiable elements;
- Sharing with the community what has been learned and what actions or decisions have resulted from the engagement process.

Review history

Date	Version	Status
11/10/20	0.1	Initial draft
20/10/20	0.2	Approved by ELT, subject to provision of s.223 clarification
09/11/20	0.3	Updates to include prescribed processes (s.223)
02/12/20	0.4	Updates to include engagement activities and outcome communication
16/02/21	1.0	Final approval by ELT after community consultation
01/03/21	1.0	Adopted by Council at 1 March 2021 Council Meeting