

Community Engagement Policy

Policy Type:	Moorabool Shire Council
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Service Unit	Connected Communities
Directorate:	Community Strengthening
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1. Purpose

The purpose of the policy is to document and communicate Council's commitment to, principles for and consistent approach to the provision of high-quality community engagement that is valued by the community and stakeholders. It provides leadership, direction and standards on how Council engages with its community, whilst meeting statutory requirements outlined in the *Local Government Act 2020*.

2. Definitions

Council	Moorabool Shire Council being a body corporate constituted as a municipal Council under the <i>Local Government Act 1989</i> .
Councillors	Individuals holding the office of a member of Moorabool Shire Council.
Council Officer or Officer	Moorabool Shire Council employees.
Consultants / Contractors	External organisations/individuals who at times assist or lead Council engagement processes.
Community	Includes individuals or groups who live, work, play, study, visit, invest in or pass through Moorabool Shire.
Stakeholder	An individual, group or organisation with a strong interest in the decisions of Council and are directly impacted by their outcomes.
IAP2	The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) is an international organisation advancing the practice of public participation
<i>Local Government Act 2020 (Victoria)</i>	Replaces the <i>Local Government Act 1989 (Vic)</i> . The Act gives the Victorian Parliament the power to make laws it considers necessary for local government, including laws relating to the constitution of councils, council elections and the powers and duties of councillors and council staff.

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Community engagement	A planned process with the specific purpose of working with individuals and groups to encourage active involvement in decisions that affect them or are of interest to them.
Consultation	The process of obtaining public feedback on analysis, alternatives or decisions. Also refers to the second level of the IAP2 Spectrum 'consult'.
Consultative engagement	The process of obtaining public feedback on analysis, alternatives or decisions. Also refers to the second level of the IAP2 Spectrum 'consult'.
Deliberative engagement	The process of obtaining public feedback through long and careful consideration or discussion. Deliberative engagements take place at the highest three levels of influence on the IAP2 spectrum, 'Involve', 'Collaborate' or 'Empower'.
Public participation	An alternative definition to 'community engagement'.
Communication	Communication refers to the range of channels and formats used to disseminate information to different audiences.

3. Scope

This policy applies to the planning, design, delivery and evaluation of community engagement activities as directed by Council, recommended by staff, or legislated by the Victorian *Local Government Act 2020*. Community engagement is the responsibility of all Council service units and employees. This policy also applies to contractors and consultants undertaking work on behalf of Council.

The 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.

Community Engagement Responsibilities

Role	Responsibilities
Mayor	The role of the Mayor is to lead engagement with the municipal community on the development of the Council Plan.
Councillors	Demonstrate commitment to community engagement principles through leadership, modelling good practice, and having regard to community input as part of decision making.
General Managers	Ensure that good quality and timely reporting is provided to Councillors on community engagement processes and outcomes.

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Role	Responsibilities
	Ensure reputational and other risks of community engagement are managed.
Service Unit Managers / Coordinators	Approve service unit Community Engagement Plans. Ensure community engagement practices are carried out in accordance with Community Engagement Plans and this policy. Manage reputational and other risks.
Council officers	Community engagement is the responsibility of all Council employees as part of core business. It is the responsibility of Council officers to ensure they adhere to this policy when planning, delivering and reviewing community engagement.
Connected Communities Service Unit	Advise and support Council's community engagement processes. Approve engagement plans.
External Consultants / Contractors	Adhere to this policy when assisting or leading community engagement processes on behalf of Council.
Moorabool Shire Community / stakeholders	Provide feedback and input in a respectful manner.

4. Non-Compliance

Breaches or violations of this policy may lead to disciplinary action in accordance with Council's relevant policies and procedures.

5. Policy

5.1. What is Community Engagement

Community engagement is based on the democratic idea that everyone who is affected by an issue that impacts their community should have a say in the decision making around it.

For the purposes of this policy we have adapted the recognised definition of the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2), to suit our particular environment.

'Community engagement is a planned process with the specific purpose of working with individuals, groups and organisations to encourage active involvement and influence in decisions that affect them or are of interest to them.'

Community engagement is sometimes also referred to as public participation.

5.2. Why we engage the community

Council is committed to continuously improving the services, infrastructure and programs it provides to support the vibrant and growing Moorabool community. There is also an

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increasing expectation by stakeholders, the community and customers that they will have an opportunity to influence government decisions that affect their lives.

Effective and meaningful community engagement enables Council to make well-informed decisions at an operational and strategic level and creates a better level of understanding between Council and our community. Community engagement is achieved when the community is and feels part of a process.

Benefits of effective and authentic community engagement:

- Delivering better outcomes to our communities;
- Making more informed decisions;
- Better understanding the needs and priorities of our diverse community and stakeholders;
- Fostering stronger relationships with our community and stakeholders;
- Creating greater transparency and trust;
- Building community understanding about Council's scope of work and decision-making process;
- Helping to inform and assist with advocacy;
- Supporting genuine and meaningful conversations;
- Building community resilience and capacity;
- Ensuring the community's right to assist with democratic processes;
- Utilising existing community assets;
- Meeting legislative requirements.

5.3. Community engagement principles and commitment

Council is committed to the notion that good governance is based on a belief that those impacted by a decision may have important contributions to make in a decision-making process. Through community engagement, we will inform, listen to and enable you to have your say on issues important to you.

We commit to community engagement that is:

Meaningful	A community engagement process will have a clearly defined objective and scope.
Informative	Participants in community engagement will have access to clear, objective, relevant and timely information to inform their participation.
Representative	Participants in community engagement will be representative of the persons and groups affected by the matter that is the subject of the community engagement.
Supportive	Participants in community engagement are entitled to reasonable support to enable meaningful and informed engagement.

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Transparent	Participants in community engagement will be informed of the ways in which the community engagement process will influence Council decision making.
Genuine	Participants in community engagement will be able to genuinely influence Council decisions.
Respectful	We will value and respect our community's time, engaging closely when their influence is high and scaling back when it is more limited.
Accountable	We will report back to the community and stakeholders, explaining what we asked, what we heard, and what we did.
Inclusive	We will apply methods to reach and encourage underrepresented groups to get involved.
Improving	We will undertake evaluation processes to continually improve our approach to community engagement.

5.4. Policy influence


Our community engagement approach is guided by the *IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation* which describes five different levels of engagement, from 'inform' through to 'empower', matching participation goals, our commitment to the community and the community's role. Many engagement processes will involve more than one level of engagement.

IAP2 is recognised as the international leader and peak body for the community and stakeholder engagement sector.

In planning a community engagement process, Council will determine at which levels we will engage and what corresponding commitment we will make to stakeholders and/or the community. This decision will guide the nature and methods of engagement.

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IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation

	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Public participation goal	To provide our community with balanced and objective information to help them understand the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain community feedback on analysis, alternatives or decisions where opportunities for community input may be limited.	To work directly with the community throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with our community 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 our community.
Commitment to Community	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge your concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how community input influenced the decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how community input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for advice in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into decision-making to the maximum possible extent.	We will implement what you decide.
Community Role	Listen	Contribute	Participate	Partner	Lead
Engagement Type	Consultative		Deliberative		
Community influence and impact					

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5.5. Types of community engagement

Council undertakes a range of community engagement activities which can be broadly defined as deliberative and consultative engagement practice. Engagement can occur at multiple stages throughout a process and often includes both types of engagement.

5.5.1. Consultative Engagement

Consultative engagement takes place at the first two levels of influence on the spectrum, 'Inform' and 'Consult' and involves one-way information exchange either from Council to community or community to Council. Participatory engagement typically occurs when feedback is invited on ideas, alternatives or draft documents. Engagement can occur at multiple stages throughout a process. Participation at this level can incorporate a broad range of community members and stakeholders in a wide variety of ways.

5.5.2. Deliberative Engagement

Deliberative engagements take place at the highest three levels of influence on the IAP2 spectrum, 'Involve', 'Collaborate' or 'Empower'. It often involves a smaller, descriptively representative group of people considering an issue in depth.

Deliberative engagement encourages community members to critically test, weigh up and consider a range of information, perspectives, inputs and evidence to reach a consensus or make recommendations. Deliberation can be scaled to suit a project based on its scope, complexity or impact and may require independent facilitation to ensure a fair and equitable process.

Projects most suited to a deliberative approach include those where the outcome will have a far-reaching or long-term effect, and issues where there is considerable community concern or division about the alternatives.

5.6. When we engage

5.6.1. Legislated community engagement

Council is required to undertake community engagement under a range of prescribed regulations and legislation, including the engagement requirements set out under the *Local Government Act 2020* as well as a broad range of other relevant Acts.

Council engagement processes will meet all statutory requirements as a minimum standard and as prescribed in this policy.

Under the *Local Government Act 2020* Moorabool Shire has the following statutory **deliberative engagement** obligations:

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- A Council must develop or review the **Community Vision** in accordance with its deliberative engagement practices;
- A Council must develop or review the **Council Plan** in accordance with its deliberative engagement practices;
- A Council must develop, adopt and keep in force a **Financial Plan** in accordance with its deliberative engagement practices;
- Council must develop or review the **Asset Plan** in accordance with its deliberative engagement practices.

The Act also outlines other elements where community engagement must occur but does not require deliberative engagement:

- A Council must adopt and maintain a community engagement policy;
- The municipal community is to be engaged in strategic planning and strategic decision making;
- Council must ensure that a process of community engagement is followed in developing or amending its Governance Rules;
- The Council must make a local law in accordance with its community engagement policy;
- Obligations for restructuring advisory panels;
- Obligations for powers in relation to land:
 - Acquisition and compensation;
 - Restriction on power to sell or exchange land;
 - Council leasing land.

This Policy does not apply to statutory processes prescribed by another Act, nor does it apply to unplanned interactions with Council such as service requests or complaints.

5.6.2. Non-legislated community engagement

Council is committed to the notion that good governance is based on the belief that those impacted by a decision may have important contributions to make in a decision-making process. Therefore, Council will engage with the community on decisions beyond mandated legislation to ensure we are achieving the best possible community outcomes. These community engagements will be conducted for a specific purpose that has been identified by Council.

Council will engage with the community to actively participate in the following processes:

- A proposed change to Council activities or strategic direction may significantly affect the community in terms of economy, lifestyle, environment, wellbeing or amenity of the municipality;
- Developing new or reviewing existing policies, strategies, plans or local laws that significantly affect the community;

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- Introducing a new service, discontinuing an existing service or substantially changing or reviewing a service;
- Planning and development of major projects and capital works, including public buildings, centres or other infrastructure;
- Allocating resources to services and projects through its annual budget process;
- Proposals for changing the way in which public space looks, is used or enjoyed;
- Any other circumstance where Council needs more information or evidence to make an informed decision.

5.6.3. Community Engagement Approach

Item	Community Engagement Approach
Community Vision	Deliberative engagement
Council Plan	Deliberative engagement
Financial Plan	Deliberative engagement
Asset Plan	Deliberative engagement
Budget	Consultative engagement
Making of a Local Law	Consultative engagement
Acquiring or selling land	Consultative engagement
Other statutory and non-statutory plans, strategies, policies, service planning and capital works projects	To be selected depending on the complexity of the matter

5.6.4. Circumstances where Council's engagement with the community will be limited

There are times when Council's level of engagement with the community and key stakeholders will be limited. In certain circumstances, Council may only be able to inform the community and stakeholders of Council's decisions and actions.

Examples include when:

- Council is not the lead agency;
- An immediate resolution is required;
- There is a risk to public safety;
- Specialist or technical 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.

5.7. Who we engage

Moorabool is a diverse community with a broad mix of people who each have unique experiences, interests and expertise. Our engagement processes will identify community and stakeholders who are impacted by, or interested in a Council project or decision, at the earliest stage.

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Examples of our community stakeholder groups include:

- First Nations people
- Business owners and workers
- Neighbourhood houses and community centres
- Resident associations
- Carers
- Residents including ratepayers and renters
- Children and young people
- Non-resident ratepayers
- Rough sleepers
- Community advocacy groups (e.g. 'Friends of...')
- Not for profit services
- Schools and education providers
- Kindergartens and childcare centres
- Council service users
- Older people
- Service groups
- Culturally and linguistically diverse people
- Shoppers and diners
- Other government agencies and tiers of government
- Cyclists
- Sports and recreation clubs
- Parents and guardians
- Students
- Diverse groups such as the LGBTQI community
- Emergency services
- Park users
- Visitors
- Families
- People with disability
- Heritage groups
- Motorists
- History interest groups
- Arts and culture community
- Business and industry
- Police
- Environmental groups
- Seniors
- Local, State and Federal MPs
- Council employees
- Students
- Public transport users
- Active transport users
- Local media
- Social media pages

5.7.1. External stakeholder organisations

External organisations and service providers will also be considered when planning for community engagement, as they have the capacity to provide valuable technical input, support, facilitation and direction. Some examples of external stakeholder organisations include Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP), Department of Health and Human Services, VicRoads, Victorian Planning Authority, Neighbouring Councils etc.

5.7.2. Council committees

Council also works with a number of advisory committees, community asset committees and project consultative/working groups, who provide us with detailed feedback on the ways Council decisions may affect specific communities.

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5.8. How we engage

There is no one-size fits all approach to community engagement activities. A variety of methods are required to cater for the different purposes of engagement, as well as the broad range of groups and individuals in the community.

The design and delivery of community engagement above statutory obligations will be determined during the planning process and scalable depending on the:

- Decision to be made;
- Community impact of the project;
- Level of opportunity for the community to influence the decision/s (negotiables);
- Community's interest in participating;
- Community's knowledge or expertise;
- Project/service to be delivered;
- Need to understand the community's view;
- Media or political interest;
- Complexity of the subject;
- Current animosity around the issue.

5.8.1. Community engagement process

Clear, consistent and planned community engagement processes are critical to achieving effective and authentic Council wide engagement outcomes.

Council's community engagement processes will be guided by the following approach.

1. Plan and design engagement

- Complete an Engagement Plan at the start of all projects, strategies and planning that require community engagement:
 - Consider engagement context;
 - Identify purpose, objectives and scope;
 - Determine what the community and stakeholders can influence (engagement negotiables and non-negotiables);
 - Identify internal and external stakeholders and design appropriate community engagement methods and activities;
 - Determine how feedback will be reported back to the community and stakeholders.
- Service unit manager to approve Engagement Plan;
- Identify and allocate required resources;
- Identify methods to communicate and promote engagement opportunities;
- Determine engagement targets and how engagement will be evaluated.

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2. Deliver and adopt engagement

- Promote and communicate engagement opportunity;
- Provide clear information to community and stakeholders *for their consideration*;
- Deliver genuine and respectful engagement activities as identified in engagement plan;
- Adapt engagement processes to meet engagement objectives as required.

3. Review and report on engagement (close the Loop)

- Review engagement feedback/data;
- Apply engagement findings to inform the decision-making process;
- Report back community feedback and outcomes to participants, stakeholders and community;
- Where appropriate, present a report to Council for a decision, incorporating community and stakeholder feedback;
- Evaluate engagement process and outcomes against engagement targets and identify opportunity for improvement *to share across the organisation*.

Community engagement processes will be guided and supported by Council's Connected Communities service unit. There may be several engagement processes required per project, strategy or planning, depending on scale.

5.8.2. External consultants and contractors

At times, Council engages external consultants to assist with projects, strategies and planning. Consultants engaged on behalf of Council, must plan and deliver community engagement in accordance with Council's Community Engagement Policy and Framework.

5.9. Inclusive engagement

Participants in a community engagement process are entitled to feel valued, respected and welcome, regardless of personal attributes or circumstances.

In every engagement process there are people who may find it more difficult to participate than others due to individual circumstances and experiences. When designing and delivering engagement activities, Council is committed to using inclusive methods to encourage broad community representation.

Examples of barriers to community engagement that may be experienced by individuals within the community:

- | | |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| • Access to and understanding of technology | • Limited education and capacity |
| • Internet access | • Ability to attend physical sessions |

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- Physical and mental health issues
- Geographic isolation
- Disability and sensory impairments
- Limited social networks
- Limited time
- Limited knowledge of benefits of engagement
- Limited knowledge of engagement activities
- Limited understanding of the subject
- Limited confidence
- Consultation 'fatigue'
- Previous unmet expectations
- Language and literacy
- Values and beliefs
- Limited or no internet access
- Financial struggles

5.9.1. Engaging harder to reach groups

Specific groups can experience additional barriers to engagement than other community members. Groups often underrepresented in community engagement processes and who will be afforded greater consideration and adaptation where appropriate, include:

- Young people
- Children
- Older community members
- Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD)
- First Nations people
- People with disability
- Young families/primary carers
- People living in rural areas
- New residents

* In presenting these groups, we recognise that not every individual in these groups may be harder to reach and not every group has been listed.

5.10. Policy Support

To ensure Moorabool Shire can deliver on its commitment to community engagement outlined in this policy, staff will be supported in the following ways through:

- Guidance and assistance from Council's Connected Communities service unit;
- Access to Council's Community Engagement Framework and Toolkit, providing critical tools and resources to guide and support officers design, deliver and report on community engagement.

5.11. What informed this policy

- *Local Government Act 2020 (Victoria)*;
- Internal review of existing policy, framework and processes;
- Independent external review of existing policy, framework and processes;
- Review of peer council policies;
- Community engagement and feedback.

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6. Related Legislation

- Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006;
- Disability Access and Inclusion Policy;
- Gender Equality Act 2020;
- Governance Rules;
- *Local Government Act 2020 (Victoria)*;
- Privacy Policy;
- Public Transparency Policy;
- Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001 (Victoria).

7. Council Plan Reference

Objectives: Strategic Objective 4: Improving Social Outcomes
Context: Context 4B: Community Connectedness and Capacity

8. Review

As a minimum, this policy will be reviewed every fourth year, in line with Council term.

9. Approval

This policy was adopted by Council 24 March 2021.