

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT POLICY

Date Adopted:	21 June 2023
Adopted By:	Council
Review Due:	2027
Responsible Officer:	Manager Communications and Engagement
Directorate:	Office of the CEO
EDRMS No:	

### PURPOSE

Southern Grampians Shire Council are committed to engaging with the community of Southern Grampians Shire and involving them in the preparation of strategies, plans and policies, the implementation of projects and Council activities, in a way that is purposeful, representative, inclusive and easy to be involved in.

This policy recognises the importance of designing community engagement methods to support meaningful engagement and to understand the many different views, experiences, and expertise of our rich and diverse community.

This document provides the community engagement framework for all engagement activities undertaken by Council and sets the standard for what the community can expect from Council.

This policy helps us meet our legislative requirements and underpins sound decision making and project planning and development.

### DEFINITIONS

#### Community

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.

#### Community Engagement

Community engagement provides planned opportunities for the community to be involved in decision-making and planning. Understanding the needs, aspirations, concerns and ideas of the community improves Council's planning and delivery of services.

Community engagement is 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. The outcomes of community engagement activities are better decisions that result in improved policy, facilities and services, as well as greater community satisfaction and wellbeing.

### **Deliberative Engagement**

While deliberative engagement is not defined in the Local Government Act 2020, it is generally understood to be defined as any engagement process used to reach an outcome or decision for complex issues. The process typically occurs over time and brings together a genuine mix of voices to work through and consider issues in a supported environment.

It is an inclusive, authentic and transparent process in which participants are provided with:

- a clear purpose from the outset of what will be achieved and why
- relevant evidence and background information to analyse
- sufficient time to explore, assess and discuss options
- practical support to enable participation in the process

Deliberative engagement provides a greater opportunity for Council to collaborate with the community and is required under legislation for several Council documents.

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

The IAP2 Spectrum from the International Association for Public Participation is used in planning community engagement, which helps define options for any public participation process.

### **Stakeholders**

Sections of the community involved in engagement because of impact, interest or responsibility to deliver on an outcome. Can also refer to external organisations, and other levels of government involved in a decision. Always includes internal decision makers and implementers of decision outcomes.

## **APPLICATION AND SCOPE**

This policy applies to the planning, design, implementation 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 areas, teams and employees. It 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 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.

This Policy, a requirement for all Councils to adopt and maintain under section 55 of the Local Government Act 2020, applies to all areas of Council and provides a framework for Councillors, Council Officers and consultants / agencies acting on behalf of Council.

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.
- There are instances where Council may not seek feedback prior to decisions being made. These may include time sensitive decisions about emergency management or public risk issues, and decisions regarding internal policy development, response to legislative requirements or other time-sensitive matters.

## **GENERAL PROVISIONS**

### **PRINCIPLES AND COUNCIL'S COMMITMENT TO THE COMMUNITY**

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	OUR COMMITMENT
<p>The community engagement process has a clearly <b>defined</b> objective and scope.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All community engagement is planned by clearly identifying the purpose, scope and objectives of the community's participation, in the community engagement plan.</li> <li>• We will communicate the reasons for engagement with participants.</li> </ul>
<p>Participants in community engagement will have access to objective, relevant and timely <b>information</b> to inform their participation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We will ensure the community has the information necessary to participate meaningfully in the engagement activities.</li> <li>• We will endeavour to provide information that is objective, relevant, timely and easy to understand.</li> </ul>
<p>Participants in community engagement will be <b>representative</b> of the persons and groups affected by the matter.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We will identify the people, communities and stakeholders who are affected by and interested in the topic of engagement.</li> <li>• We will reach out to our community to involve and hear from participants that represent the affected and interested groups.</li> </ul>
<p>Participants in community engagement are entitled to be supported to enable <b>meaningful</b> and informed engagement.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We will reduce physical, social and cultural barriers to participation.</li> <li>• We will consider the needs and perspectives of all groups that may want to be involved in the process.</li> <li>• We will seek to obtain the views of a broad cross section of the community, especially when there is a quiet majority.</li> <li>• We will allow sufficient time for review of information and participation in varied engagement activities.</li> </ul>
<p>Participants in community engagement are informed of the ways in which the community engagement process will <b>influence</b> Council decision making.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We recognise the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) as the international standard for effective community engagement. We will be guided by IAP2 recommendations.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We will inform participants of the level of influence they will have, as described in the IAP2 spectrum’s promise to the public, and</li> <li>• We will ensure they know the outcomes of any decisions made.</li> </ul>
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## IMPLEMENTATION

### WHY WE ENGAGE

Effective engagement strengthens Council’s decision-making by connecting community and stakeholders to the policies, projects and services that impact their lives. A clearly defined purpose and scope for the engagement process helps to ensure that people participate in a meaningful way – where they understand what they are being asked and how they are influencing decision-making.

Community engagement can help decision makers by:

- Gathering information, meaningful feedback and diverse points of view prior to making decisions,
- Fostering community partnerships,
- Increasing trust and community confidence,
- Gathering inputs from stakeholders who are impacted by Council decisions,
- Identifying risks and gathering workable inputs on mitigations,
- Building understanding of, and commitment to, projects and strategic decisions; and
- Enhancing accountability and transparency through open and genuine consultation and feedback on public participation outcomes.

### WHO WE ENGAGE

Southern Grampians Shire Council projects, policies, service provision and operations impact the day-to-day lives of community members and stakeholders across the whole municipality. Engagement should seek to connect with a broad range of community members to create fair and inclusive engagement processes.

We understand that some of our decisions affect the entire community, but we also know that most of our decisions affect some people more than others. We work hard to identify and engage directly with the most impacted, including those who face barriers to participation.

A stakeholder analysis should be undertaken to identify those who are most impacted by the decision. Stakeholders may include:

- business and industry,
- not-for-profit and community organisations,

- emergency services,
- environmental groups,
- children,
- families,
- young people,
- older people,
- First Nations community members,
- people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities,
- LGBTIQ+ community members,
- people with a disability,
- carers;
- visitors; and
- Boards, Committees, Trusts and Section 86 committees

Some community members fall within multiple stakeholder groups, making them particularly relevant to certain engagement processes.

## HOW WE ENGAGE

Council will employ different levels of engagement, having regard to the significance, complexity and anticipated level of impact of what is being proposed, and the stakeholders we need to target.

This policy adopts the International Association for Public Participation's (IAP2) Public Participation Spectrum to guide the range and extent of participation at each of the five levels. The five levels of engagement outlined on the IAP2 spectrum shown below will be utilised in every instance to meet our commitment to the community:

**Inform:** To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.

**Consult:** To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.

**Involve:** To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.

**Collaborate:** To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and identification of the preferred solution.

**Empower:** To place final decision-making in the hands of the public.

The levels of community engagement will be identified on the IAP2 spectrum at the project planning stage following an analysis of the desired outcomes. The community engagement plan will identify the most appropriate communication tool and timeframes to ensure the particular stakeholder group(s) are well informed of both the issue and the engagement opportunities.

# IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation



IAP2's Spectrum of Public Participation was designed to assist with the selection of the level of participation that defines the public's role in any public participation process. The Spectrum is used internationally, and it is found in public participation plans around the world.

INCREASING IMPACT ON THE DECISION					
	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GOAL	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations 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 aspirations, and provide feedback on how public 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 public input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for 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.

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## WHEN WE ENGAGE

Our community engagement activities can be categorised according to the following:

### 1. Legislative requirements – Major Policy and Strategic Documents

Deliberative engagement is a legislated requirement for our major strategic documents including the **Council Plan, Asset Plan, Ten Year Financial Plan, Community Vision** and new or changing local laws. Development of these plans will also be complemented by a broad community engagement process.

### 2. Engagement concerning local matters

Local issues including site specific master plans, local area structure plans and policies, or specific issues such as emergency awareness may require specific engagement plans. We will be flexible according to the scale of the project, this may include community forums, working groups, surveys or other engagement tools.

### 3. Engagement linked to day-to-day council business

We will identify and manage community engagement activities associated with core business and projects approved in Council's budget. We will only consult on those aspects of core business that are negotiable and where the community can have meaningful input.



Examples of projects include: upgrades to a local park, streetscape, infrastructure or facilities, where we would use a variety of engagement tools to hear from the community (e.g. surveys and forums). We commit to ensuring that those who are affected by a decision will be given the opportunity to inform that decision.

## **TYPES OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT EXPLAINED**

### **Mandatory Engagement**

There are some decisions that require a greater level of engagement. In these cases, legislation sets out the minimum engagement requirements. Council will meet all legislative engagement requirements but can also decide to extend its engagement in regard to these requirements.

The Local Government Act 2020 and other legislation sets out some minimum levels of engagement for key decisions which are summarised below:

<b>TYPE OF DECISION</b>	<b>LEVEL OF ENGAGEMENT</b>
Community Vision	Deliberative Engagement (Collaborate - Empower)
Council Plan, Financial Plan, Asset Plan, Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan	Deliberative engagement (Involve – Collaborate)
Annual Budget	Participatory engagement (Consult)
Making a Local Law	Participatory engagement (Consult)
Buying, selling or leasing Council land	Participatory engagement (Consult)
Making amendments to the Planning Scheme or deliberating on planning applications under the Planning and Environment Act 1987	Participatory engagement (Consult) unless within exemptions under the Planning and Environment Act 1987.
Other services, facilities, strategies, plans and policies	To be determined based on the scale, complexity and anticipated impact of the decision.

### **Deliberative engagement**

Deliberative engagement is about giving participants time to consider and discuss an issue in depth before they come to a considered view.

Council will undertake deliberative engagement:

- Where it is a legislative requirement (including Community Vision, Council Plan, Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan, Long Term Financial Plan and Asset Plan).
- Where Council resolves that it wants its decision-making on a matter or initiative to be informed by this model of community engagement.



- Where the matter has a certain level of complexity and/or significance to the community.

As part of Council's commitment to effective deliberative engagement practices, Council will:

- Provide a clear scope to the people involved in the deliberative process.
- Ensure participants have access to information to facilitate conversation and understanding of issues.
- Ensure the process is representative.
- Allow the time needed to "deliberate" on complex information, weigh up options, ideas and ask questions.
- Give the deliberative participants a full understanding of their level of influence over outcomes or decisions.

Examples of deliberative practices are:

- working with advisory groups
- online proposals and ideas are discussed by a panel of community members
- participants are asked to consider and prioritise ideas
- a representative group participates in a series of sessions of information exchange in order to reach consensus.

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.

### **Participatory engagement**

Participatory practices take place at the first two levels of influence on the spectrum, 'Inform' and 'Consult' and involve 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.

Examples of participatory practices are:

- Surveys
- Polls, ideas gathering
- Submissions

### **When 'Informing' may be appropriate**

There are circumstances when an "informing" level of engagement may be appropriate. In these cases, Council will inform the community, key stakeholders or internal staff about the decision or outcome. Examples include:

- Where the community or individuals can have no influence
- Emergencies and when immediate action is required
- Items of a confidential or commercially sensitive nature
- If there is a risk to public safety

## OUR APPROACH TO ENGAGEMENT

Council will thoroughly plan out its engagement activity and Council Officers will be supported to implement engagement in line with the Policy via our Community Engagement Handbook. Our approach to engagement will be tailored to the type of decision as well as the members of our community, stakeholders and internal teams that may be affected. We will also consider factors such as time, resources, budgets and any legislative requirements.

## REPORTING BACK TO COMMUNITY

Council is committed to reporting back to participants the findings of the engagement process and how they have influenced the decision or outcome, ensuring the method/s are inclusive and accessible.

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.

## 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)*.

## GENDER EQUALITY COMPLIANCE

It is considered that this policy is compatible with the relevant gender equality principles identified in the *Gender Equality Act 2020*.

Is a Gender Impact Assessment required?

- Yes (*legally required for all policies that have a direct and significant impact on the public*)
- No (*please provide an explanation why a Gender Impact Assessment is not required*)

## ASSOCIATED DOCUMENTS

*Local Government Act 2020*

*Gender Equality Act 2020*

**REVIEW**

This Policy must be reviewed a minimum of every four years or in-line with legislative change.

**AUTHORISED**

**CEO** Tony Doyle

**Signature**

**Date**

**OR**

Adopted at Council Meeting on {INSERT DATE}.

**END**