

THE CITY OF
GREATER GEELONG

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT POLICY

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Introduction

PURPOSE

The Greater Geelong region has a proud history of community-inspired leadership and our community is rich in experience and diverse in its expertise. The participation of everyone in our community is encouraged, welcomed, and valued.

This policy is designed to guide Council and the City to meet their engagement obligations with the community, giving effect to the engagement principles, as described under section 55 and section 56 of the Local Government Act 2020.

WHAT IS COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT?

Community Engagement is a process used by Council and the City to connect with the community. The purpose of the engagement process is to seek feedback about issues that might affect, impact or interest the community, such as planning, decisions or general council activities.

WHY IS ENGAGEMENT IMPORTANT?

Listening to and considering the needs, priorities, and expectations of our community before making decisions has long been ingrained in our practices. We believe it is critical that the decisions which shape the region's liveability and prosperity are informed and influenced by the people and communities who live, work, visit or do business in the region.

Effective and authentic community engagement promotes greater trust, builds stronger relationships and leads to better outcomes for the City and the community. This results in better decisions that deliver better outcomes and are more widely valued by the community.

Furthermore, while in a community as dynamic as ours with a huge diversity of backgrounds, experiences and perspectives, we may not achieve consensus in our decisions, best practice community engagement helps people and groups understand the rationale behind our decision-making processes.

SCOPE

This policy provides direction on all formal, legislative and informal community engagement planning and activities conducted by Council and anyone carrying out delegated duties or functions of Council. This includes:

- Councillors
- City officers
- external providers
- contractors and
- volunteers.

The following engagements are outside the scope of this policy:

- those related to planning permit applications and planning scheme amendments governed by the *Planning and Environment Act 1987*
- legislated engagements governed under other Acts
- Council or City matters where the statutory form of community engagement is governed by section 223 and section 119 of the *Local Government Act 1989* (which is being progressively repealed).

Definitions

ACT

Local Government Act (Vic) 2020.

THE CITY

The City of Greater Geelong organisation led by the Chief Executive Officer.

COMMITTEE

A delegated committee, joint delegated committee or community asset committee under sections 63, 64 and 65 of the Act, respectively.

COUNCIL

The Greater Geelong City Council comprising Councillors and its Delegated Committees.

DELIBERATIVE ENGAGEMENT

Deliberative engagement is a process of engagement that brings participants closer to the decision makers than other forms of engagement; where participants are provided with a clear task or question, have access to appropriate resources and information, and are given the time and space required to deliberate and reach their consensus.

PARTICIPATORY ENGAGEMENT

Participatory engagement 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.

Policy

WHO WE WILL ENGAGE WITH

We will engage with people and groups likely to be affected by, or interested in, planning and decision-making by Council, including individuals, community groups, advisory committees, businesses and organisations, peak bodies and other levels of government.

However, we recognise that there are barriers to participation for some of these people and groups. Barriers could include abilities, language and cultural differences, carer and work responsibilities, age and lack of access to transport.

To hear a full range of perspectives and make sure our decisions are meeting the needs of the community, we will make reasonable adjustments to its consultation processes to ensure the greatest number of people and groups can contribute. We will identify and engage direction with relevant people and groups where barriers are particularly significant, or certain people or groups are under-represented.

WHEN WE WILL ENGAGE

We will engage when it anticipates decisions or plans are likely to impact the community. This may include situations where we are:

- making plans – for example, developing strategic plans or policies
- changing something – for example changes to a service where those changes may have an impact on the community
- making a decision that is likely to impact people and the places they live, work, invest or play – for example, introducing a new project, initiative or service
- required by law to do so
- seeking to address an issue affecting the community that has been raised and requires a decision.

We may also engage in cases where:

- the broader community raises, or expresses an interest in, a policy, initiative or service
- it requires assistance to identify community needs or aspirations
- it desires to build capacity, provide information to increase knowledge and change behaviour
- it seeks new or wishes to strengthen existing relationships with the community.

Situations where we may not engage

There are times when we may decide it is not appropriate to engage with the community. This would include situations where:

- decisions must be made immediately – for example, in emergency management, community safety or for occupational health and safety reasons
- decisions relate to the City's day-to-day organisation operations (except where there is likely to impact the community)
- legal or commercial restrictions prevent it
- Council does not have the decision-making power.

HOW WE WILL ENGAGE

Community engagement principles

We will give effect to the five engagement principles described below in the design, delivery and reporting of all engagement activities by ensuring they are:

- consistent
- clearly defined
- informative and

- inclusive in their approach.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PRINCIPLES

1. A community engagement process must have a **clearly defined objective and scope**.
2. Participants in community engagement must have access to **objective, relevant and timely information** to inform their participation.
3. Participants in community **engagement must be representative of the persons and groups affected** by the matter that is the subject of community engagement.
4. Participants in community engagement are **entitled to reasonable support to enable meaningful and informed engagement**.
5. Participants in community engagement are **informed of the ways in which the community engagement process will influence** Council decision making.

In observance of the community engagement principles, we will:

- plan its engagements to be timely, open and easily understood
- make sure engagement activities are inclusive, accessible and seek a diverse range of perspectives
- be upfront about how much opportunity there is to influence a decision
- define the community's role in any community engagement process
- provide community members with reasonable support to help them participate
- provide information to support meaningful community participation
- use a variety of engagement techniques that meet the needs and interests of the community
- let the community know how their input has influenced our decision, and
- learn from each experience to review and improve future engagement practices.

Choosing the best engagement process

We will use best practice engagement when choosing the best process for planning, delivering, and reporting on engagements to ensure that we use the appropriate variety of tools, activities and methods to produce the most meaningful feedback.

We will use the following key steps to developing a best-practice community engagement:

1. define the purpose of the engagement.
2. understand stakeholder and community interests, values and opportunities for engagement.
3. design an appropriate engagement process.
4. deliver genuine and respectful engagement.
5. review and interpret the engagement information and data.
6. apply the outcomes of the engagement to inform the decision-making process and its reasons for decision.
7. evaluate the success of the engagement and share lessons learnt.
8. report feedback and 'close the loop' on the public engagement.

The engagement process also establishes the level of community engagement. Engagement activities can be conducted anywhere along a spectrum of engagement from inform and consult to involve, collaborate and empower, and can be broadly categorised as either deliberative or participatory (see descriptions of these on page 8).

Factors that may influence the level of engagement chosen include:

- level of influence people and groups can have on the decision
- level of complexity and risk associated with a project
- specific projects goals
- timeframes
- resources
- the legal and governance framework under which the Council operates.

The level of engagement may also vary depending on the stage a project or decision is at – for example, the input required when scoping a project will be very different to that required for delivering it. Ultimately, the interests of the community and stakeholders will be the key consideration in determining the process and level of engagement in any public participation activity.

Once the level of engagement for a given planning or decision-making process has been determined, tools, activities and data-collection methods will then be identified.

Deliberative engagement

Deliberative engagement is a process that brings participants closer to the decision makers than other forms of engagement. Deliberative practices take place to allow for a representative group to come together to deliberate an issue in depth, over time, before coming to an informed consensus or decision.

As part of the deliberative process, participants must:

- be provided with a clear task or question
- have access to appropriate resources and information and
- be given the time and space required to deliberate and reach the desired outcome, consensus or decision.

Deliberative engagement should be conducted when participants have a high level of influence over, or impact on the outcomes or decision to be made.

Council will engage deliberatively when developing things such as:

- the Community Vision
- Council Plan
- Asset Plan
- Financial Plan
- other significant projects or initiatives as considered appropriate.

Participatory engagement

Participatory engagement is an informal engagement process that enables participants to provide feedback that does not necessarily include a conversation or dialogue with us.

While participatory engagement may be a simpler process than deliberative engagement, it is valuable for hearing important and useful information from a broad range of people and groups.

Examples situations where we may engage in participatory engagement include, but are not limited to:

- program evaluations
- determining satisfaction with services levels
- inviting community ideas
- determining views on an issue
- seeking feedback on alternative draft documents
- gauging support for a proposal
- asking community for local knowledge
- seeking feedback on a design or plan
- changing service levels.

Table 1: The tools, methods and activities suitable for different levels of engagement

TOOLS	PARTICIPATORY		DELIBERATIVE		
	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
	Factsheets Websites Information sessions Letters	Feedback and submission forms Online forums Surveys Public meetings Drop-in sessions	Workshops Community panels Focus groups Design charrettes Field trips	Advisory committees Deliberative decision-making Focus groups Study circles Community panels	Citizen juries or panels Delegated decision Ballots

HOW WE WILL REPORT ON ENGAGEMENT

We are responsible for, and committed to, reporting back the following information to the community:

1. What was learnt – that is, the data and information collected as part of the process.
2. How this has influenced the decisions, plans and activities of Council.

In determining the best ways to report this information back, we consider the people and groups involved and the level of interest to the wider community.

Methods for reporting back could include, but are not limited to:

- updates on Geelong Australia website
- updates on the project Have Your Say page
- posts on social media
- public notices and newspaper advertisements
- direct communication with the involved people and groups.

Implementing this Policy

RESPONSIBILITIES

Party/parties	Roles and responsibilities
Councillors	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Champion the commitment and principles for community engagement through leadership and decision-making.Adopt the Community Engagement Policy and oversee its implementation.
Executive Leadership Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Champion behaviours that foster good engagement practice and drive the principles through policy, process and leadership.Implement and ensure compliance with this policy.
Leadership Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Manage areas of responsibility to ensure community engagement is consistent with this policy.
All staff involved in community engagement planning and delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Design and deliver best-practice community engagement that aligns with this policy, in consultation with managers and the Corporate Affairs team.
Corporate Affairs' Community Engagement team	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Monitor the implementation of this policy and conduct periodic reviews to drive continuous improvement.Support Council to plan and deliver best-practice engagement processes.

MONITORING AND REPORTING

The City commits to monitoring processes, information sharing and decision making to understand the overall level of success in the policy's implementation. Key evaluation measures of success over each 12 month period will include:

- community satisfaction with community consultation and engagement (annual survey)
- number of engagements
- number of participants
- percentage of deliberative and participatory engagements

and may also include measures such as:

- diversity of engagement methods
- information delivery modes
- representation – adequate and diverse representation across target groups
- timeliness of reporting back to the community (closing the loop)

ADVICE AND ASSISTANCE

The Responsible Officer for this policy is responsible for advising the organisation about this policy and monitoring its implementation.

RECORDS

The City must retain records associated with this policy and its implementation for at least the period shown below.

Record	Retention / Disposal Authority	Retention Period	Location
This policy	Manager, Corporate Affairs	Four years	Geelong Australia
Feedback archives	Manager, Corporate Affairs	Four years	CityWeb location

REVIEW

Council should review and, if necessary, amend this policy within four years of the approval date. A periodic review of this policy will also be undertaken to ensure necessary changes or updates are made in a timely manner.

References

External references

- *Victorian Local Government Act 2020*
- *Victorian Local Government Act 1989* (being progressively repealed)
- *Public Participation in Government Decision-making Better Practice Guide* – Victorian Auditor-General's Office 2015
- *Public Participation and Community Engagement: Local Government Sector* – Victorian Auditor-General's Report 2017
- *Public Participation in Government Decision-Making* – Victorian Auditor-General's Report 2017
- *Victorian Government Draft Public Participation Framework* (2020)
- *Local Government Act 2020 – Principles Community Engagement* (DELWP)