

<b>Title:</b>	<b>Community Engagement</b>
<b>Type:</b>	<b>Council</b>
<b>Adopted:</b>	24 February 2021
<b>Document No:</b>	21/16053
<b>Attachments:</b>	

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## Thank you to our community

Murrindindi Shire Council would like to thank the community members who have contributed to the development of our Community Engagement Policy by participating in the 'Your Opinion Matters' focus groups or survey during late 2020 and early 2021.

Your observations and feedback helped inform this Policy, guiding Murrindindi Shire Council on the best ways to engage community and stakeholders.

Murrindindi Shire Council acknowledges the Taungurung people as the Traditional Owners of the land now known as Murrindindi Shire. We pay our respects to their elders past and present.

## 1. Purpose

The purpose of the Community Engagement Policy is to formalise Council's commitment to appropriate, effective and inclusive engagement practices. The Policy recognises the importance of designing community engagement methods that maximise public participation and meet outcomes of particular initiatives and projects.

## 2. Rationale

Community engagement strengthens Local Government's confidence, connection to community and capacity to deliver. Open dialogue and the genuine exchange of ideas and opinions leads to a shared understanding of issues. Informed, considered and meaningful community participation in Council decision-making will achieve the best outcomes for all stakeholders.

Benefits of successful community engagement include:

- The development of policies that are more practical and relevant to the community;
- More effective and efficient service delivery tailored to community needs;
- Early recognition of any emerging issues, allowing Council to address these in a strategic, proactive and timely manner;
- Establishing Council as open, accountable and willing to listen;
- Community ownership of solutions to problems or plans for the future and empowerment of the community to share in decision making and responsibility;
- Increased willingness within the community to work with Council and contribute to future projects; and,
- An increased sense of belonging and pride in the community.

## 3. Scope

This Community Engagement Policy will guide all community engagement activities required by legislation or recommended by Council staff. This may include community engagement appropriate to the development of Council policies, strategies, major projects and delivery of services.

The Policy also covers deliberative engagement practices that can be used to develop the Community Vision, Council Plan, Asset Plan and Financial Plan and other appropriate projects or issues.

## 4. Objectives

This Policy will guide all planning, implementation and evaluation of community engagement activities undertaken by Council. This Policy will support Council's service delivery and benefit the wellbeing of Council communities by:

- Providing a consistent and principled approach to engaging the community;
- Promoting shared understanding, innovation and decision making processes which better represents the interests of the community; and,
- Outlining the frameworks and approaches Council will use to plan, deliver and document community engagement and deliberative engagement processes.

## 5. Definitions

Reference Term	Definition
Community	Our community consists of people who live, work, visit or use services and amenity across Murrindindi Shire.

	Our community includes Traditional Owners, residents, ratepayers and members of the general public who have an interest in the Shire including individuals, groups, organisations, businesses and government.
Stakeholders	Stakeholders consist of people and groups of people with an interest in or who are affected by a decision or issue within the municipality.
Public Participation	A process in which those who are affected by a decision are involved in the decision-making process. Community engagement and deliberative engagement are forms of public participation.
Community Engagement	A genuine process of working with community to build understanding, strengthen relationships and inform Council decisions. Community engagement is a two-way process of interaction between Council and the community, supporting all demographics of community members to be involved in decisions that affect them.
Deliberative Engagement	An engagement process involving a representative group of community members who are supported with the appropriate resources (e.g. relevant information on the issue, time for consideration) so that they can deeply examine a particular issue, and whose recommendations or decisions are influential in Council decision-making on the topic.
IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation	The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) Spectrum, which helps define options for engaging the public in any participation process.

## 6. Guiding principles

Community engagement is a core process that ensures community needs and aspirations are considered in developing and implementing Council's strategic directions and priorities. The guiding principles relevant to Murrindindi Shire Council's Community Engagement Policy are:

### ***A Transparent Process***

- The decision-making processes have a clearly defined objective and scope which is communicated to participants.
- Council will openly share objective, relevant and timely information with the community (subject to legal impediments) to help inform participation.
- Council will make it clear how community feedback, advice and concerns will influence or be incorporated into the final decision.
- Council will report back to the community on the findings and recommendations of the engagement process.

### ***An Inclusive Process***

- Council will do its best to ensure the community is aware of engagement opportunities for projects or issues that may affect them.
- Information provided to the community will be presented in a way that is accessible, responsive to diverse needs and easy to understand and will account for the diversity of our communities.
- All affected and interested stakeholders will be encouraged to participate. A variety of processes will be used to enable all parties to effectively participate.

### ***A Fair Process***

- The engagement process will be genuine – not tokenistic or contrived.
- Community engagement will occur at the beginning of a process or issue as far as possible, will be clearly defined and will extend over the life of the issue.

- The community will be provided with adequate time and resources during the engagement process in order to give the community the best opportunity to make a contribution and influence the outcomes.

### **A Responsive Process**


- All contributions during the community engagement process will be thoroughly considered before a decision is made.
- Reasons for decisions, including how community contributions were used as part of decision-making, will be provided to the community.

## **7. Community engagement framework**

Community engagement can range from simply providing information to the community (e.g. when Council offices are open) right through to extensive participation in decision-making processes (e.g. community-led steering groups). Differing levels of engagement need to be employed depending on the relative importance and risks of an issue or program.

Murrindindi Shire Council uses the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) framework for community engagement approaches. This framework helps decide what level of impact on a decision is most appropriate for the specific issue or project and provides guidance as to what type of methods can be used in that context.

*Increasing level of engagement/partnership*

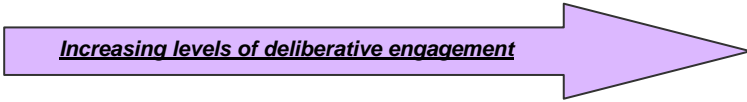


	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
Goal	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problems, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public 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 community	We will keep you well informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge your concerns 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 direct advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations in decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.

<b>Example methods</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Website</li> <li>• Direct mail-outs</li> <li>• Social media</li> <li>• Newsletters</li> <li>• Pop-ups</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Surveys</li> <li>• Social media</li> <li>• Stakeholder interviews</li> <li>• Community meetings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus groups</li> <li>• Workshops</li> <li>• Stakeholder interviews</li> <li>• Community meetings</li> <li>• Online platform</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advisory group</li> <li>• Expert panel</li> <li>• Online platform</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Task force group</li> <li>• Community panel</li> </ul>
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**Figure 1:** The International Association for Public Participation.

*Increasing levels of deliberative engagement*



Deliberative engagement practices involve an intensive community engagement process, often on the involve-collaborate-empower end of the IAP2 Spectrum. It is designed around the following principles:

- Representative and inclusive: involves an appropriately representative cross-section of the community with the aim of maximising inclusion.
- Transparent and fair: allowing for extended consideration of a key question with access to objective, relevant and timely information.
- Responsive: participants are aware of how their decisions will influence Council decision-making.

As deliberative engagement processes are resource-intensive, it is not feasible to utilise these practices in every project. However, deliberative techniques (such as creating a community consultative committee) may be included in any community engagement process.

Regardless of the level of engagement, the following steps are to be considered before and during undertaking public participation:

- 1) Clearly define the decision required, and the scope of the public participation exercise
- 2) Understand who is affected and how they should be included
- 3) Identify the resources, skills and time required for effective public participation
- 4) Document the public participation and management approach
- 5) Implement the public participation plan and monitor its progress
- 6) Evaluate the public participation exercise and apply continuous improvement



**Figure 2:** Victorian Auditor General's Office: Elements of better practice in public participation in government decision-making

Adherence to the Policy will be supported by *Community Engagement Guidelines* and the *Community Engagement Toolkit* designed to provide Council officers with a clear framework for conducting community engagement.

## **8. When to engage**

Murrindindi Shire Council is involved in a diverse range of services, projects, activities and planning matters. Activities that may require community engagement include:

### *Local or Site Specific*

Issues regarding a specific site e.g. improvements to a street or local community facility.

### *Neighbourhood*

Issues having an impact on a neighbourhood, district or community e.g. development of a neighbourhood park or traffic management plan, applications for gaming licences.

### *Service Planning and Delivery*

Any change, review or impact on a particular service e.g. library or childcare services, rubbish collection. This includes service reviews.

### *Policy Development*

The development of, change to or review of Council policy e.g. an amendment to the Planning Scheme or review of the Animal Management Policy. This may have an impact on the entire Murrindindi Shire community or may focus on a particular area.

### *Major Projects and Strategic Plans*

Any projects, planning or strategic initiatives that have a major impact on the Murrindindi Shire community, e.g. the Council Plan.

## **9. Who to engage**

Murrindindi Shire Council recognises many different views may be held about a particular issue or project, and Council is committed to providing genuine opportunities for these views to be heard. Engagement methods will be selected and designed to remove barriers to participation.

Undertaking a stakeholder analysis will help Council identify and classify stakeholders important to a project and may include people, organisations, businesses or agencies within or external to the Murrindindi Shire local government area. Resources for stakeholder analysis will be provided to Council staff as part of the *Community Engagement Toolkit*.

Community engagement methods will target stakeholders of the specific issue or project. Examples of stakeholder groups include:

- Local residents
- Local businesses
- Local sporting clubs
- Community volunteer groups
- Older people
- Traditional Owners and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders peoples
- People with a disability
- Women

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- People from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) backgrounds
- People from the LGBTIQ community
- Single parent families
- People who are unemployed or on a low income
- Young people
- Tenants
- Absentee owners.

Staff must also consider including existing reference groups and/or advisory committees currently working with Council.

### **10. How to engage**

A community engagement project may involve one or more engagement methods. Engagement methods should be chosen to match the requirements of the project including objective, scope, level of engagement and resourcing.

Stakeholders must be provided with adequate notice of engagement activities and be made aware of opportunities to get involved, and participants should be provided with adequate time to make a submission. Council should be aware of how the time, location and format of methods used may impact on access for stakeholders. Council is required to make suitable adjustments or provide support to allow stakeholders to contribute where possible.

Options for methods of engagement may include:

- Notices in public spaces e.g. noticeboards, store windows
- Pop-ups in public spaces and events
- Surveys (both online and paper)
- Stakeholder interviews
- Social media
- Online platform
- Focus groups
- Workshops
- Community meetings (both online and in person)
- Expert panels
- Community panels
- Advisory groups and community consultative committees
- Task force groups

To maintain a strong focus on community engagement, Council is committed to ongoing innovation and adopting new technology that support engagement and training for Councillors, Council committee members and Council staff.

### **11. How to evaluate**

Evaluation is an important aspect of the community engagement process. It assists in ensuring that we are continuing to reach the stakeholders we are targeting and that we are meeting the community's needs. Evaluation also allows us to reflect on what can be learned from the process and what we can do better.

At the beginning of the community engagement process, an evaluation plan will be developed to ensure that evaluation is embedded within the process. This plan should consider both the impact



of the community engagement method (i.e. the successful delivery of the project or resolution of the issue) and the success of the engagement process itself (e.g. were the stakeholders that were targeted actually engaged, did stakeholders feel like their views were considered).

Specifically, an evaluation might include:

- Which communication techniques were most effective in conveying technical information?
- Which engagement methods had the highest response rate?
- How did participants feel about the process? Did they feel they could participate in a meaningful way?
- Did participants feel their contribution was considered or valued in a timely way?
- What decisions, outcomes or sense of community ownership have resulted from the engagement process?
- Were the level of resources available (time, team, costs) adequate to successfully engage the community?

## **12. Implementation, Management and Review of Policy**

Council is responsible for engaging the community on strategic, high-level issues, as well as acting as a conduit and advocate for the community to Council staff and other levels of government. Community engagement is the responsibility of all Council service areas, teams and employees, as well as contractors and consultants undertaking work on behalf of Council.

This Policy will be monitored by the Manager Community Wellbeing who is responsible for the development, review and promotion of this Policy, providing advice to staff where necessary.

All directors and managers are required to ensure community engagement activities comply with this Policy. All staff with management responsibilities shall be accountable for implementation of this Policy, ensuring the appropriate engagement methodologies are used at the most relevant time to enable relevant and early input.

To aid implementation, engagement and consultation training shall be offered and/or included in:

- Project management
- Community development
- Staff induction
- Councillor induction
- Committee induction

The effectiveness of the *Community Engagement Policy* and staff resources will be measured by the degree to which they lead to better decisions (policies, plans and projects) and improved satisfaction levels in the community in relation to Council services.

This Policy and associated staff resources will be reviewed every two years and within 12 months of Council elections.

## **13. Related Policies, Strategies and Legislation**

This policy is related to the following Murrindindi Shire Council Policies and Strategies:

*Council Plan 2017-2021*

*Communications Policy and Strategy*

*Customer Services Policy*

*Code of Conduct (Employee)*

*Councillor Code of Conduct*

*Communications Strategy*

*Towards 2030 Community Planning Framework*



Related State Government Legislation includes:

*Local Government Act 2020*

*Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014*

*Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008*

*Planning & Environment Act 1987*

*Gender Equity Act 2020*

Furthermore, this Policy has been developed with consideration of the requirements under the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*.