



Yarra Ranges Council

# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT POLICY

# 2021

MEANINGFUL | AUTHENTIC | RESPONSIVE

Empowering our community through meaningful, authentic and responsive engagement



*Yarra Ranges Council respectfully acknowledges the traditional owners, the Wurundjeri people, as the custodians of this land. We pay respect to all Aboriginal community Elders, past and present, who have resided in the area and have been an integral part of the history of the region.*

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# 1. What is the purpose of this policy?

**Put simply, this is Council's commitment to community engagement** and how, as an organisation, we will approach it. It is founded upon Council's belief that **meaningful, authentic and responsive** community engagement **empowers communities** to influence the decisions that affect them.

We seek to improve Council's engagement processes and outcomes by adopting a more **deliberative, consistent and coordinated approach**. We recognise that community engagement is an essential element of the democratic process and we want to ensure that community needs and opinions inform our vision, planning and decision-making.

Adhering to this policy is the shared responsibility of all Yarra Ranges Council employees, Councillors, contractors and external consultants acting on behalf of Council. The Community Engagement Policy will underpin the Communications and Engagement Strategy, Framework and Toolkit.

This Policy also helps Council meet its legislative requirements under the Local Government Act 2020. **But it is more than that. We want to do engagement well - really well.**



## 2. What is Community Engagement?

Community engagement provides an **opportunity for the community to shape the plans and decisions that affect their current and future needs**. It helps inform Council's vision, strategic direction, planning and decision making, while also providing Council with a better understanding of community priorities.

It is a **purposeful, planned process** of working with identified groups of people, whether connected by geography, demography or interests, to:

1) **Inform decision making**

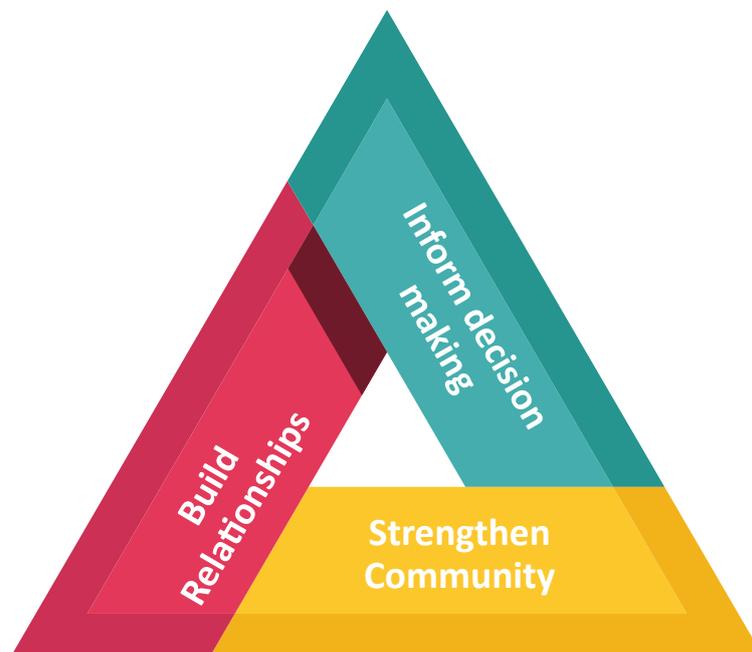
To provide opportunities for the community to contribute to the decision-making process

2) **Build relationships**

To build relationships and/or improve relationships with the community.

3) **Strengthen community**

To build the capacity of the community on a specific theme or issue to increase knowledge and change behaviour



### 3. Our Community Engagement Vision and Principles

#### Our vision:

*'We are deeply connected to our communities through meaningful, authentic and responsive community engagement'*



#### Transparency + Trust

We will act in an honest, transparent and respectful way to build strong relationships, partnerships and trust with our community and other stakeholders. People know what is happening and how their input is being used. They will also have access to the right, objective and relevant information to inform their participation.

#### Inclusive + Equitable

We will ensure that those who are affected by a decision will be given an opportunity to inform that decision. We respect diversity and will use a variety of engagement methods to ensure that the broadest possible range of community members and stakeholders have a genuine opportunity to participate.

#### Responsive + Impactful

We ensure that the community is consulted in a timely manner. We make our decisions in an open and transparent way and provide feedback to our community and other stakeholders in order to explain our decisions and let them know how their views have influenced the outcome.

#### Building Capacity

We value the enhanced social connections, increased skills and strengthened community partnerships that result from meaningful, authentic and responsive engagement activities. We evaluate our engagement activities and learn from the feedback that has been provided to us to improve future engagement activities.



## 4. Community Engagement Framework

Our Community Engagement Framework is guided by the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) Spectrum.

The IAP2 Spectrum identifies and defines each of the five levels of engagement. It details our promise to the public for each level of engagement ensuring that both the community and Council have shared expectations. Decisions on the level of engagement will be made according to the specific needs of projects. The Community Engagement team is available to help co-design the most appropriate and impactful engagement plan for each project.

**The objectives of the Community Engagement Framework are to:**

- Ensure Councillors, Council employees, contractors and consultants engage with the community in a meaningful way about decisions that affect them
- Provide a consistent and coordinated approach to community engagement
- Assist in selecting the most appropriate and effective method and level to engage the community in order to achieve the best outcome
- Increase trust and community confidence by strengthening relationships between Council and the community.

# IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum

We will apply our **DELIBERATIVE ENGAGEMENT PRINCIPLES** across **ALL LEVELS** of the **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION SPECTRUM**.

	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.
Example initiatives	Emergency management	Undertaking a survey on a playground redevelopment	Public submissions	Council Plan Lilydale Structure Plan	Yarra Glen People's Panel
Example methods	Website Social media Advertisements Media Letters Email SMS Phone Newsletter Public Notices Social media Videos Publications Displays	Surveys (pop up, online and phone) Public meetings Online forums Written/email submissions Exhibitions	Advisory committees Workshops Focus groups Deliberative polling Field trips	Advisory committees Community Summits Stakeholder meetings	Participatory budgeting Hosted conversations Deliberative panels

## 5. Why we engage?

Community engagement enables Council to understand the needs, aspirations, concerns and ideas of the community while providing community with the opportunity to be involved in planning and decision-making. Benefits of community engagement include the ability to:

- Build a **strong evidence base** for informing Council decision making
- **Listen to diverse points of view** prior to making decisions
- Strengthen community's **confidence and trust** in Council
- **Increase transparency** in the decision-making process
- Provide a **greater understanding** of, and commitment to, Council projects and initiatives
- Identify and prevent or minimise potential risks

Beyond guiding Council planning and decision making, the community engagement process itself can benefit the community by:

- **Enhancing community connection**
- Generating a sense of **positive community spirit**
- Strengthening a sense of **pride in the community**
- Building **community capacity** with skills such as critical thinking, debate and cooperation

## 6. Who we engage?

Community engagement should seek to connect with a **diverse range of community members** and stakeholders to create a **balanced and inclusive** engagement process.

While some of the projects we engage on might impact the whole community, other projects or decisions might impact more specific parts of our community.

Stakeholder mapping is a key part of the planning process for any community engagement activity to ensure those who are likely to be impacted by a decision or project can have input into the decision-making process.

It is also important to understand that some groups in our community may have barriers to engaging with us. We need to ensure we design engagement plans so that **everyone has an opportunity to participate and provide their input.**



## 7. When we engage?

Community engagement should occur whenever a decision is being made or a project planned which affects community members. Examples include when:

- There are changes in strategic direction which may significantly impact the community in terms of health and wellbeing, environment, lifestyle or economy.
- Planning and developing major capital works and infrastructure projects.
- Introducing, discontinuing or substantially changing a service
- There are sensitive or divisive community issues which require Council action or response.
- Developing new, or reviewing existing, external policies, strategies and plans.
- Considering significant alterations to a public space.

Community engagement may also need to be undertaken to meet legislative requirements. Examples include when developing the Council Plan, Local Laws or the Annual Budget.

Community and stakeholders will be engaged early in our planning process. This will provide the opportunity to influence decisions by participating in a more meaningful and deliberate way. Timely engagement also enables us to identify opportunities and challenges early in the planning process and respond accordingly.

Community and stakeholders will also be given adequate time to participate in engagement initiatives. Wherever possible, engagement will take place during times most convenient to community and stakeholders, taking into consideration limitations such as working hours and holiday periods.

What constitutes enough time will depend on the complexity and scale of the engagement initiative.

## 9. How we engage?

When planning engagement initiatives, we will be guided by the IAP2 spectrum and adhere to our engagement principles.

Our community engagement practices will be well planned, meaningful, accessible and responsive. To achieve this, we will adhere to a clear three stage process

01



### DESIGN + PLAN

- Establish purpose
- Design scope
- Identify participants
- Confirm levels of engagement (as per IAP2 spectrum)
- Select most effective methods and tools



02



### ACTION + DELIVER

- Develop communications plan to raise awareness of, and participation in, engagement initiative
- Confirm roles and responsibilities Launch and implement engagement
- Collate community and stakeholder input



03



### REVIEW + RESPOND

- Analyse data and capture findings
- Report back to participants
- Review and evaluate success of engagement process



## 10. Definitions

- **Community** – Individuals who have a connection to Yarra Ranges Council through residence, work or visitation.
- **Community engagement** – The process Council undergoes to exchange information with the community, using this data, insights and ideas to inform decisions or solve problems.
- **Deliberative engagement** – Engagement that is authentic, meaningful and responsive – not a ‘tick the box’ exercise but a more considered, intentional approach to truly listen, consider and address community thinking. Whilst traditionally perceived to be a deeper engagement method used in higher levels of the IAP2 spectrum (involve, collaborate, empower), for Yarra Ranges deliberative engagement will sit across the entire spectrum. Our engagement principles are all deliberative in nature. With these guiding our engagement, all of our engagement will be informed by deliberative engagement practices.
- **Toolkit** – An operational handbook that contains further guidance, templates and tools for planning, delivering and evaluating community engagement activities to meet the requirements of this policy.
- **IAP2** - International Association for Public Participation Australasia. IAP2 is an international member association which seeks to promote and improve the practice of public participation or community and stakeholder engagement, incorporating individuals, governments, institutions and other entities that affect the public interest.
- **Stakeholders** – Individuals or organisations that would be affected by, or highly interested in, a decision made by Council.





**Enquiries: Communications and Engagement Team**  
**Telephone No: 0409 265 642**

P.O. Box 105, Lilydale VIC 3140

