

MAKING YOUR VOICE MATTER

Engagement Summary Report



PROJECT OVERVIEW

Making Your Voice Matter was an education campaign that ran online for 6 weeks between 21st February and the 1st April. The campaign was launched in the Feb/March edition of the ourballarat magazine.

Making Your Voice Matter was an engagement initiative designed to achieve 3 outcomes.

- ✓ **Increase registration of new Mysay users**
- ✓ **Educate community on how or why Council undertakes engagement in order to improve trust and transparency**
- ✓ **To learn more from community in their preferences to engagement, or barriers to participation.**

Our Audience and Reach

While promotion was run through the Ourballarat magazine and through the City of Ballarat's social media accounts, the engagement campaign was run solely on the mysay platform due to the target in increasing our online reach and membership. Additional outreach work and research still needs to be undertaken in order to hear preferences from members of the community who do not access online spaces such as social media or mysay.

> 2007 Visitors

Visitors are defined as the number of unique users that have entered the site. A single visitor may make more than one Visit to your site over the course of the same day or several days, but are only counted once.

> 649 Contributors

The unique number of Visitors who have left feedback or Contributions on a site using the available participation activities. Contributors is a unique value, and a Contributor who makes more than one Contribution is only counted as a single Contributor.

> 664 Contributions

While most people contributed to the survey, some people engaged with both the survey and the 'gather' tool which drove up the total amount of contributions.

✓ OUTCOME 1: Increase registration of new Mysay users

Increasing the number of registered users to the Mysay platform was a strategic decision made to increase our reach to engaged community in the lead up to the development of the new Council Plan.

Registered users of MySay receive twice monthly newsletters as well as the ability to provide feedback on certain consultations that require registration.

Result:



During the period that the Making Your Voice Matter engagement was running, we received 545 new registered users. This brought the total up from 6356 to 6901 as of the 1st April, 2024.

**There were several other open engagements during this period which may have also impacted on increased registration*

✓ OUTCOME 2: Educate community on how or why Council undertakes engagement to improve trust and transparency

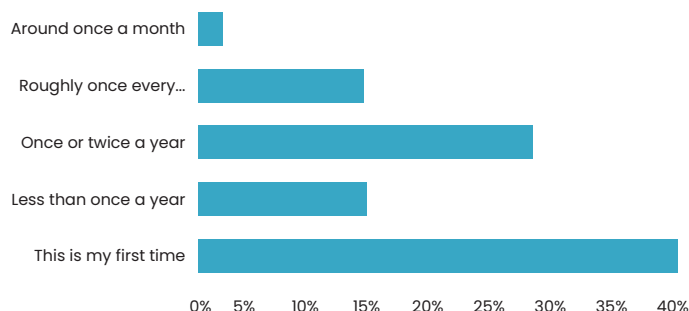
Monitoring the outcomes of increased trust and awareness of Council engagement is something which will need to be undertaken continuously over several years as trust, by its nature, can be something that can be slow to build and easy to lose. Further consideration about future questions that we can ask the community on this needs to be had with the aim of monitoring through a benchmarking exercise.

There was however, a good outcome in the number of people who completed a survey through mysay for the first time. Of the 623 people that responded to the survey, 40% of them were first time contributors.

Result:

This showed that the campaign was successful in broadening its reach to new audiences, with many of the respondents indicating that they weren't previously aware of the engagement opportunities available.

Q. How often do you take part in community consultations or make submissions



Of the 623 people that responded, 250 (40%) were first time submitters.

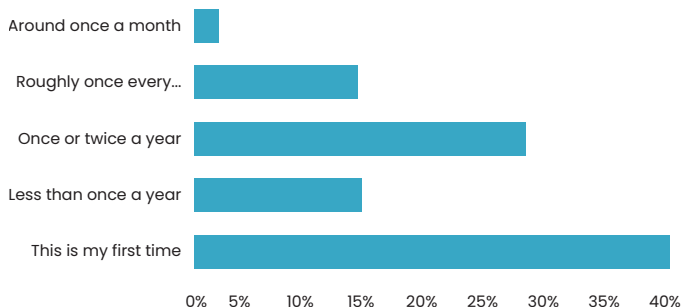
✓ OUTCOME 3: To learn more from community in their preferences to engagement, or barriers to participation.

A short survey was conducted to gather data on people's preferences and barriers to participation. There were 5 questions asked;

1. How often do you take part in community consultations
2. How do you like to take part in community consultations?
3. When taking part in community consultations, what is most important in order to participate?
4. Let us know if there is anything else about community consultation which is important to you?
5. If you haven't taken part in consultations before, is there anything that has stopped you?

Result:

1. How often do you take part in community consultations

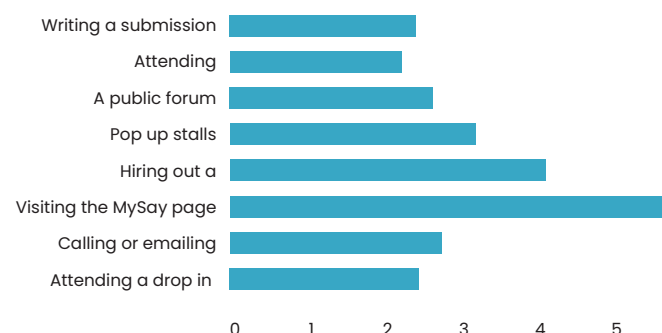


Besides the people who were responding for the first time, the majority of respondents engaged with consultations once or twice a year indicating that they are motivated by a particular topic of interest, but not in the full scope of work of Council.

2. How do you like to take part in community consultations?

Understanding how people like to be engaged with helps us to understand how to better allocate resources and to ensure that our methodology is meeting the diverse needs of our communities. People could rank the answers in order of preference. Options included were:

- Writing a submission
- Attending a workshop to problem solve solutions with staff and community members
- A public forum with a Q + A
- Pop up stalls at markets and festivals
- Filling out a paper survey
- Filling out a Mysay page
- Calling or emailing a staff member
- Attending a drop-in information centre at a community centre, library or town hall.



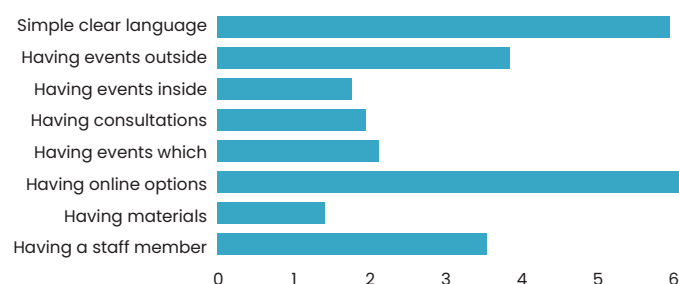
The top three ranked options included using the Mysay page, filling out a paper survey and visiting a pop up stall at a market or festival. All three top options are common in that they are the most time efficient, offer flexibility for the person engaging and are of lower commitment than attending a dedicated session such as a workshop or Town Hall style meeting.

3. When taking part in community consultations, what is most important in order to participate?

By understanding what barriers people may face to engaging we can better accommodate our engagements to be inclusive for all to participate.

Using the ranking system, people could choose from options including:

- Simple, clear language
- Having events outside of business hours having events inside business hours
- Having consultations that are inclusive for children to take part in
- Having engagements that are accessible to public transport
- Having online options to take part in consultations
- Having materials in languages other than English
- Having a staff member available to talk to



This has confirmed that while engagements need to offer a range of ways to take part, having an interactive Mysay page with simple, clear language still remains an important component of our over-arching engagement strategy.

Results have shown that having events or staff members available to speak to outside of business hours could increase participation from a cohort we may not hear from often.

4. Let us know if there is anything else about community consultation which is important to you?

There were 488 contributions with the results split into 5 main themes:

Transparency and Accountability:

- Many contributors emphasized the importance of transparency in the consultation process, wanting clear communication about how feedback is used and what decisions are made based on it.
- They expressed a desire for honest, authentic engagement rather than perceiving it as a mere formality or box-ticking exercise by the council.

Inclusivity and Representation:

- A recurring theme was the need for inclusive participation, ensuring that all segments of the community have a voice in the consultation process.
- Contributors highlighted the importance of representing diverse demographics, including age groups, ethnicities, socioeconomic backgrounds, and different community organizations.

Accessibility and Engagement Methods:

- Accessibility was a significant concern, with a preference for various engagement methods to accommodate different preferences and schedules.
- Online options were favored by many, but there were also requests for in-person consultations, ensuring that those without internet access or who prefer face-to-face interactions can participate.

Follow-Up and Action:

- Contributors emphasized the importance of follow-up and action following consultations. They wanted to see tangible results, with feedback considered in decision-making and visible outcomes communicated back to the community.
- Feedback on past consultations and how it was used in decision-making was requested, highlighting a desire for accountability and responsiveness from the council.



Communication and Awareness:

- Many contributors highlighted the need for improved communication and awareness about consultation opportunities. They suggested various channels for promoting consultations, including traditional media, community newsletters, and social media platforms.
- Providing advance notice, regular updates, and clear information about consultation topics were seen as essential for increasing community engagement.

Of the 488 responses received, barriers to participation varied.

1. Awareness and Information Gap: Many respondents cited not being aware that consultations were happening or not knowing how to participate. This lack of awareness suggests that there's room for improvement in communication and outreach efforts to ensure that community members are informed about consultation opportunities.

2. Time Constraints: Time emerged as a significant barrier for participation. Busy schedules, work commitments, family responsibilities, and inconvenient timing of consultation events were commonly mentioned factors preventing individuals from taking part.

3. Perceived Ineffectiveness: Some respondents expressed skepticism about the effectiveness of consultations, believing that decisions were already made or that their input wouldn't make a difference. This perception of futility could discourage participation.

4. Accessibility Issues: Accessibility barriers, such as lack of transport options, physical disabilities, or mobility issues, hindered participation for some individuals. Additionally, concerns about online accessibility were raised, highlighting the importance of providing inclusive digital platforms for engagement.

5. Cynicism and Mistrust: A lack of trust in the consultation process, coupled with skepticism about decision-makers genuinely listening to community feedback, deterred some from participating.

6. Complexity and Bureaucracy: The complexity of the consultation process, including registration requirements and the volume of material to review, was mentioned as a barrier for some respondents.

7. Personal Factors: Personal factors like social anxiety, lack of confidence, or feeling uninformed about the issues being discussed also played a role in inhibiting participation.

8. Relevance and Interest: Some individuals indicated that they hadn't participated because they didn't feel passionate enough about the topics or didn't see the relevance of consultations to their concerns.

9. Previous Experience: Negative past experiences with consultations, such as feeling ignored or witnessing decisions that didn't align with community feedback, influenced some individuals' decisions not to participate.

10. Geographical Factors: Specific to the Ballarat community, there were mentions of perceived biases towards long-term residents and a lack of representation for newcomers or outsiders, which could deter participation from certain demographics.

Overall, addressing these barriers requires proactive efforts to increase awareness, improve accessibility, build trust in the consultation process, simplify procedures, and ensure that consultations are inclusive and genuinely responsive to community input.

Additional question: What projects are you most interested in being engaged on?



Result: This question sat outside of the survey and was non-compulsory. There were 48 responses. Of those that responded Parks, Infrastructure, Town Planning, Waste Mangement and Heritage came through with the most common areas that people put forward as their areas of interest for engagement.



SUMMARY

Overall, the number of responses we received to the engagement was positive, with increased engagement likely to be attributed to using the financial incentive of the chance to win a \$200 fuel or food voucher.

The campaign was successful in increasing our membership on the mysay platform, but the survey results also highlighted and reinforced the need for engagement projects to continually consider alternative methods of engagements both online and offline, and in times and methods that are inclusive and accessible.

It has also highlighted a need to review our communications methods to ensure that news of engagement opportunities are reaching broad sections of the community in a timely manner.

The survey and “Making Your Voice Matter” campaign will serve as a good benchmark to undertake on an annual basis so that we can continue to learn if trust in our engagement process’ are improving and whether we are seeing an improvement on reducing peoples barriers to participation.



NEXT STEPS

The topics and themes raised in this survey have created a strong foundation in which to build for better engagement based on what the Ballarat community wants and needs. Action to be undertaken will include but are not limited to;

- ✓ Increase staff training opportunities for best practice engagement, particularly around inclusivity
- ✓ Review our communications strategy to ensure that we are effectively ‘closing to the loop’ to show community clearly how their input is impacting decision making
- ✓ Review our communication methods to ensure that promotion of engagement opportunities is happening both broadly and allowing people enough time to engage.
- ✓ Reviewing and updating the Engagement Planning template to ensure that various methods of engagement beyond just the mysay page are adequately emphasized