

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT POLICY

1.0 Purpose

This policy has been developed in accordance with section 55 of the *Local Government Act 2020* (the Act).

The purpose of this policy is to:

- Outline Council's commitment and approach to engaging the community in decision-making processes.
- Promote inclusive community engagement, recognising the rich knowledge and experience of our diverse community.
- Provide guidance to City of Ballarat staff, Council and the community on our engagement principles, methods and available resources.
- Enable a consistent, transparent and high-quality approach to the design and delivery of community engagement.
- To ensure that the knowledge, experiences, needs and aspirations of the community are considered in Council decision-making processes.
- To provide a strong foundation for understanding and working with our community, – promoting shared responsibility for decisions and trust in the decision-making process.
- To strengthen collaboration and partnerships between Council and the community.

2.0 Scope

This policy applies to all areas of City of Ballarat and provides a framework for Councillors, City of Ballarat staff and consultants / agencies acting on behalf of City of Ballarat.

This policy applies to community engagement processes to be undertaken as directed by Council, recommended by City of Ballarat staff, or required by legislation.

The policy does not apply to statutory processes prescribed in other acts, such as planning matters covered by the *Planning and Environment Act 1987*, nor does it apply to unplanned interactions with City of Ballarat such as service requests or complaints.

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, decisions regarding internal policy development, response to legislative requirements or other time-sensitive matters.

3.0 Policy Statement

3.1 Policy Objectives

Council recognises that engagement leads to well-informed decisions at a strategic and operational level, achieves effective and transparent governance, and is fundamental to inclusive, vibrant and thriving communities.

3.2 Our Approach and Principles

Community engagement requirements are guided by legislation and frameworks such as the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) Public Participation Spectrum. Council will make decisions based on legislative requirements, the expert advice of City of Ballarat staff and/or consultants, and community inputs gathered through engagement processes.

Engagement should be well-planned, tailored to circumstances and consider factors such as complexity of the decision to be made, community values, sensitivity, timing and opportunity. Community engagement will be undertaken transparently with reference to the following principles:

- The community and stakeholders will be enabled to provide meaningful and relevant input into decision-making.
- The objectives and scope of the engagement and the opportunities to influence decision-making will be well articulated.
- Processes will be respectful taking into consideration the cultural and social impact of the engagement on the community.
- Accurate, timely and accessible information will be provided to the community to inform their input.
- Participation in community engagement will be sought from those people and groups who are most affected by the matter that is subject of engagement.
- A wide variety of engagement opportunities will be available to enable access for all community members, and effort will be made to involve people and groups that face challenges to engagement.
- Community will be informed of the final decision and how their input was considered.
- The effectiveness of community engagement processes will be reviewed and evaluated.
- Engagement processes will be planned, resourced and reported on appropriately.
- Council's approach to community engagement will be guided by the IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum.

The IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum describes five levels of engagement from 'inform' through to 'empower' (Figure 1). It matches the purpose of community engagement with the level of influence that community input will have on decision-making.

Many engagement processes will operate on more than one level of engagement as the community will be involved and have different levels of influence at different stages of a project or program. Likewise, different engagement levels may be used for different groups within the community that are more, or less, directly impacted than others.

Engagement practices can be described as either participatory or deliberative engagement.

Participatory engagement aims to get feedback from a wide variety of participants and usually involves a transactional interaction between City of Ballarat and community where information is shared either one or both ways. This type of engagement typically occurs where City of Ballarat informs the community about works occurring or invites feedback on ideas, alternatives or draft documents. This is the type of engagement that occurs at the 'inform' and 'consult' levels of the IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum.

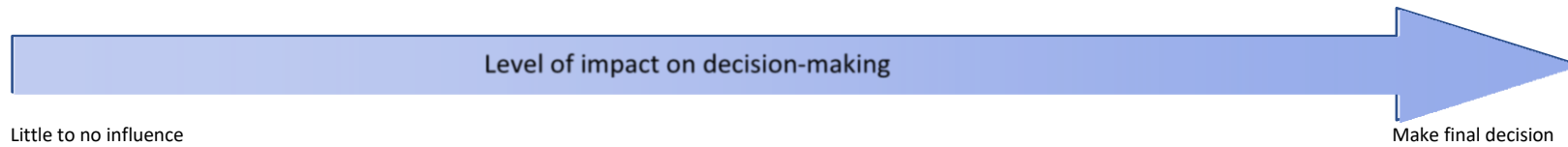
Deliberative engagement is a form of high influence community engagement where a select group of participants are provided with information, support and time to deliberate over perspectives, inputs and evidence to support their decision-making or recommendations. Participants are selected to form

a group that is representative of those who will be impacted by the decision. Deliberative engagement is a time and resource-intensive process and is more likely to occur at the 'involve', 'collaborate' and 'empower' levels of the IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum.

City of Ballarat will undertake deliberative engagement for the development of the:

- Community Vision (10-years)
- Council Plan (4-years)
- Financial Plan (10-years)
- Asset Plan (10-years)
- Health and Wellbeing Plan (10-years)

City of Ballarat may undertake deliberative engagement for projects identified where an outcome or decision is a complex issue and would benefit from a deeper review from a diverse range of people in our community.



	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
Purpose of engagement	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.
Commitment to community	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 seek your feedback on drafts and proposals.	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 work together with you to formulate solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.
Examples of when each level of engagement may be used			Involve, collaborative and/or empower The Act requires deliberative engagement practices for: • Long-term Community Vision • 4 Year Council Plan • Long-term Financial Plan • Long-term Asset Plan On long term and significant impact projects like these, we use methods to partner with the community.		
			Involve and/or collaborate High impact and complex projects (for example, major park upgrades, precinct master planning or annual budget planning) require extra levels of interaction and often happen over several stages.		

		Consult and/or Involve Decisions carrying a lower impact (such as a minor policy review) still require community input but less time and resource-intensive methods		
		Consult Sometimes options are limited for practical reasons (such as maintenance work that must be carried out). In this case, we will ask you how and when it should happen		
	Inform Sometimes we may need to inform you of a decision where there is no opportunity for community input. For example, where there are public safety issues that need to be addressed, we are not the decision-making authority, or there are no real alternatives available. In these cases, we will keep you informed.			

Figure 1: Different levels of community engagement and examples of use (adapted from IAP2 Spectrum of Engagement and City of Yarra Engagement Policy 2020)

3.3 Engagement process planning

Quality community engagement is well-planned and resourced. Engagement planning should commence with four key questions:

Why are we engaging? 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.

When will we engage? Decisions about when to engage are directly impacted by the purpose and scope of the engagement process. City of Ballarat will conduct engagement at a time that community input can influence decisions as outlined in the purpose and scope of the process.

Who do we engage? City of Ballarat's projects, policies, service provision and operations intersect in 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. A stakeholder analysis should be undertaken to identify those who are most impacted by the decision. **How do we engage?** With a clear purpose and understanding of the target for engagement, engagement methods and the tools to be used to undertake and record engagement feedback can be selected. These will vary depending on the type of engagement process to be undertaken but may include:

Type of engagement	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Examples of relevant methods	• Fact sheets • Websites • Open houses	• Public comment • Focus groups • Surveys • Public meetings • Community expo and ward sessions • Direct mailout	• Workshops • Deliberative polling	• Advisory committees • Consensus building • Participatory decision making	• Citizen juries • Ballots • Delegated decisions

An engagement plan should be developed for any project or process where community engagement will be undertaken and should include the following as a minimum:

1. Project description: What is the project that involves decision making?
2. Background: What is the background of the project?
3. Engagement purpose and scope: What do we need to find out from the community? How much influence will the community have on the decision?
4. Timing: When do we need to engage in order to facilitate that influence on decision-making? Will there be multiple phases of engagement?
5. Engagement stakeholder analysis: Who are the people and groups most impacted by this decision?
6. Engagement methods and tools: What methods and engagement tools are we going to use to engage with the target groups? Are there are variety of ways people can engage, including face-to-face and localised opportunities? Have we thought about accessibility for groups that face barriers to engagement?

7. Collateral required: What do we need to develop to undertake the process? What human and other resources are required?
8. Communications: How will we communicate the engagement process and follow up with participants?
9. Data collection and analysis: How will we collect and analyse data?
10. Evaluation planning: How will we know if we were successful in our engagement?

3.4 Evaluation of community engagement processes and feedback to participants

Council is committed to continuous improvement of our community engagement practices, with a particular focus on increasing participation numbers and evaluating each consultation to 'close the loop' with our community.

The engagement plan identifies evaluation and 'closing the loop' opportunities as crucial steps in the engagement process. All participants that are registered on City of Ballarat's online engagement platform will be informed directly of the engagement outcomes, and this is also made publicly available on the engagement project page.

The evaluation process will identify who engaged in the project, how the feedback was considered and what changes, if any, were made based on the engagement.

Each community engagement process will be evaluated by those responsible for the engagement, in collaboration with the community engagement officers. Key result areas and indicators shown in Figure 2 should be used when evaluating individual community engagement processes. City of Ballarat will collate results of individual engagement evaluations to produce an annual report of its community engagement activity.

KRA	Indicator
Planning, resourcing and structures enable the achievement of engagement objectives	1. The detail of engagement planning was consistent with stakeholder/community expectations 2. The time and budget allocated was consistent with stakeholder/community expectations 3. The internal structures and responsibilities were clarified early in the engagement planning
Timely and clear communication builds trust and increases participation	4. Stakeholders/community were given sufficient time and information to engage in a meaningful way, and at influential stages of the process 5. Outcomes and commitments made to stakeholders/community were recorded and followed through in a timely way 6. The results of the process were communicated back to stakeholders/community.
Diversity of participation ensures balance and enables deep understanding of stakeholder and community perspectives	7. The stakeholders/community engaged was representative of the project impact and risk 8. The engagement process ensured there was equitable opportunity for participation for a diverse range of perspectives to be shared 9. There was transparency of communicating engagement details including goal, negotiables, timelines and events
Influence to the extent promised builds sustainable decisions	10. The influence/input from stakeholders/community matched the level of engagement promised 11. The decision or outcome was considered "sustainable" (economically viable, technically feasible, environmentally consistent and socially acceptable)
Goal orientated engagement builds support and honours the time and resources committed	12. The engagement process enabled practical project outcomes to be achieved 13. Stakeholders/community demonstrate support for the engagement process
Engagement builds learning opportunities for all	14. The process enabled knowledge capture and sharing to improve practice 15. Participation in the engagement process benefited the stakeholders/community involved

Adapted from the City of Melbourne Evaluation Framework (2014)

Figure 2

3.5 Roles and Responsibilities

Everyone with a relationship with City of Ballarat has a role in the successful implementation of the Community Engagement Policy.

Role	Responsibilities
Councillors	• Good level of understanding of the policy and resources. • Adhere to engagement principles in their day-to-day interaction with community. • Be respectful of engagement processes, City of Ballarat staff, community members and stakeholders. • Consider engagement outcomes in decision making.
Executive Leadership Team	• Good level of understanding of the policy and resources. • Support the consistent implementation of the policy. • Resource staff to deliver community engagement. • Promote to Council about the role of community engagement. • Consider engagement outcomes in decision making.
Community Engagement Team	• High level of understanding of the policy and resources. • Support City of Ballarat staff to design and deliver community engagement. • Identify opportunities to strengthen and improve engagement processes. • Lead review and evaluation process with a focus on continuous improvement.
City of Ballarat staff	• Good level of understanding of the policy and resources. • Use policy and resources to design and deliver engagement processes. • Coordinate engagement activities across departments and groups. • Seek out engagement specialists when requiring support and guidance. • Create appropriate and relatable communications on large scale projects that have either a community impact or would generate community interest. • Consider engagement outcomes in decision making.
Community members	• Respect engagement processes, Councillors, City of Ballarat staff and other community members and stakeholders. • Constructively participate in engagement processes. • Share local knowledge, values and expertise.
Representative bodies and Advisory Committees	• Bring a representative voice to Council processes. • Strengthen relationships between Council and community members. • Represent the views of minority groups. • Encourage and promote community engagement opportunities among networks. • Disseminate information among networks.

4.0 Supporting documents and references

4.1 Legislation

- *Local Government Act 2020*
- *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*
- *Equal Opportunity Act 2010*
- *Child Safety Act 2015.*
- *Gender Equality Act 2020*

4.2 Associated Documents

- Public Participation in Government Decision Making – Victorian Auditor General's Officer – Better Practice Guide
- IAP2 Quality Assurance Standards – Core Values, Practitioners Code of Ethics and the IAP2 Spectrum of Engagement.

4.3 Definitions

Community engagement	Community engagement involves a two-way exchange between Council and community. Community engagement strengthens relationships, shapes decisions and enables us to learn from each other.
Stakeholder	Any individual or group of people with a specific stake in the outcome of a decision.
Participation	Participation by communities in activities to help achieve desired outcomes.
Deliberation	An engagement process with a select group of community members. The process focusses on a defined issue, weighs up options and provides recommendations to decision-makers.
Council	Means the group of Councillors who are democratically elected to represent the Ballarat municipality in accordance with the <i>Local Government Act 2020</i> .
City of Ballarat	Means the body corporate constituted in accordance with the <i>Local Government Act 2020</i> .
Staff	A staff member includes employees, labour hire agency staff, volunteers and work experience students engaged by the City of Ballarat.

5.0 Administrative Updates

From time to time, circumstances may change leading to the need for minor administrative changes to this policy. Where an update does not materially alter this policy, such a change may be made administratively. Examples of minor administrative changes include changes to names of Council

departments or positions, change to names of Federal or State Government departments or a minor amendment to legislation that does not have material impact. Where any change or update may materially change the intent of this policy, it must be considered by Council.

6.0 Policy owner

Executive Manager Engaged Communities

7.0 Authorisation

Adopted by Ballarat City Council on 27 August 2025 (R150/25).