CITY OF BALLARAT

ANNUAL COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT REPORT 2025/26

Proudly working with and for our community





Contents

Executive Summary 3

Introduction 4

Engagement Methods 5

Connecting the Community with Engagement Opportunities 8

Who Did We Hear From? 10

Community Satisfaction Survey 14

Engagement Highlights 15

Case Study 1 – Let's Chat Ballarat Community Expo 15

Case Study 2 – Disability and Inclusion Access Plan 16

Our Commitment to Continuous Improvement 17

Appendix 19

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The City of Ballarat acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land we live and work on, the Wadawurrung and Dja Dja Wurrung Peoples, and recognises their continuing connection to the land and waterways.

We pay our respects to their Elders past and present and extend this to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

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Executive Summary

Welcome to the Annual Community Engagement Report for 2025/26.

The City of Ballarat is committed to listening to our residents and working together through effective engagement to shape well-informed decisions that affect our city and contribute to a vibrant and thriving place to live.

In 2025/26, the City of Ballarat supported 45 engagement projects across a broad range of themes — from strategic planning and policy to local infrastructure and community services, this is an increase from 32 engagement projects in 2024/25.

All areas of the organisation contributed to engagement in 2025/26 in some form. The Let's Chat Ballarat Community Expo was the largest single-location engagement, enabling teams across Council to connect with the community and build an understanding of Council's roles, responsibilities and how community input can influence decisions.

There were a number of community engagement projects in 2025/26 which attracted a large volume of community interest and participation.

The top five most contributed to engagements were:

- Four Bin service review - 1,332 survey responses*
- Safer Ballarat - 1,183 survey responses*
- Age Friendly Ballarat - 619 survey responses
- Lake Wendouree Public Toilets - 482 survey responses
- Community Local Law Review – 340 survey responses

*These projects are ongoing beyond the 2025/26 financial year. Survey responses are as of 30 June 2026.

Year three of the 'Making Your Voice Matter' campaign was conducted and provided further benchmarking data. Whilst participation numbers declined, the feedback received gave unique insights into what good community engagement looks like. Feedback collected over the three years continues to inform our continuous improvement program.

In-person and targeted community engagement was a key focus again in 2025/26, diversifying feedback and making sure we are hearing from those that can often be underrepresented. Some of these engagement approaches included:

- Continuing to engage our Ballarat Kids Think Tank group
- Ongoing engagement sessions with the Community Panel, continuing with deliberative engagement, following on from the development of the Council Plan
- Using the networks of our Advisory Committees to reach specific demographics
- Let's Chat Ballarat Community Expo and Let's Chat Councillor Roadshows

The Let's Chat Ballarat Community Expo was held for the second year, with all Council service areas represented and on hand to 'chat' to the community. Approximately 600 people attended and participated in current engagements, spoke to Councillors and staff, saw fun and interactive displays and enjoyed food cooked by our friends from Rotary Club of Wendouree Breakfast and Ballarat East Community Men's Shed. A popular addition to this year's Let's Chat Ballarat Community Expo was the attendance of the winners of both City of Ballarat winter events, Ballarat Hot Chocolate Showdown, Mondegreen Cafe and Ballarat's Best Pie, Mrs Browne's Bakes selling out as usual.

Key metrics from the MySay webpage for 2025/26 show membership numbers at 8478, an increase of 748 members over the past 12 months, approximately 64,000 views and a total of 8,543 contributions to engagement projects, an increase of 2,793 from 2024/25.

This report brings together participation data and trends, engagement methods and partnerships that supported community input, key engagement and communication activity, demographic insights and project highlights to provide a clear picture of how the community was engaged throughout the year. It also reflects on what Council learned through this work and how those insights are informing future improvements to engagement planning and delivery, including strengthening meaningful, accessible and transparent conversations with the community.

Introduction

In 2025/26 a key focus was on the consolidation and continued improvement of the City of Ballarat's community engagement program. Across the year, City of Ballarat delivered a broad range of opportunities that helped community members contribute to decisions about local services, infrastructure, strategies, policies and places.

The *Local Government Act 2020* continued to guide the principles of community engagement, with the City of Ballarat's Community Engagement Policy being the primary framework supporting practices during the year. A review of the policy commenced in March 2025, with community feedback contributing to the Policy being adopted by Council in August 2025.

In 2025/26, in line with the updated Community Engagement Policy, Council continued to strengthen both face-to-face and digital engagement, including through the MySay Ballarat webpage, localised face-to-face conversations, advisory committees, the Ballarat Kids Think Tank, the Ballarat Community Panel and the Let's Chat Ballarat Community Expo. These approaches supported more accessible, meaningful and transparent opportunities for community members to have their say in ways that suited their needs, interests and lived experience.

City of Ballarat uses the Engagement Institute framework (formerly knowns as International Association for Public Participation (IAP2)), which outlines best-practice principles for community engagement. This helps us to:

- Be open and transparent about how decisions are made
- Involve the right people at the right time
- Use your feedback to help shape the outcome
- Close the loop by reporting back on what we heard and what we're doing

While increasing participation remains important, Council's engagement program focuses not only on the number of people involved, but also on the quality, accessibility, inclusiveness and impact of the engagement process.

In 2025/26, in line with the updated Community Engagement Policy, Council continued to strengthen both face-to-face and digital engagement

Engagement Methods

Community members engage with City of Ballarat in different ways. Some prefer to complete an online survey, while others value speaking directly with Councillors or Council staff, attending a workshop or participating through a community event. During 2025/26, City of Ballarat continued to deliver a broad range of engagement methods, selecting approaches that best suited the purpose of each project, the community affected and recognising that participation across all methods provides a more complete understanding of community participation than survey responses alone.

During 2025/26, Council recorded approximately 19,539 contributions across its engagement program, including surveys, workshops, pop-up conversations, stakeholder meetings, advisory groups and other activities.

Face-to-face engagement

Face-to-face engagement remained a focus of Council's program during 2025/26, creating opportunities for community members to speak directly with Councillors and Council staff, ask questions and provide feedback in both informal and structured settings. It is estimated that over 4,000 community members participated in one or more face-to-face activities contributing to a more informed community about City of Ballarat engagement activities and more feedback captured.

Face-to-face activities	Number delivered
Stakeholder and Advisory Committee meetings	144
Community events	99
Pop-up and drop-in sessions	92
Workshops	92
Total	**427**



Stakeholder and Advisory Committee meetings included presenting directly to stakeholders and Advisory Committees to gain an understanding of their lived experience and expertise in the particular project, and to disseminate information into specific demographics.

Community events provided opportunities to engage with residents where they were already gathering, including major festivals, cultural celebrations and other community-based events. The Let's Chat Ballarat Community Expo was City of Ballarat's main engagement event, which brought together 28 Council project stalls and approximately 600 community members over two days, providing opportunities for residents to explore multiple projects in one location. Councillor Roadshows continued throughout the year in each Ward to provide opportunities for residents to meet directly with Councillors within their local communities.

Pop-up and drop-in sessions created informal opportunities for conversation in libraries and other community venues, allowing residents to ask questions and provide feedback in convenient locations about specific projects.

Workshops supported more detailed discussion by bringing community members, stakeholders and Council staff together to explore issues, share experiences and contribute to the development of Council plans and projects.

MySay

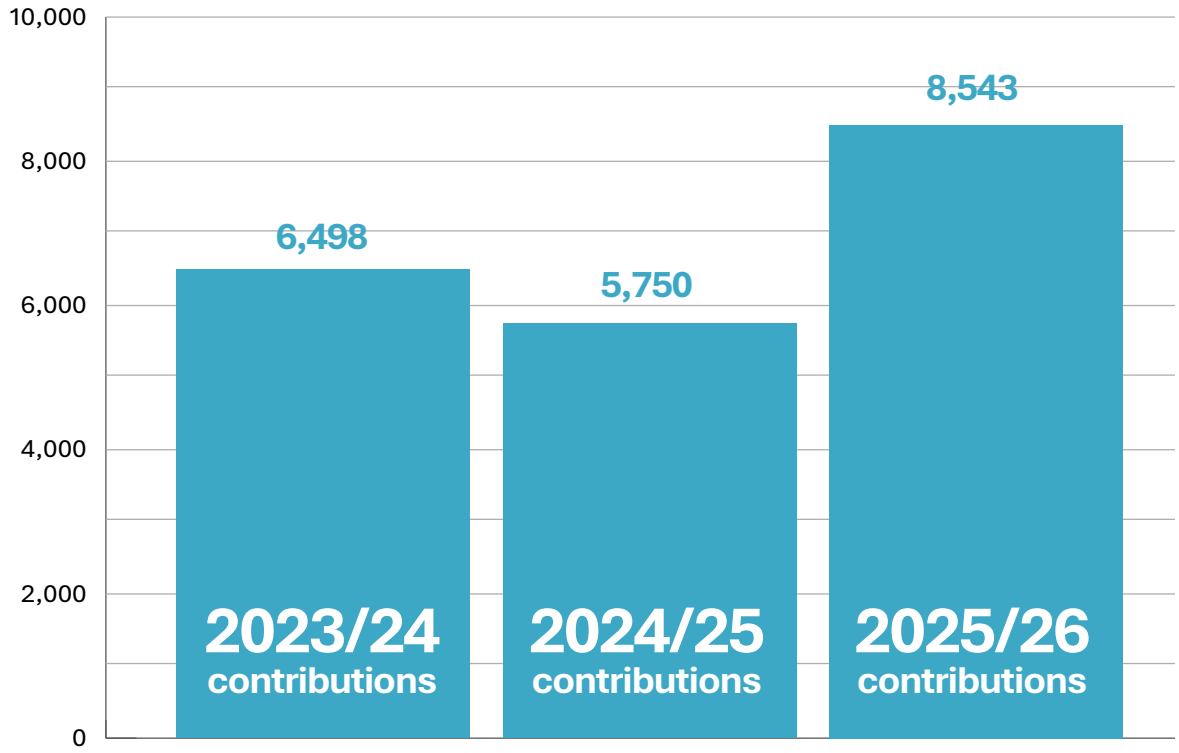
Digital engagement through the City of Ballarat's MySay website, continued to provide opportunities for community members to access project information, participate at a time convenient to them and remain informed throughout the engagement process.

The MySay website, being the primary online engagement platform showed an increase in statistics from last financial year, across a number of elements including:

- Registration numbers up by 748
- Project followers up by 399
- A 272% increase of engagement documents being downloaded. This growth indicates increasing use of project information, supporting the community's appetite to be fully informed of Council consultations.

Online participation also continued to grow, with contributions through MySay increasing by 67 per cent compared with 2024/25, reaching the highest level recorded over the past three years, as shown in the graph below.

Online Engagement Tools – Total Contributions



Growth occurred across all major online engagement tools, with the following table showing the variety of approaches used to be more inclusive and accessible.

Online Engagement Tools	Contributions 2024/25	Contributions 2025/26
Form/Survey	5,394	6,732
Social Map	189	1,157
Quick Poll	135	440
Visioner	2	163
Gather	30	40
Conversation	0	10
Forum	0	1

Continuing to evolve engagement methods

City of Ballarat continued to explore new engagement approaches throughout the year, trialling methods that better reflected the purpose of individual projects and the information being sought.

One example was the Safer Ballarat project, which combined ground decals with an interactive mapping tool, allowing community members to identify specific locations where they felt safe or unsafe and provide detailed feedback about their experiences. Alongside the mapped location, participants shared how they used the space, the physical and social factors influencing their perceptions of safety, the impact these feelings had on how they used the area, and demographic information. This enabled Council to better understand not only where safety concerns existed, but also who was experiencing them, what factors contributed to those perceptions, and how they influenced people's use of public spaces.

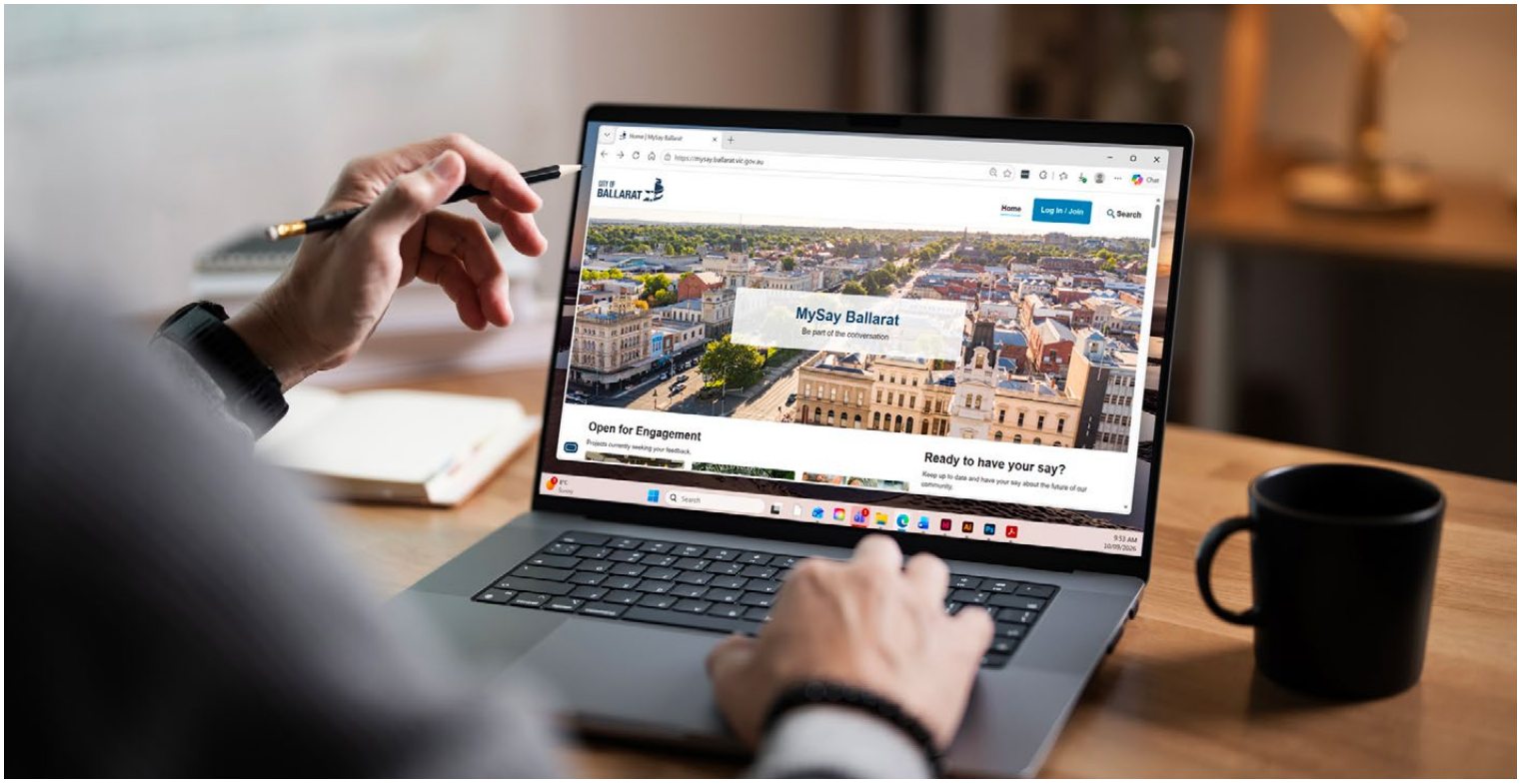
Accessible participation

In 2025/26, there was a continued focus on providing a range of accessible participation options across engagement programs, recognising that removing barriers to participation is essential to inclusive engagement. During 2025/26, 34 of the 45 engagement projects offered hard copy participation options, including printed surveys, reply-paid envelopes and printed materials available through Customer Service. Hard copy resources were also available alongside online engagement through MySay, helping reduce barriers for people who preferred to download or print a hard copy version.

Accessibility was also supported through the MySay platform with the installation of UserWay accessibility tools, enabling community members to customise their experience to meet their individual needs. Features included screen reader compatibility, text and contrast adjustments, font and spacing controls, translation into more than 50 languages, and a range of other accessibility settings.

One example of this approach was the Disability Access and Inclusion Plan, which demonstrated Council's commitment to tailoring engagement methods to the needs of the intended audience. Alongside online engagement, the project provided Easy Read materials, translated information, video content, Auslan interpretation, hard copy resources, an online blog, workshops, drop-in sessions and one-on-one discussions. This combination of engagement methods helped ensure community members could participate in ways that reflected their communication needs, preferences and lived experience.

Together, these methods provided multiple pathways for community members to participate, recognising that meaningful engagement extends well beyond survey responses.



Connecting the Community with Engagement Opportunities

Providing opportunities for people to participate is an important part of effective engagement. Equally important is ensuring residents are aware of those opportunities and can easily access information about current consultations. In 2025/26, the City of Ballarat prioritised raising awareness through a coordinated mix of face-to-face promotion, communications and digital engagement.

Connecting with the community

City of Ballarat continued to connect with the community through major events and dedicated engagement activities, recognising that these activities provided valuable opportunities to reach people where they are already gathering.

Events such as the Ballarat Begonia Festival (attracting more than 75,000 attendees across three days), and SpringFest (approximately 25,000 attendees on one day) enabled staff to be available to promote current consultations, raise awareness of the MySay webpage and the importance of having your say, and encourage participation from people who may not otherwise engage with City of Ballarat.

City of Ballarat's largest face-to-face community engagement event, the Let's Chat Ballarat Community Expo was promoted through MySay newsletters, rates notice inserts, radio, social media, digital advertising, partnerships with local media, and 'spruiking' at the major Ballarat events named above.

Coordinated communications

Community engagement opportunities were promoted through a coordinated mix of digital, print, broadcast and online communication channels.

Throughout the year, local media supported consultation promotion through 45 Councillor radio interviews and 26 media releases, generating coverage across local radio, television and print media.

Social media continued to direct community members to engagement opportunities and the MySay webpage. The City of Ballarat's social media channels reached a combined audience of approximately 88,900 followers, while paid advertising was used where appropriate to target communities directly impacted by individual projects. For example, the Binney Reserve consultation used geotargeted advertising, generating more than 31,000 impressions among nearby residents.

Print communication also remained an important promotional channel. The weekly City of Ballarat Public Noticeboard appeared in every edition of the Ballarat Times, reaching approximately 25,000 households each week, while consultation features in the ourballarat magazine reached a further 15,000 households each quarter.

The City of Ballarat website remained the largest referring website to MySay webpage for the third consecutive year, with referrals increasing by almost 40 per cent compared with the previous financial year.

MySay – Keeping the community up to date

MySay Ballarat continued to support communications throughout the engagement process, enabling community members to follow projects, receive updates and stay informed as consultations progressed.

The MySay community continued to grow during 2025/26, reaching 8,478 registered members (up almost ten per cent), 742 project followers (up 46 per cent) and 6,718 newsletter subscribers (up nine per cent). This overall growth demonstrates increasing interest in receiving project updates and remaining connected beyond a single opportunity to participate.

Email communication also expanded significantly throughout the year. A total of 41 email campaigns (up 315 per cent) were delivered achieving an average click-through rate of 18.54 per cent.

Community members accessed MySay through a variety of channels, including direct visits, search engines, social media, communication campaigns and referrals from other websites. Direct traffic remained the largest source of visits, while Google, Facebook and the City of Ballarat website continued to play an important role in directing people to engagement opportunities. AI assistants also emerged as a new referral source during the year, reflecting changing ways people are accessing information online.

Source	What it includes	Visit Numbers
Direct	Typed web address, bookmarks and untracked links	46,112
Search Engines	Google, Bing and other search engines	16,232
Social Media	Social media Facebook, LinkedIn, X and other social platforms	10,118
Campaigns	Tracked promotional campaigns including the MySay newsletters and other tagged promotional links	7,767
Websites	Visitors who arrived via links on other websites, such as the City of Ballarat website	6,770
AI Assistant	Visitors who clicked through to MySay after receiving information or a link from AI tools such as ChatGPT, Microsoft Copilot or Google Gemini.	112
	Total visits by source	**87,111**

Who Did We Hear From?

Understanding who participates in City of Ballarat's community engagement activities helps assess whether opportunities are reaching a broad cross-section of the community and provides an opportunity to identify and strengthen future engagement.

Of the 45 engagement projects delivered during 2025/26, 30 online surveys included City of Ballarat's set of demographic questions. The following analysis is based on responses collected through those projects.

Demographic information does not need to be collected for every engagement. However, in line with the City of Ballarat's Community Engagement Policy—which states that engagement should seek participation from the people and groups most affected by the matter being considered—demographic information is always considered in relation to the purpose and intended audience of each engagement.

Where available, community benchmarks have been included to provide context in the demographic data. Minor variations between some reported totals reflect differences in reporting periods, with MySay platform analytics reported to 30 June 2026 and some project statistics reflecting consultations that concluded after the end of the financial year.

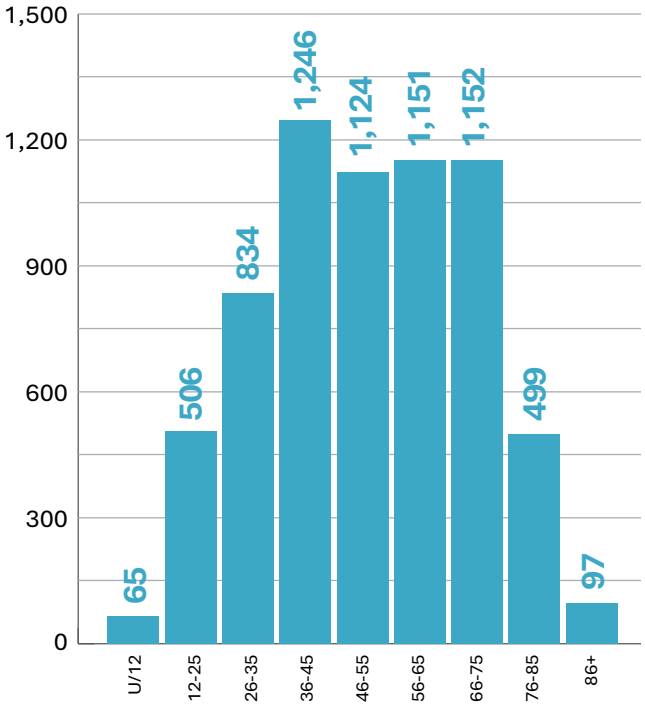
Overall participation

Gender	2024/25	2025/26
Women	60%	60.3%
Men	36.2%	33.6%
Non-binary	1.2%	1.5%
Other	0.4%	0.3%
Prefer not to say	2.2%	4.3%

Women continued to represent the largest proportion of respondents, accounting for 60.3 per cent of demographic responses, compared with 33.6 per cent selecting men as their gender. This pattern has remained consistent over the past few years.

The following graph shows the largest proportion of respondents in 2025/26 were aged 36 - 45 years (18.7 per cent). Overall, respondents aged 36 - 75 years represented approximately 70 per cent of all age responses, while participation from people aged under 26 years (8.6 per cent) and 86 years and over (1.5 per cent) was comparatively lower.

Age



Reaching intended audiences

While the overall demographic profile provides valuable insights across City of Ballarat's engagement program, project-level results demonstrate the importance of considering participation in the context of each engagement's purpose and intended audience.

The Youth Strategy successfully reached younger community members, with 78 per cent of respondents who completed the standard demographic questions aged 12–25 years, reflecting the project's intended audience. Similarly, the Age Friendly Ballarat project successfully engaged older residents through Seniors Festival events, visits to community groups, workshops, printed surveys, an expo and online engagement. Of the 619 survey respondents for the Age Friendly Ballarat survey, 98 per cent were aged 56 years and over.

These examples demonstrate that success is not always measured by achieving a representative sample across the entire population, but also by effectively reaching the communities each project is intended to engage.

Priority groups

The City of Ballarat has identified priority groups through its Health and Wellbeing Plan and supporting inclusion strategies to help ensure all community members have opportunities to participate in and benefit from Council services, programs and decision-making. Understanding participation across these groups helps City of Ballarat assess representation, identify opportunities to strengthen inclusion and inform future engagement approaches.

Participants could identify with more than one priority group, recognising that people can often have multiple lived experiences.

The below table shows the 2025/26 MySay statistics for the priority groups participating.

Priority group	Respondents	% of respondents*
LGBTQIA+	677	9.4%
Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander	207	2.9%
Disability / chronic health condition	1,252	17.4%
Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD)	427	5.9%
Financial support / concession	1,704	23.7%
None of the above	3,199	44.6%
Prefer not to say	889	12.4%
Total	**8,355**	

*Participants could select more than one priority group. As a result, percentages do not total 100 per cent and the total represents the number of selections, not individual respondents.

Respondents identifying as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander represented 2.9 per cent of demographic responses, compared with 1.8 per cent of the Ballarat population. While this indicates participation from First Nations community members across Council's engagement program, Council recognises that meaningful engagement is strengthened through ongoing relationships, partnerships and culturally appropriate approaches.

Where benchmarking was possible, participation from respondents identifying as LGBTQIA+ (9.4 per cent) closely reflected the Ballarat community benchmark (9.6 per cent). The engagement was supported by strong existing relationships with the community and a broad mix of participation opportunities, including activities held during Pride Month, the Pride Ball, Pride Market, and advisory committee involvement.

Respondents identifying as culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds accounted for 5.9 per cent of demographic responses. While this measure is not directly comparable with Australian Bureau of Statistics data, which reports 11.3 per cent of Ballarat residents were born overseas, it provides a useful indication that there may be opportunities to further strengthen participation from culturally diverse communities across Council's engagement program.

The Intercultural Plan demonstrated the value of working through trusted community networks and meeting people where they were already gathering. Of the 76 respondents who completed demographic questions, 41 (54 per cent) identified as culturally and linguistically diverse. This was achieved through targeted engagement at cultural events, libraries, playgroups, homework clubs and community organisations, whilst having the support of partnerships with community leaders, multicultural organisations and the Intercultural Advisory Committee.

What did we learn through the collection of demographic data?

Demographic information provides valuable insights into who is participating in City of Ballarat's engagement activities. Across the 2025/26 program, the data demonstrates strengths in reaching intended audiences and engaging a range of priority groups, while also identifying opportunities to strengthen participation among some age groups. Working closely with the Community Inclusion Officer, improvements continued in the inclusiveness of City of Ballarat's engagement programs.

Ballarat Kids Think Tank

In 2024 the Ballarat Kids Think Tank was co-designed with 3 schools and launched as a way of consulting children to understand their perspectives on different projects. In 2025/26, the Ballarat Kids Think Tank continued to provide a creative, age-appropriate engagement model for students in Years 4–6.

It has now grown to include a total of 6 schools in 2026 including Dana Street, Warrenheip, Buninyong, Magpie, Macarthur Street and Canadian Lead Primary Schools

In 2025/2026 the Kids Think Tank contributed to the following engagements:

- Yarrowee River Litter Trap
- Library Collections
- City Oval Master Plan
- Family and Children's Strategy
- Reimagining Llanberris

In 2026 students have also participated in 'Champion Topics' throughout the school term. These activities empower participants to apply what they've learnt at meetings within their own school communities, encouraging broader student involvement and a culture of civic participation.

Advisory Committees

City of Ballarat continued to engage with several advisory committees throughout 2025/26. These committees are formed by community members with lived experience and subject matter expertise, providing valuable insights to support inclusive and informed decision-making.

Active committees in 2025/26 included:

- Ballarat Heritage Advisory Committee
- Disability Advisory Committee
- Intercultural Advisory Committee
- Koorie Engagement Action Group Advisory Committee
- LGBTIQA+ Advisory Committee
- Ballarat Youth Ambassadors
- Social Inclusion Action Group

These committees brought forward diverse perspectives and played a vital role in shaping City of Ballarat's understanding of community needs. Their contributions reflected the Inclusion Framework's commitment to "creating spaces where everyone feels they belong, can contribute, and is heard."

Thirty-six (36) community engagement projects presented to the advisory committees, seeking advice to reach more of the community, support in further distribution of information and direct feedback through lived experiences.

Ballarat Community Panel: A Representative Approach

In 2025, as part of the development of the 2025-2029 Council Plan and Community Vision review, 43 community members were independently selected to reflect Ballarat's population, based on the Australian Bureau of Statistics aligned characteristics such as age, gender and suburb.

In 2025/26, deliberative engagement has been a commitment of the Community Engagement team, maintaining an ongoing relationship with this representative group throughout the life of the Council Plan.

The Community Panel met on two occasions in 2025/26 and had the opportunity to develop a deeper understanding of key projects arising from the Council Plan and remain engaged and informed throughout the journey from Council Plan adoption to project delivery.

In November 2025, the Community Panel were provided with a full 'closing the loop' of the Council Plan 2025-2029, Community Vision 2025-2035 and the budget. The Panel were also instrumental in developing the ongoing composition of the group, including meeting frequency, topics, and governance.

April 2026, the Community Panel reconvened for their first deliberative engagement session. The meeting commenced with the development of a set of Community Panel values, **ARLII**:

Accountability – taking responsibility for our actions, commitments, and impact

Respect – treating each other with dignity, even when we disagree

Listening – giving full attention and valuing what others say, especially lived experiences

Inclusion – making space for all voices, backgrounds, and perspectives

Integrity – acting honestly and aligning words with actions

The Community Panel then discussed two community engagement projects, the Active Ballarat Strategy and the Reimagining Llanberris Reserve project. Both projects were provided with themes, ideas and recommendations that were considered in the analysis of community feedback.

Community Satisfaction Survey

Each year, the City of Ballarat participates in the state-wide Local Government Victoria (LGV) Community Satisfaction Survey (CSS). In 2026 a newly appointed and Government endorsed consultant delivered a refreshed program while maintaining the integrity, comparability and credibility of the survey.

A total of 401 Ballarat residents and ratepayers over 18 years of age were selected and surveyed.

Residents may rate Council based on either direct experience or broader perceptions. Both are valuable, as they help show not only how services are experienced, but also how Council is seen by the wider public.

Consultation and engagement are one of the surveyed areas and benchmarking is provided on the results against other regional councils and a state-wide average.

Under the heading 'Opportunities to give feedback on key local issues', respondents were asked 'How important should this be as a responsibility for Council?' and 'How has Council performed on this over the last 12 months?', respondents rated 58 from a 100-point scale.

This result:

- Is ten (10) points higher than the 2025 result (48)
- Is two (2) points higher than the 2026 result for the regional centre average (56)
- Sits three (3) points higher than the 2026 state-wide average (55)

The 2026 result is one of the highest year-on-year improvements among the governance and engagement services rated. The increase indicates resident perceptions of access to Council have shifted materially over the past year.

While opportunities to give feedback have improved, it remains high-influence and mid-performing in the matrix, with feedback indicating communication and follow-through (closing the loop) are the most frequently raised improvement themes among residents who rated their service contact negatively.

Recommendations from the CSS report:

We recommend Council build on the improvement in opportunities to give feedback by creating more regular two-way communication with residents on the issues that matter most to them. Consultation and engagement are key drivers of overall satisfaction, therefore it is important to maintain this momentum. Clearly showing residents how their feedback is being used will help continue improving perceptions.

The table below shows the community consultation and engagement scores and benchmarking.

Ballarat 2024	Ballarat 2025	Ballarat 2026	Regional Centres 2026	State-wide 2026
48	48	58	56	55

Engagement Highlights

Case Study 1

Let's Chat Ballarat Community Expo

Engagement Type
Face-to-face / City-wide event

When
Thursday 26 & Friday 27 March 2026

Participants
Approximately 600 community members / 28 Council stalls

Purpose
To provide a welcoming opportunity for community members to connect directly with Councillors and staff, learn about Council services and projects, and share ideas and feedback.

Summary
Building on the success of its inaugural year, the 2026 Let's Chat Ballarat Community Expo attracted approximately 600 community members across two half days at Civic Hall, representing a 20 per cent increase in attendance from 2025. The Expo brought together 28 stalls showcasing Council services, projects and programs, creating opportunities for direct, face-to-face conversations between residents, Councillors and staff.

The event featured interactive displays, children's activities, live radio broadcasts, community activations and participation from local schools through their civic participation unit and the attendance of the Ballarat Kids Think Tank program.

A fun inclusion in the 2026 event was the attendance of two of Ballarat's Winter Festival competition winners, Ballarat Hot Chocolate Showdown winners Mondegreen, and Ballarat's Best Pie winners Mrs Browne's Bakes.

Feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with attendees rating their overall experience 4.6 out of 5 and the Expo's contribution to improving Council engagement 8 out of 10. Feedback highlighted the value of speaking directly with Councillors and staff, gaining a better understanding of Council's work, and experiencing a positive and welcoming environment.

The Expo continues to demonstrate Council's commitment to transparent, accessible and community-centred engagement by creating meaningful opportunities for residents to connect with decision-makers and learn more about the services that support Ballarat's growing community.

What we heard

"I wasn't expecting it to be as interactive and fun, I just assumed it was going to be the bare minimum. The vibe was positive and buzzing."

"Made me very proud of the work that goes into our community."

Case Study 2
Disability and Inclusion Access Plan

Engagement Type
City wide consultation with extensive targeted engagement

When
Two periods of engagement between February and July 2026

Participants

- 51 community members attended the targeted community focused in-person or online engagement sessions.
- 44 organisation representatives attended the targeted organisation focused in-person engagement sessions.
- 132 community members participated in open drop-in sessions to programs and networks
- 23 people were engaged through 1-1 bookable discussions with the Community Inclusion Officer
- 8 people posted through the online blog hosted on the MySay page.
- 11 Disability Advisory Committee members were engaged in a targeted engagement session
- 56 people responded to the Mysay survey. The MySay page received 796 visits, 467 unique visitors, and 8 blog contributions.

Purpose
The aim of this engagement was to hear directly from the Ballarat community, including people living with disability and chronic health conditions, carers, and local organisations, about the barriers they experience and the opportunities to improve accessibility over the next four years.

Summary
Engagement for the Disability Access and Inclusion Plan highlighted the experiences of people with disability and carers across Ballarat, identifying transport, access, communication and discrimination as key priorities. The findings provide a strong evidence base for the next Plan, informing practical actions to improve accessibility, inclusion and service delivery, while reinforcing the value of ongoing engagement in creating meaningful community outcomes and a stronger sense of belonging.

Key outcomes included
Data from the Disability Access and Inclusion Plan 2026-2030 engagement process was analysed and grouped into key themes that informed the priority areas actions of the Plan:

- Built Environment and Accessible Design
- Community awareness, rights and safety
- Accessible communication, information and engagement
- Accessible leadership and service delivery
- Accessible economic, cultural and social life

The community engagement was integral in developing these five priority areas and showcases the Council's commitment to its core value of *'working with and for our community'*.

What we heard

"People just stay home because it's too hard"
Community member

"When you make things more accessible, it opens up experience... there's a whole cohort of people who can't follow their dreams."
Community member

Our Commitment to Continuous Improvement

In 2025/26 the City of Ballarat undertook two significant projects with the community and staff to understand how the current community engagement practices are viewed, including the engagement processes, methods, frequency, and topics. The projects also provided insight into what the community thought what successful engagement would look like to them.

These projects were the Community Sentiment Survey which gathered input from over 800+ residents on a variety of Council services, facilities, and programs, and through the Making Your Voice Matter campaign which gathered data from both residents and from staff who plan and undertake engagement.

Many of the themes that arose from community were similar to what we have heard in previous years including;

- community wanting to see impact of engagement on decisions made
- variety of communication channels required to ensure broad reach into community
- variety of engagement methods needed from online to in person to remain accessible

In combination with what we heard through our staff engagement across 11 different teams, we are focusing on four areas of improvement for the 2026/27 financial year. These are;

- Improvement in our communications approach to increase reach and increase transparency on engagement impact
- Build staff capability in planning and delivering successful community engagement projects
- Improve internal governance to ensure clear and meaningful negotiables are included in all engagements
- Continue to identify and incorporate mechanisms to reduce barriers to participation

There are already some changes that have been identified and are either currently implemented, undergoing testing or are preparing to be incorporated into engagements including;

- Increased use of quick polls or single question surveys
- Capture contact data so staff can respond directly to survey respondents
- Build staff capability in survey design and facilitation skills
- Review upcoming changes to the Engagement Institute (formerly International Association for Public Participation (IAP2)) spectrum and adopt accordingly (anticipated end of 2026)
- Explore opportunities to utilise engagements and the MySay page for advocacy projects
- Explore alternative promotion opportunities in our communication of engagements

In the past year we have seen;

- A decrease in the use of consultants, showing an increase in staff capability, which can be attributed to the additional community engagement staff providing a more in-depth level of support and guidance through each community engagement project
- A decrease in ‘hot’ conversations, showing an improvement in planning and risk mitigation
- An increase and improvement of quality in engagement summary reports, improving our transparency to community

Additional contributions to the community engagement process through our previous (2024/25) continuous improvement actions included;

- Updated engagement planning templates and resources
- Community Engagement Team's ability to provide more assistance and expertise in planning and implementing community engagement projects
- Consistent approach to engagement project debriefing and understanding lessons learned

One key commitment that was made last year was to improve our deliberative engagement opportunities. This commitment has been seen through the youth led engagement for the recent Draft Youth Strategy 2027-2030, the continuation of the Ballarat Kids Think Tank and also in the continuation of the Ballarat Community Panel which was formed during the development of the 2025-2029 Council Plan.

Additional resourcing in the engagement team has enabled the management of a consistent and thorough evaluation process. The evaluation on the success and learnings of each project was undertaken through an in-depth interview and self-reflective session with each of the project leads. This process provided an opportunity for the engagement team to identify improvements that could be implemented to the planning and delivery process, enhancing the internal service and providing a better experience for the community.

The table below provides some community engagement projects internal evaluation data for 2025/26:

Questions	Result
How integral/supportive were the engagement team during the implementation?	Averaged 4.6 out of 5
To what extent did we engage with those interested in and directly affected by the project?	21% exceeded their target 57% met their target 7% mostly met their target 14% fell short of their target*
To what extent did the engagement process meet its objectives?	69% met all of their objectives 23% met most of their objectives 7% met some of their objectives

*Project leads are encouraged to set realistic, but ambitious targets in the number of responses and specific cohorts. While not all engagements met those numbers, the targets set allow for the project leads and engagement team to stretch into new audiences.

Appendix

Project Name	Open	MySay Page Views	Method of Engagement	Number of contributions
Active Ballarat Developing a strategy to guide active lifestyles and participation. Phase one of the Strategy.	Phase 1: 6 March 2026 – 5 April 2026 Phase 2: 7 July 2026 - 5 August 2026	1,700 views	Age Friendly Ambassador Meeting Briefings – presentations City of Ballarat Community Panel Expo - Begonia Festival Interviews - State Sport Associations Let's Chat Expo MySay Postcards Social media Stakeholder meetings Survey Website Workshop	153 survey responses 253 total contributions
Age Friendly Ballarat Understanding the needs, priorities, and experiences of older people to create a more age-friendly Ballarat.	Wednesday 1 October 2025 – Friday 14 November 2025	2,734 views	Activity feedback form Advisory committee/ Ambassador presentations Ageing Well Strategy Staff Survey In person visit to groups Letters Newsletters Printed surveys Seniors Festival Event attendance Social media	619 survey responses 2,497 total contributions
Ageing Well in Ballarat Strategy Developing a strategy and action plan to create a more age-friendly Ballarat.	Friday 27 March 2026 – Thursday 23 June 2026	1,731 views	Advertising Activity feedback form Advisory committee/ Ambassador presentations Ageing Well Strategy Staff Survey Ballarat Ageing Well Expo Briefings – presentations Community survey In person visit to groups Let's Chat Expo Letters Media releases Newsletters One quick question response Printed surveys Radio Seniors Festival Event attendance Social media Website Workshop	242 survey responses 813 total contributions

Project Name	Open	MySay Page Views	Method of Engagement	Number of contributions
Binney Reserve - Planning for Future Growth - Phase One Consultation Developing a Precinct Plan informed by current and future use and community priorities.	Tuesday 5 May 2026 – Sunday 31 May 2026	1,434 views	Advertising In person pop up Interviews /phone conversations Letters Media releases Newsletters Project working group meetings Radio Social media Submissions Survey	58 survey responses 101 total contributions and 3 organisation submissions
Burrumbeet Creek Flood Investigation Gathering local knowledge to support the Burrumbeet Creek Flood Investigation.	Thursday 12 February 2026 – ongoing engagement	934 views	Blog posts In person pop up Let's Chat Councillor Roadshow Let's Chat Expo Map Media releases MySay Newsletter Photos Radio Social media	23 Survey responses 27 total contributions
Draft Corporate Emissions Plan 2026-2029 Developing a policy to guide Council's carbon emissions reduction.	Wednesday 1 April 2026 – Wednesday 29 April 2026	162 views	Briefings – presentations Fairs and Festivals (Begonia, SpringFest) Focus Groups Let's Chat Expo MySay Newsletter Newsletters Radio Social media Submissions Survey	6 survey responses 26 total contributions
City of Ballarat Budget 2026-2027 Reviewing community priorities to inform the 2026/27 Budget.	Thursday 2 October 2025 – Friday 31 October 2025	955 views	City of Ballarat Community Panel In person pop up Media releases MySay Newsletter Radio Social media Survey Workshop	82 survey responses 135 total contributions

Project Name	Open	MySay Page Views	Method of Engagement	Number of contributions
City Oval Precinct Masterplan Understanding current use and community aspirations to develop a 10-year Masterplan.	Tuesday 18 November 2025 – Sunday 14 December 2025	2,401 views	Advertising Advisory committee presentations Ballarat Kids Think Tank City of Ballarat Community Panel In person pop up Letter drop Media releases MySay Newsletter Newsletters Radio Signage Social media Spring fest Stakeholder meetings Submissions Survey Website Workshop	155 Individual survey responses, 15 Group submissions 202 total contributions
Colquhoun Lane - Commemorative Naming for a lane at Barkly Square Seeking community views on a proposal to commemorate Amalie Colquhoun through place naming for a lane at Barkly Square.	Friday 5 September 2025 – Monday 6 October 2025	373 views	In person pop up Letters MySay Newsletter Radio Social media Submissions Survey	33 survey responses 40 total contributions
Community Local Law Review 2026 Understanding community and business priorities to develop a Community Local Law that remains relevant, easy to understand and supports Ballarat over the next 10 years.	Tuesday 19 May 2026 – Monday 29 June 2026	3,021 views	Advisory committee presentations Briefings – presentations Community Events External Email Notifications External Stakeholder Meetings Face-to-face participants In person drop in Media releases MySay Newsletters Postcards Posters Radio Social media Submissions Survey Website Workshop	340 survey responses 2,563 total contributions
Creative Sector and Services Survey Understanding the needs and priorities of Ballarat's Creative sector to inform future planning and support.	Wednesday 10 September 2025 - Tuesday 30 September 2025	588 views	Media releases MySay Newsletter Newsletters Radio Social media Survey Webinars Workshop	94 survey responses 123 total contributions

Project Name	Open	MySay Page Views	Method of Engagement	Number of contributions
De Soza Park Seeking feedback on concept designs for new public toilets at De Soza Park.	Thursday 26 March 2026 - Thursday 23 April 2026	555 views	Advisory committee presentations In person pop up Let's Chat Expo Media releases MySay Newsletter Newsletters Radio Social media Submissions Survey Webinars Website	54 Survey Responses 193 total contributions
Disability Access & Inclusion Plan Understanding the experiences and priorities of people with disability to develop the Disability Access and Inclusion Plan 2026–2030.	Phase 1: Monday 16 February 2026 - Sunday 22 March 2026 Phase 2: Monday 1 June - Wednesday 1 July 2026	1,007 views	Advertising Advisory committee presentations Ground decal feedback In person pop up Let's Chat Expo Media releases MySay Newsletter Newsletters Radio Social media Story telling Submissions Survey Tours Video Voting Webinars	52 Survey Responses 325 total contributions + 54 organisations
Domestic Animal Management Plan Understanding community priorities to develop the Domestic Animal Management Plan 2026–2029	Phase 1: Wednesday 27 August 2025 - Friday 26 September 2025 Phase 2: Wednesday 1 October 2025 - Wednesday 29 October 2025	1,848 views	Advertising Advisory committee presentations In person pop up Let's Chat Expo Media releases MySay Newsletter Newsletters Radio Social media Survey Website	367 survey responses 500 total contributions
Draft Financial Plan, Asset Plan and Health and Wellbeing Plan Seeking feedback on the draft Financial Plan, Asset Plan and Health and Wellbeing Plan following extensive community engagement and deliberative engagement in Phase 1.	Wednesday 6 August 2025 - Thursday 28 August 2025	198 views	Media releases MySay Newsletter Radio Social media Survey	6 survey responses 10 total contributions

Project Name	Open	MySay Page Views	Method of Engagement	Number of contributions
Draft Onsite Wastewater Management Plan Developing a plan to protect public health and the environment through effective onsite wastewater management.	Monday 1 September 2025 - Tuesday 30 September 2025	1,049 views	Advertising Emails Letters Media releases MySay Newsletter Newsletters Social media Stakeholder meetings Submissions Survey	297 online survey responses 288 total contributions
Draft Reconciliation Action Plan 2025 – 2027 Developing a Reconciliation Action Plan to guide Council's reconciliation commitments under the Reconciliation Australia framework.	Monday 15 September 2025 - Friday 6 October 2025	1,148 views	Advertising Advisory committee presentations In person pop up Media releases MySay Newsletter Newsletters Radio Social media Stakeholder meetings Story telling Submissions Survey Workshop	191 survey responses
Eureka Hall Upgrade Refining upgrade plans to improve the accessibility, functionality and community use of Eureka Hall.	Monday 1 June 2026 – Tuesday 30 June 2026	1,122 views	Advertising Advisory committee emails Eureka Stockade Memorial Park Committee In person pop up Let's Chat Councillor Roadshow Media releases MySay Newsletter Social media Stakeholder meetings Submissions Survey	75 survey responses 113 total contributions
Family and Children's Strategy Developing a strategy to guide services, programs and spaces for children and families.	Friday 30 January 2026 – Monday 30 March 2026	1,152 views	Advisory committee presentations Ballarat Kids Think Tank In person pop up Let's Chat Expo Media releases MySay Newsletter Newsletters Radio Social media Stakeholder meetings	102 survey responses 576 total contributions
Financial Hardship Policy Updating the policy to provide fair and consistent financial hardship support.	Friday 22 May 2026 – Sunday 14 June 2026	123 views	Direct engagement with service providers Media releases MySay Newsletter Social media Stakeholder meetings Survey	5 survey responses 8 total contributions

Project Name	Open	MySay Page Views	Method of Engagement	Number of contributions
Forest Street Active Transport Corridor Shared updated concept designs and outlined changes made in response to previous community feedback.	March 2026	142 views	Let's Chat Expo Let's Chat Councillor Roadshow Stakeholder meetings Submissions Website	0 survey responses (inform only engagement) 90 total contributions
Four Bin Service Review Understanding community experiences following the introduction of the new kerbside waste service.	Tuesday 24 March 2026 – October 2026	4,245 views	Advertising Advisory committee presentations E-Newsletters (Sustainability Ballarat) Let's Chat Expo Media releases MySay Newsletter Radio Social media Survey	1,358 survey responses 1,519 total contributions
Gambling Harm Prevention Policy A two-stage engagement to understand the community attitudes towards gambling and seek feedback on the draft Gambling Harm Prevention Policy.	Phase 1: Monday 22 September 2025 – 9 November 2025 Phase 2: Friday 17 April 2026 – Monday 18 May 2026	1,948 views	Advertising Advisory committee presentations Gambling Harm Prevention Taskforce In person pop up Media releases MySay Newsletter Newsletters Radio Social media Stakeholder meetings Survey Workshop	364 survey responses 383 total contributions
Heritage Gaps Study An extended community engagement to gather local knowledge and identify places of potential heritage significance across Ballarat.	Monday 8 November 2024 - Wednesday 1 April 2026	2,340 views	Advisory committee presentations App - Snap Send Solve Heritage Newsletters Let's Chat Expo Mail drop Media releases MySay Newsletter Nominations Phone calls Radio Social media Survey Targeted workshops	118 survey responses 272 total contributions
Intercultural Plan Engagement Understanding community priorities to shape the next Intercultural Plan.	Phase 1: Monday 15 June 2026 – Friday 26 July 2026	1,478 views	Advisory committee presentations Community events In person pop up Media releases MySay Newsletter Newsletters Radio Social media Stakeholder meetings Survey Workshop	124 survey responses 397 total contributions

Project Name	Open	MySay Page Views	Method of Engagement	Number of contributions
Lake Wendouree Public Toilets Understanding community priorities for the location and design of new public toilet facilities at Lake Wendouree.	Monday 20 October 2025 – Sunday 30 November 2025	920 views	Advisory committee presentations In person pop up Let's Chat Expo Media releases MySay Newsletter Radio Social media Stakeholder meetings Survey Voting	482 survey responses 2,267 total contributions
Len T Frazer Reserve - Ballarat City Skatepark Understanding community needs to guide the future upgrade of Len T. Frazer Reserve and the Ballarat City Skatepark.	Tuesday 2 December 2025 – Tuesday 23 December 2025	1,163 views	Advertising In person pop up Media releases MySay Newsletter Radio Social media Stakeholder meetings	93 survey responses
LGBTQIA+ Inclusion Plan Developing an Inclusion Plan informed by the experiences of LGBTQIA+ people and allies.	Phase 1: Monday 1 June 2026 – Tuesday 30 June 2026	767 views	Advisory committee presentations Customer Service promotion Hardcopy surveys In person drop ins In person pop up Media releases MySay Newsletter Newsletters Newspaper interviews Posters and fliers Radio interviews Social media Stakeholder meetings Story telling Submissions Survey Webinars Website Workshop	331 survey responses 458 total contributions
Llanberris Reserve Understanding how the community uses Llanberris Reserve to guide its future.	Thursday 16 April 2026 – Thursday 28 May 2026	3,459 views	Advertising Advisory committee presentations Ballarat Kids Think Tank City of Ballarat Community Panel Expo In person pop up Let's Chat Expo Letter drop Media releases MySay Newsletter Newsletters Radio Social media Submissions Survey Tours Virtual site tour (Matterport) Workshop	361 survey responses, 11 Expression of Interest responses 882 total contributions

Project Name	Open	MySay Page Views	Method of Engagement	Number of contributions
Local Activity Centre engagement Understanding community needs to guide future improvements to Carpenter Street and Harold Street activity centres.	Tuesday 28 October 2025 – Sunday 30 November 2025	1,363 views	In person pop up MySay Newsletter Social media Survey	56 survey responses 141 total contributions
Lydiard Street Heritage Precinct Review Reviewing heritage controls to protect the character of the Lydiard Street Heritage Precinct. (part of a larger project -Ballarat Pilot Heritage Study)	Tuesday 6 January 2026 - 6 February 2026	325 views	Advertising Letters Stakeholders Submissions	Survey responses N/A 21 total contributions
Making Your Voice Matter Run annually from 2024 , this engagement seeks community feedback on preferred communication and engagement methods to inform improvements to Council's future community engagement practices.	Friday 6 March 2026 - Tuesday 7 April 2026	746 views	Advertising Advisory committee presentations City of Ballarat Community Panel Let's Chat Expo Media releases MySay Newsletter Radio Social media Survey	46 survey responses 112 total contributions
Naming City of Ballarat Parks Phase one of inviting the community to suggest names for unnamed parks.	Friday 20 March 2026 - Friday 15 May 2026	689 views	Let's Chat Expo Media releases MySay Newsletter Radio Social media Survey	31 survey responses 42 total contributions
Naming Proposal for an unnamed lane off Errard Street South Seeking community views on a proposed name for an unnamed laneway.	Monday 14 July 2025 - Friday 15 August 2025	260 views	Media releases MySay Newsletter Radio Social media Survey	25 survey responses 30 total contributions
Planning Scheme Amendment C234 Ballarat West PSP and DCP Review Planning future housing, infrastructure and open space between Alfredton and Cardigan Village.	Thursday 3 July 2025 - Monday 4 August 2025	4,261 views	Advertising Council website Letters MySay News (Ballarat Times) Notice published in Government Gazette Public notices and posters displayed in DTC, Djila-tjarriu Community Hub and Lucas Community Hub Social media	22 submissions received 85 total contributions
Roam Discovery Trail Exploring community support for an augmented reality experience celebrating Ballarat's history on Lydiard Street.	Monday 2 February 2026 - Friday 27 February 2026	357 views	Advertising Advisory committee presentations Face-to-face stakeholder meetings In person pop up Letter Drop - Lydiard Businesses Media releases MySay Newsletter Newsletters Radio Social media Submissions Survey Walking tours	23 survey responses 173 total contributions

Project Name	Open	MySay Page Views	Method of Engagement	Number of contributions
Safer Ballarat Understanding how safe and unsafe community members feel in specific public places across Ballarat to inform future safety projects and initiatives	Wednesday 1 October 2025 – ongoing engagement	4,490 views	Advertising Advisory committee presentations Ageing Well Expo Ground decal feedback In person pop up Let's Chat Expo Media releases MySay Newsletter Newsletters Radio Social media Survey	1,183 survey responses 1,200 total contributions
Sally McLean Netball Courts Seeking community views on a proposed commemorative name for the CE Brown Reserve netball courts.	Thursday 30 October 2025 – Monday 1 December 2025	582 views	Advertising Media releases MySay Newsletter Newsletters Radio Social media Submissions Survey	45 survey responses 50 total contributions
Shared Micromobility (e-scooter and e-bike) Review Understanding community experiences to inform the future of shared e-scooters and e-bikes in Ballarat.	Wednesday 30 July 2025 - Monday 25 August 2025	2,646 views	Advisory committee presentations In person pop up Media releases MySay Newsletter Radio Social media Submissions Survey Workshops	436 survey responses 481 total contributions
Surplus Council Land Seeking community input on the future use of identified surplus Council land.	Thursday 14 May 2026 – Monday 15 of June 2026	1,959 views	Media releases MySay Newsletter Radio Social media Submissions Survey	138 survey responses 145 total contributions
The Future of the Ballarat CBD Understanding community priorities to guide the future of the Ballarat CBD.	Friday 5 June 2026 – Friday 10 July 2026	1,333 views	Advisory committee presentations In person pop up Media releases MySay Newsletter Radio Social media Stakeholder Presentations Submissions Survey Virtual site tour (Matterport) Walking tours	307 survey responses 538 total contributions
Vickers Street Community Hub naming proposal Seeking community input on the proposed name for the kindergarten and community hub.	Friday 8 August 2025 – Monday 8 September 2025	305 views	Advertising Media releases MySay Newsletter Radio Social media Survey	14 survey responses 18 total contributions

Project Name	Open	MySay Page Views	Method of Engagement	Number of contributions
Victoria Park Inclusive Play space Understanding community experiences to improve the park and the Sensory Friendly Stay and Play Zone.	Tuesday 23 December 2025 – Monday 9 February 2026	712 views	Advertising Advisory committee presentations Ground decal feedback In person pop up Media releases MySay Newsletter Newsletters Radio Social media Story telling Submissions Survey	82 survey responses 100 total contributions
Victorian Goldfields World Heritage Bid Gathering community stories and local knowledge to support the Victorian Goldfields World Heritage nomination.	Wednesday 15 April 2026 – ongoing engagement	243 views	Advertising Advisory committee presentations Let's Chat Expo Media releases MySay Newsletter Newsletters Radio Social media Survey Video	39 survey responses 1,000 total contributions
Youth Strategy Understanding the experiences, needs and aspirations of young people to develop a Youth Strategy.	Monday 2 March 2026 – Sunday 31 May 2026	2,866 views	Advertising Advisory committee presentations Begonia Festival Fed Uni Orientation program Focus groups In person workshops (internal and external) Let's Chat Expo Media releases MySay Newsletter Newsletters Peer-peer discussions Postcard/ QR code distribution School SRC meetings School swimming carnival Service club presentations Social media Story telling Survey Voting activities Youth Network meetings	331 survey responses

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