



Policy Title:	Community Engagement Policy	
Date of Adoption:		
Adoption Method:	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Council <input type="checkbox"/> CEO <input type="checkbox"/> Other <i>(please specify)</i>	
CEO Signature:		Date:
Responsible Officer and Unit:	Interim Executive Manager – People, Culture and Performance	
Nominated Review Period:	<input type="checkbox"/> Annually <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other <i>(please specify)</i> Every four years	
Last Review Date:		
Next Review Date:		
Purpose/Objective:	<p>Community engagement is the process by which Council gathers information to make decisions that impact the community. Council is committed to meaningful community engagement and recognises the important role that it plays in democratic governance and civic life.</p> <p>This policy outlines Council’s commitment to engage with the Macedon Ranges community when there is a decision to be made by Council. It outlines the purpose, principles and responsibilities of Council as required under the Victorian Local Government Act 2020 (see Appendix 1).</p> <p>This policy ensures that Macedon Ranges Shire Council staff, Councillors, contractors and volunteers understand the purpose, principles and responsibilities that guide Council’s community engagement. It also serves as a guide for external organisations delivering infrastructure and services in Macedon Ranges.</p> <p>This policy outlines what community members (including but not restricted to: residents, constituents, rate payers and absent ratepayers and visitors), can reasonably expect from Council’s community engagement processes.</p> <p>Internal policy for our day-to-day practices is provided to all Macedon Ranges staff in the Community Engagement Guidelines.</p>	
Scope	This Policy guides Macedon Ranges Shire Council community engagement with its stakeholders and community. Well planned and genuine community engagement is an essential element of a good governance process. It is at the heart of Council’s commitment to listen to community and engage with them as appropriate in the decision-making process.	

	This Policy provides a statement of Council's commitment to deliver one of the overarching Council decision-making principles in line with the <i>Local Government Act 2020</i> .
Background/Reasons for Policy:	This policy ensures that Council meets the community engagement requirements as outlined in the Victorian Local Government Act 2020 and provides a good practice approach to community engagement planning and delivery.
Definitions:	Refer Appendix 2
References:	<p>This policy is informed by a range of external research and best practice standards, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Public Participation in Government Decision Making - Victorian Auditor General's Office - better practice guide ● International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) Quality assurance standards - Core Values, Practitioners Code of Ethics and the IAP2 Spectrum of Engagement ● Co-design Community Engagement, Victorian Government
Related Policies:	<p>Governance Rules Part II Statement Councillor Code of Conduct Staff Code of Conduct Complaints Handling Policy Live Streaming and Publishing Recordings of Meetings Policy Public Transparency Policy Privacy Policy Procurement Policy</p>
Related Legislation:	<p>Local Government Act 2020 (Vic) Local Government Act 1989 (Vic) Freedom of Information Act 1982 (Vic) Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014 (Vic) Health Records Act 2001 (Vic) Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (Vic) Equal Opportunity Act 2010 (Vic) Public Records Act 1973 (Vic) Privacy Act 1988 (Cth) Copyright Act 1968 (Cth) Other relevant legislative instruments</p>

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 1 OBJECTIVES 4
- 2. POLICY STATEMENT 4
- 3. ALIGNMENT WITH COUNCIL PLAN..... 4
- 4. THE POLICY 4
- 5. THE PURPOSE OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT 4
- 6. OUR PROMISE TO THE COMMUNITY..... 5
- 7. LGA 2020 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PRINCIPLES..... 5
- 8. WHEN WE ENGAGE 6
- 9. WHEN WE MAY CHOOSE NOT TO ENGAGE 7
- 10. HOW WE ENGAGE 8
- 11. WHO WE ENGAGE WITH - UNDERSTANDING OUR COMMUNITY 9
- 12. THE DIVERSITY OF OUR POPULATION..... 9
- 13. MAKING A DECISION10
- 14. PRIVACY10
- APPENDIX 1: LEGISLATIVE REQUIREMENT.....11
- APPENDIX 2: DEFINITIONS12
- APPENDIX 3: LEVELS OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION.....14
- APPENDIX 4: STATUTORY CONSULTATION15
- APPENDIX 5: ENGAGEMENT CATERGORIES 17

1 OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this Policy are to:

- 1.1 achieve compliance with relevant legislative requirements
- 1.2 facilitate public awareness of Council commitment to meaningful community engagement
- 1.3 ensure achievements of appropriate standards of integrity, transparency and accountability in Council's community engagement processes
- 1.4 lead, promote and advocate public participation in Council's decision-making processes
- 1.5 lead and support a culture of continuous improvement in the way that Council increases openness and transparency with the community and the public at large.

2. POLICY STATEMENT

Council will develop and maintain this Policy in consultation with the community.

3. ALIGNMENT WITH COUNCIL PLAN

Our community engagement policy and guidelines aim to align with, inform, enhance and give effect to, the Council Plan.

4. THE POLICY

This Policy has been developed in consultation with the Macedon Ranges Shire community and stakeholders between October and December 2020. The draft policy was informed by a six-month engagement process undertaken in 2019 to develop the Macedon Ranges Shire Council Community Engagement Framework. The draft policy was also informed by the Victorian Government's Engage Vic good practice examples.

5. THE PURPOSE OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Good democratic governance occurs when a government informs and engages the community in the planning and delivery of services and activities.

Quality community engagement between Council and its community can also build resilience, trust and a sense of united purpose. Engaged citizens will be more informed and have greater capacity to problem solve and work collaboratively with one another and with Council.

Community engagement is a process of informed, two-way communication between Council and the community on an issue prior to a decision being made.

- It recognises that Council has the mandate to be the decision-maker unless otherwise determined by Council

- It aims to recognise and communicate the needs and interests of all interested and impacted stakeholders including Council
- Depending on the legislative requirement or issue, Council may undertake a deliberative form of engagement.

6. OUR PROMISE TO THE COMMUNITY

The principles below articulate our community engagement promise. They are guided by our organisational values and our commitment to working for, and in partnership with our community.

The principles have been informed by community feedback received in 2019 during the development of Council's Community Consultation Framework.

They are also informed by best-practice community engagement frameworks including the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) Core Values for the Practice of Public Participation and Spectrum of Engagement, the Victorian Auditor General's Office (VAGO) Public Participation Principles and the principles outlined in the Victorian Local Government Act 2020 (LGA 2020).

7. LGA 2020 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PRINCIPLES

1. a community engagement process must have a clearly defined objective and scope;
2. participants in community engagement must have access to objective, relevant and timely information to inform their participation;
3. participants in community engagement must be representative of the persons and groups affected by the matter that is the subject of the community engagement;
4. participants in community engagement are entitled to reasonable support to enable meaningful and informed engagement;
5. participants in community engagement are informed of the ways in which the community engagement process will influence Council decision making.

Table 1 - how we will give effect to the LGA 2020 community engagement principles

Principle	Action
1. a community engagement process must have a clearly defined objective and scope	a) Each community engagement activity will be supported by a community engagement plan
2. participants in community engagement must have access to objective, relevant and timely information to inform their participation	a) Each community engagement activity will run for a period of at least 28 days, unless otherwise specified by Council.

	b) Each community engagement activity will have an identified stakeholder assessment
3. Participants in community engagement must be representative of the persons and groups affected by the matter that is the subject of the community engagement	a) Each community engagement activity will be accompanied by a communications plan that guides how supporting information will be provided in a range of appropriate formats
4. participants in community engagement are entitled to reasonable support to enable meaningful and informed engagement	a) Each community engagement activity will consider the accessibility and participation needs of stakeholders
5. participants in community engagement are informed of the ways in which the community engagement process will influence Council decision making	a) Community engagement activity outcomes (including how the engagement informed the final decision), will be reported to the community in a variety of appropriate formats

8. WHEN WE ENGAGE

Community engagement is conducted for a specific purpose that has been identified by Council when it is required to make a decision, or to advocate on behalf of the community.

In determining the need for engagement, Council considers the intended outcomes and benefits that will be derived from the engagement, what resources will be required and how the information gathered will support and influence Council's decision making.

8.1 Deliberative engagement

Deliberative engagement methods will be used where required under the LGA 2020. Deliberative engagement methods may be considered, where appropriate, for other community engagement opportunities.

Deliberative engagement **must apply** to the following:

- The development of the Community Vision
- The development of the Council Plan
- The development of the Financial Plan
- The development of the Asset Plan

Council will design and deliver an appropriate deliberative engagement strategy to seek community input into the above¹.

The principles that Council will apply to its deliberative engagement methods are:

- **Representative**
 - We will engage a representative sample of Macedon Ranges Shire community.
- **Deliberative**
 - We will provide adequate time and opportunities for dialogue and deliberation.
- **Influence**
 - We will give full, fair and thorough consideration to the outputs of the deliberative process.

IAP2-recognised deliberative engagement methods may include citizen's juries/people's panels, deliberative polls, steering committees, planning cells, consensus forums, co-design process, world cafés, negotiation tables, online consultations, policy roundtables, search conferences and formal and informal partnerships. All of these techniques will be subject to requirements such as timelines and resourcing.

The Community Engagement Guidelines for staff outline the detail on how to develop a deliberative community engagement process.

8.2 Statutory engagement

This policy **does apply** to other relevant decision-making processes. However, the LGA 2020 does not require a deliberative engagement approach must be undertaken on any of the issues in Appendix 4. Council may choose to use a deliberative engagement approach following an assessment of engagement requirements based upon the complexity of the issue, the community impact and interest in the issue, and the available Council budget and resources allocated for the engagement (Attachment 5).

For specific issues requiring statutory consultation and planning scheme amendments, see Appendix 4.

8.3 Other engagement

Council may also undertake community engagement on a variety of issues that are not specified in the LGA 2020 or any other legislation. The decision to engage is based upon an assessment of the need for engagement. This may include:

- Development of strategies that guide future decision-making and service delivery.
- How Council allocates resources to services and projects through its annual budget
- New or revised policies
- Changes to service delivery, including discontinuing or altering a service, and identifying new opportunities or areas for improvement.
- Infrastructure projects, including construction, alteration or closure of buildings and facilities.
- Any other projects that significantly impact on the environment.

9. WHEN WE MAY CHOOSE NOT TO ENGAGE

There may also be occasions when Council is not required to engage on a matter due to circumstances beyond its control, such as State Government statutory requirements, and funding or policy requirements of other levels of government. In this case Council may still

decide it is appropriate to engage community to seek out their view so that they can advocate to other levels of Government on their behalf.

When there is no genuine opportunity for the community to influence particular decisions, it may not be appropriate to conduct community engagement. In this case Council may still decide it is appropriate to inform the community of the decision.

10. HOW WE ENGAGE

Council will determine the method for each community engagement topic and activity based on a number of factors including:

- The level of community interest in the issue
- The level of impact on the community of the issue
- The complexity of the issue
- The location and timing of the issue
- The resources available to undertake the engagement

A thorough assessment of the topic and the issues, including a stakeholder analysis, will be undertaken as part of determining the scope of the community engagement.

10.1 Single stage community engagement


For low to medium public impact issues, or for highly technical documents where specialised knowledge is required, a single stage community engagement process may be appropriate. For details on how to determine the impact of an issue, see Levels of Participation in Appendix 3.

10.2 Two stage community engagement

Resource and timeframe-permitting, for medium to high public impact issues Council will use a two-stage community engagement process before making a decision:

- 10.2.1 Pre-position forming engagement (to seek input from the community before forming a preferred position)
- 10.2.2 Post-position forming engagement (to test the preferred position before making a final decision). Two-stage engagement requires more resources and a greater lead-time, so this will need to be factored into planning.

The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) Spectrum is one of the tools used to identify the need for, and level of engagement required.

INCREASING IMPACT ON THE DECISION 					
	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GOAL	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision making in the hands of the public.
PROMISE TO THE PUBLIC	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision. We will 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.

© IAP2 International Federation 2014. All rights reserved.

Deliberative engagement sits within the collaborative – empower pillars of the IAP2 Spectrum.

11. WHO WE ENGAGE WITH - UNDERSTANDING OUR COMMUNITY

We make better decisions when we fully understand the needs, priorities and concerns of individuals and groups within our community. When we are planning to make a decision, we first identify the people and groups likely to be affected, and we reach out to involve them in the process.

We recognise that some groups face barriers to engaging with us and we commit to using methods that enable and encourage their participation. Identifying who is impacted or interested in a decision, best methods of outreach and any barriers to participation are guided by a stakeholder identification process.

12. THE DIVERSITY OF OUR POPULATION

We understand that some of our decisions affect the entire community while other decisions affect some people more than others. It is our objective to identify and engage directly with the most impacted, including those who face barriers to participation.

Sustainable decision making is also achieved when we involve relevant service providers, decision makers and funding bodies who might be external to Council. This may involve seeking their input prior to community engagement to understand the issues and parameters of a decision, or to facilitate conversation between various community stakeholders and other levels of government or to inform those organisations.

Table 2 – examples of our stakeholder groups

Aboriginal and Torres Strait	LGBTQI community	Children and young people
------------------------------	------------------	---------------------------

Islander people		
Young parents	Cyclists (both professional and leisure)	Students
Visitors	Older people	Town based groups
People with disabilities	Heritage and history groups	Culturally and linguistically diverse groups
People working in specific professions or industries	Families	Ratepayers (resident and non-residents)
Sports and recreation clubs	People experiencing financial hardship	Park and or trail users
Traditional owners	Small businesses	Tourism providers

12.1 Council committees and stakeholder groups

Council may also choose to seek input from, and the assistance of its Advisory Committees and external stakeholder groups in its engagement activities.

13. MAKING A DECISION

Following planned community engagement activities, Council will:

- analyse the feedback received
- consider the feedback in the context of the other data, advice, strategies and/or legislation that is relevant to this matter;
- review the proposal in the context of concerns or suggestions expressed.

Council commits to respect the diverse range of interests and views which may exist on a particular issue and make genuine attempts to resolve conflicts, while recognising that unless otherwise agreed, it has the ultimate decision-making role.

Where appropriate a report will be presented to Council for a decision.

Engagement participants who have opted in for project updates should be notified of the report going to Council prior to the meeting taking place.

The decision will be communicated to all stakeholders involved in the community engagement and the broader community through a variety of appropriate channels.

14. PRIVACY

Local government decision-making and community engagement processes usually affect both public and private interests. In many instances, Council will seek written submissions and input to proposals. These public processes imply a certain amount of public disclosure of information and therefore a degree of privacy loss. Refer to the Privacy Policy for further details.

APPENDIX 1: LEGISLATIVE REQUIREMENT

Section 55 of the *Local Government Act 2020* (Vic) ('Act') requires a Council to adopt and maintain a community engagement policy.

A community engagement policy must:

- be developed in consultation with the municipal community; and
- give effect to the community engagement principles; and
- be capable of being applied to the making of the Council's local laws; and
- be capable of being applied in relation to the Council's budget and policy development; and
- describe the type and form of community engagement proposed, having regard to the significance and complexity of the matter and the level of resourcing required; and
- specify a process for informing the municipal community of the outcome of the community engagement; and
- include deliberative engagement practices which must include and address any matters prescribed by the regulations for the purposes of this paragraph and be capable of being applied to the development of the Community Vision, Council Plan, Financial Plan and Asset Plan and
- include any other matters prescribed by the regulations.

APPENDIX 2: DEFINITIONS

Community engagement - involving those affected by or interested in a decision in the decision-making process.

Community - Can refer to the Macedon Ranges Shire community as a whole or:

- community of place (based on geographic location e.g. the Gisborne community)
- community of practice (based on common interests and activities e.g. the bike riding or gardening community)
- community of identity (based on an individual's shared perspective e.g. Aboriginal heritage, language speakers, residents of public housing, particular age groups or a religious community)

Stakeholders - Sections of the community involved in engagement because of impact, interest or responsibility to deliver on an outcome. Can also refer to external organisations, and other levels of government involved in a decision. Always includes internal decision makers and implementers of decision outcomes.

Tools and methods - Refers to the many types of engagement that can be employed such as online or in person, public meetings and community panels, surveys, ideas boards, public competitions or deliberative budgeting for example.

Engagement approach - The design/plan that ensures appropriate timing, resources, tools and methods according to a considered analysis of those affected, impacted or interested and the scope and remit of any engagement project.

Co-design - A partnership with community to come to an agreed model or design of service delivery or public infrastructure. Can also refer to the co-design of the engagement process itself to ensure it is fully transparent and works for all parties.

Representative community panel - Can be used to deliver a range of engagement types from world café's, in person and/or online advisory groups through to complex deliberative processes. Panels can provide a representative sample of the population (to acceptable industry standards) of Macedon Ranges and can be appropriate for whole of Council area decisions with wide reaching impact. Panels can also provide representative samples for niche decisions impacting particular groups of the Macedon Ranges community but still require appropriate support, time and information.

Deliberative processes and/or citizens juries - Usually convened for more complex, long term and high impact issues, where perspectives are likely to differ and/or where the issue is high impact on sections of the community. Can take different forms but best practice always involves:

- a representative sample of the population or group who are impacted
- a clear scope and remit that often asks for an agreed compromise of interests and outcomes, agreed priorities or consensus on a vision and direction
- provision of timely, objective and independently sourced/verified information
- sufficient time
- support to participate (including independent facilitation, reimbursement for time, hardships and expenses incurred)
- a commitment to participants on the level of influence their recommendation or decision holds

Deliberative elements - Used where time and resources required of a full deliberative

exercise is incompatible with the level of impact a decision entails, but the impact is sufficiently high or the decision is sufficiently complex to still warrant an extra level of transparency, meaningfulness and representation. Examples of elements of deliberative practice include:

- Inviting a representative sample of those impacted by a decision in to a one-off workshop in order to hear the range of perspectives and share more detailed information (this would usually happen after a broader community consultation so the full range of perspectives and issues requiring compromise are fully understood)
- Inviting the community to consider the trade-offs involved in decision by presenting options, choices or a budget framework
- Offering information sessions and accessible explanations of the project scope where issues are complex or dependent on other factors
- Inviting key stakeholders or a sample of those highly impacted to co-design the engagement process to ensure it reaches out to the right groups and is fully representative.

DRAFT

APPENDIX 3: LEVELS OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Council will determine the level of participation for each consultation activity based on the timeframes, available resources, expected level of public impact, and expected level of community interest in the issue.

<p>Inform: low level of public impact</p>	<p>Provides information to the community with balanced and objective information to assist them in their understanding of a problem, alternatives, opportunities and possible solutions. Most appropriate when the activity is routine in nature, and affects a limited number of people in a limited way.</p>
<p>Consult: low to medium level of public impact</p>	<p>Obtains feedback from the community on analysis, alternatives and decisions. Usually involves developing a preliminary or preferred position before releasing it for community input. Most appropriate for projects which affect larger numbers of people but in a limited way. Methods may include community information sessions, surveys and email or written submissions.</p>
<p>Involve: medium level of public impact</p>	<p>Works directly with the community to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered throughout a process. This may involve the community in various stages of the project in seeking specific answers to issues as opposed to broad general feedback sessions. Methods may include focus groups, workshops, advisory committees and online consultations.</p>
<p>Collaborate: medium to high level of public impact</p>	<p>Partners with the community in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution. Community collaboration may be fostered through deliberative engagement such as steering committees, planning cells, consensus forums, 21st century dialogue/town meetings, Co-Design Process, Deliberative Polls, World café, negotiation tables, online consultations, policy roundtables, citizen panels, search conferences and formal and informal partnerships.</p>
<p>Empower: high level of public impact</p>	<p>May use similar methods for lower levels of participation, but instead of Council making the final decision, decision-making is placed in the hands of the community.</p>

Adapted from the International Association for Public Participation’s Public Participation Spectrum

APPENDIX 4: STATUTORY CONSULTATION

While the community engagement processes used for the matters below will vary according to the complexity of the particular issue, each process used will include consideration of any submissions received as part of any statutory community consultation under applicable legislation.

Council has responsibilities and makes decisions under a wide variety of Victorian and Australian legislation. In many instances the legislation sets standards and provides minimum requirements in regard to notifications and referrals. This includes the following matters:

- Setting Councillor and Mayoral allowances (s 39)
- Adopting a Council Plan
- Making and amending a Local Law (s 73)
- Changing the Council's system of land valuations for Council rates (s 355)
- Adopting a budget
- Declaring a special rate or a special charge
- Selling, exchanging or leasing land
- Entering into a regional library agreement
- Deviating or discontinuing a road
- Developing or amending Governance Rules (s 60)
- Leasing land not included as a proposal in the budget (s 114)
- Conducting a review of, or restructuring advisory panel (s 16 & s 239)

The statutory consultation required by law for these matters may include all or some of the following:

- The Council must publish a public notice (in a local or daily newspaper, and on the Council's internet website) that identifies the proposal and tells people that they have the right to make a written submission to the Council.
- People who wish to make submissions must lodge them by the date specified in the public notice
- Anyone who has made a written submission and asked to be heard in support of this submission is entitled to speak to the Council or a committee appointed for the purpose. The submitter may appear in person or be represented by someone else.
- The Council must fix a time, date and place for this meeting and give reasonable notice of the meeting to each person requesting to be heard.
- The Council or a Council committee must consider any submissions received before making a decision.
- After it has made a decision, the Council must write to a person who has lodged a submission advising of the Council decision and the reasons for it.

Planning scheme amendments

Specific consultation arrangements apply in relation to proposed amendments to the Planning Scheme under the Planning and Environment Act 1987. These arrangements enable a person to make a submission:

- to the planning authority about an amendment to its planning scheme
- to a panel appointed to consider a planning scheme amendment.

Council is required to give public notice when proposing amendments to its Planning Scheme, including advice about how submissions can be made.

Protocol for planning permits

In considering with any planning application, Council complies with its statutory consultation obligations which can include the following consultative protocol:

- Letters to adjoining landowners and occupiers and a sign being required to be placed on the site. In some instances in addition to the letters and sign on-site, public advertising of the proposal will occur in the local newspaper(s).
- Notifications to surrounding residents/landowners will advise people on how they can view any plans and supporting information on a proposal. In such instances the information will be available at the relevant Council service centres and online.
- In some circumstances where high levels of community interest are anticipated, community information sessions can be held, either by the developer alone or jointly with Council.
- All submissions on a proposal will be considered in determining any application. If there are objections, the planning officer may convene and facilitate an applicant/objector(s) meeting.

DRAFT

APPENDIX 5: ENGAGEMENT CATEGORIES

Council has identified five categories of issues to help determine the required level of participation and engagement methods.

Category	Issue	Examples
One	Matters that change the current arrangements/uses on a single site	Any significant redevelopment of a community facility, e.g. kindergarten renovation.
Two	Matters impacting on an area, neighbourhood or township	Traffic management proposals/solutions, streetscape proposals e.g. installation of roundabouts, speed humps, local open space developments, sporting club rooms at a recreation reserve.
Three	Service planning matters which have impacts across the shire	Changes to the garbage service, changes to aged care services or maternal child health services.
Four	Major plans which have impacts across the shire	Development of strategies relating to residential/industrial land use, or Council's strategic position related to issues such as open space planning, economic development, arts and culture or youth development.
Five	Major projects or issues with shire-wide impacts	Development of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Vision* • Council Plan* • Financial Plan* • Asset Plan* • New and major infrastructure projects

*Deliberative method required