

Community Engagement Policy

Date first adopted:	23 February 2021
Dates amended:	
Next review date:	February 2026
Position title of responsible business unit Manager:	Director Community Wellbeing
Approved by:	Council
Internal external or both:	Both

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1. TITLE

Community Engagement Policy

2. OBJECTIVE

Developed in consultation with our community, this Community Engagement Policy outlines Council's commitment to and steps for achieving effective and inclusive community engagement.

3. DEFINITIONS AND ABBREVIATIONS

Term	Meaning
community engagement	Community engagement is a planned process. It involves Council working with organisations, stakeholders and communities to shape the decisions or actions in relation to a problem, opportunity or outcome. Good quality community engagement builds stronger relationships between Council and our community.
community	A group of people that share a common attribute or experiences. Broadly, our community includes people who live, work, access services, participate or contribute to community life in Glen Eira. Within this, there are many diverse communities, including communities of place, communities of interest, communities of affiliation, and communities of culture.
deliberative engagement	Deliberative engagement occurs when a group of people from the community consider relevant facts from multiple points of view, identify options, and come to a group decision. It is one form of 'high influence' engagement. It is not an alternative to Council's performing its role as a statutory decision-making body.
the Act	<i>Local Government Act 2020 (Vic)</i>
Council	Glen Eira City Council
Policy	Community Engagement Policy
the Strategy	Glen Eira City Council Community Engagement Strategy 2018-2021 or any later edition of the Strategy.
the Toolkit	Glen Eira City Council Community Engagement Toolkit
IAP2	International Association of Public Participation

4. BACKGROUND

Engaging meaningfully with residents, local groups, businesses, and organisations is important in building relationships and enhancing community capacity, which in turn ensures that Council's decisions are well informed.

This Policy sets out a vision for community engagement in Glen Eira and outlines our promises to the community to undertake best practice community engagement. These promises give effect to the community engagement principles in Sections 56(a) to (e) of the Act.

This Policy was developed in accordance with the overarching governance principles in section 9 of the Act. These principles define the core performance requirements for Councils. The concept of community engagement is embedded in the principles. The principles include a requirement for Councils to ensure that its municipal community is engaged in strategic planning and strategic decision making.

5. SCOPE AND RESPONSIBILITY

This Policy applies to the planning, design, implementation and evaluation of community engagement activities as directed by Council, recommended by staff, or required by the Act.

Community engagement is the responsibility of all Council business units, teams and individual employees, including contractors of Council. This Policy, therefore, applies to the whole Council organisation.

It is also a requirement of the Act that the role of the Mayor includes leading engagement with the municipal community on the development of the Council Plan.¹

The Community Wellbeing Division will lead community engagement across Council to ensure the effective application of the community engagement principles which are given effect to in our promises to the community.

This Policy sets out our vision for community engagement whilst acknowledging that each community engagement process will be different for individual engagements, depending on the topic, the stakeholders involved, and the outcomes anticipated. Effective application of this Policy will, therefore, involve a range of approaches and methods.

The Policy does not apply to community engagement processes that are subject to prescribed processes imposed by other Victorian legislation such as land-use planning applications or other Council processes such as service requests or complaints.

6. POLICY

6.1 Our promises to the community

Our promises to the community about how we design and deliver community engagements have been developed through engagement with Council officers, Glen Eira Community Voice (Council's online community panel), community groups and the broader public. Consideration has also been given to industry standards such as the IAP2 *Core Values for Public Participation* as well as guidance from the Victorian Auditor-General's Office and the requirements of the Act.

6.1.1 Inclusive and Accessible

We will ensure that participants in community engagement are representative of the persons and groups affected by the matter that is the subject of the community engagement.

We will identify the persons and groups affected by the matter that is the subject of the community engagement.

We will ensure that opportunities for community engagement are available and accessible to the persons and groups affected by the matter.

We will seek out those whose voices in our community are not often heard.

¹ See Section 18(1)(c) of the Act.

We will use different types of engagement to ensure we hear from different groups in our community such as children and young people or groups at risk of not being represented.

We will build stronger relationships with community groups and organisations to ensure that each engagement opportunity is promoted broadly across the municipality.

We will engage with our community to involve and hear from participants that represent the affected and interested groups.

6.1.2 Informed and Meaningful

We will ensure that participants in community engagement have access to objective, relevant and timely information to inform their participation in the engagement activities.

We will provide information in plain English, accessible formats and in other languages where possible to participants in community engagement to inform their participation in the engagement.

6.1.3 Respectful and Supportive

We will ensure that participants in community engagement are provided with reasonable support to enable meaningful and informed engagement.

We value the time our community puts into participating in community engagement activities and will engage closely with participants to reduce physical, social and cultural barriers to their participation.

6.1.4 Open and Transparent

We will ensure that the community engagement process has a clearly defined objective and scope.

We will identify the objective and scope of the community engagement in the community engagement plan.

We will communicate to the community the objective and scope of the community engagement.

6.1.5 Accountable

We will ensure that participants in community engagement are informed of the ways in which the community engagement process will influence Council decision-making.

We will actively listen and be receptive to community feedback and will have a transparent process for informing participants in community engagement of the influence their feedback will have on our decision-making.

We will be clear on other factors that influence our decision-making, such as plans and strategies, budgetary implications, evidenced-based data or State Government requirements.

6.1.6 Advocacy

We will consider all feedback received from participants in community engagement and will use the findings to influence decisions or advocate where we do not have the authority to make decisions, such as decisions around public transport routes or gambling machines limits in local venues.

6.2 How we engage

The IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum articulates five levels of engagement, from the provision of information only (*Inform*) to the most influential (*Empower*) where the final decision is placed in the hands of the community. This Policy adopts the IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum to guide the range and extent of participation at each of the five levels.

We will tailor the level of participation to the project and the stakeholders, recognising that one level is not inherently better than the other, having regard to the significance and complexity of the matter and the level of resourcing required.

The five levels of engagement outlined on the IAP2 spectrum shown below in Table 1 will be utilised in every instance to meet our promises to the community. It is important to note, however, that Council cannot 'Empower' regarding decisions to which it cannot delegate.

Table 1. IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum

	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Public Participation Goal	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions	To obtain public feedback on analysis alternatives and/or decisions	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure 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 identification of the preferred solution	To place final decision-making in the hands of the public
We will	Keep you informed	Keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision	Work with you to ensure your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision	Look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible	Implement what you decide
Examples of engagement activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Website • Social Media • Videos • Publications • Presentations • Media • Displays • Advertisements • Letters • Emails • Phone • SMS 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Surveys (paper, online and phone) • Online forums • Polls • Pop-up activities • Information sessions • Open-house events • Written/email submissions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus groups • Workshops • Deliberative polling • Reference groups • Field trips 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stakeholder committees • Online community panel • Mediations • Community summits • Participatory budgeting • Co-design processes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Citizens' jury • Ballots • Delegated decisions

This list, in the examples of engagement activities in Table 1 above, is not exhaustive. There are many other methods and tools we can use. The Toolkit provides a longer and more detailed list of our methods and tools. It is used in conjunction with the Strategy, which guides our approach to reaching different stakeholder groups.

For example, to boost participation of people with disability, we can make sure that our online survey is compatible with screen readers, our workshop venues are accessible to mobility aids, and that participants are aware that we can arrange support staff (e.g. Auslan and language interpreters). Where projects impact children and young people we work with our local early years and youth service providers and school communities and use age-appropriate methods.

6.3 Type of community engagement

Community engagement can take place at multiple levels of the IAP2 spectrum across different stages, depending on the size and scope of the project. The type or form of the engagement undertaken can generally be described as either deliberative engagement or participatory engagement. Whilst the level of a particular engagement will be determined having regard to the significance and complexity of the matter and the level of resourcing, Table 2 below outlines both the form and the minimum level of community engagement to be undertaken with regard to the relevant specified matters.

6.3.1 Deliberative engagement

Deliberative engagement is all about placing people (citizens, residents, affected individuals) closer to the affairs of government and decision-makers. It generally aligns with the 'Involve', 'Collaborate', 'Empower' range of the IAP2 spectrum.

Deliberative engagement encourages people to critically test, weigh up and debate with a range of perspectives, inputs and evidence.

It is an alternative approach to asking people for feedback on a matter that may not be front of mind, which elicits uninformed responses. Instead, deliberative approaches seek to elicit informed, quality, meaningful outputs.

6.3.2 Participatory engagement

Participatory engagement refers to forms of engagement which generally align with the 'Inform' to "Consult" range of the IAP2 spectrum. Participatory engagement typically occurs when feedback or ideas are sought on a particular project, strategy or plan.

6.4 Statutory requirements

Statutory requirements direct how Council undertakes community engagement in specified matters. For example, under the Act, Council has a statutory obligation to develop a long-term Community Vision, Financial Plan and Asset Plan, as well as a four-year Council Plan in accordance with our deliberative engagement practices. Under the *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008*, Council has a statutory requirement to develop a four-year Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan.

Table 2 outlines various matters and identifies a minimum level of community engagement to be undertaken.

Table 2. Matter and form of engagement

Matter	Form of engagement	Minimum level of community engagement
Develop or review the Community Vision	Deliberative engagement	Collaborate
Develop or review the Council Plan	Deliberative engagement	Collaborate
Develop or review the Financial Plan	Deliberative engagement	Involve
Develop and adopt or review the Asset Plan	Deliberative engagement	Involve
Budget and any revised Budget (subject to section 96(2) of the Act)	Participatory engagement	Consult or Involve
Making of a local law (from 1 July 2021)	Participatory engagement	Consult
Purchase or compulsory acquisition of land under section 112 of the Act (from 1 July 2021)	Participatory engagement	Inform
Lease of land where section 115(4) of the Act applies (from 1 July 2021)	Participatory engagement	Inform
Selling or exchanging land where section 114 of the Act applies (from 1 July 2021)	Participatory engagement	Inform
Other forms of strategic planning, strategic decision making or policy development	Form of engagement is to be selected having regard to the significance and complexity of the matter and the level of resourcing required	Consult, Involve or Collaborate
Engagement that is subject to a submission process under section 223 of the <i>Local Government Act 1989</i>	Form of engagement is to be selected having regard to the significance and complexity of the matter and the level of resourcing required	Consult

6.5 Informing decision-making and reporting back

Council recognises that transparent decision-making processes rely on the use of sound evidence, community input and representation. All views gathered through community engagement activities will be considered, balanced and assessed, giving consideration to any other data, advice, strategies and/or legislation that is relevant to the matter.

Importantly, we will report back to participants and the municipal community to demonstrate how engagement results and outcomes of the community engagement have been used to inform the final decision. We will utilise a range of communications channels including social media, Council's website, Council's online engagement platform, GE News and other relevant newsletters and e-newsletters dependent on the significance of the matter. The methods utilised to communicate outcomes will be detailed in our community engagement plans.

The reporting format may vary depending on the nature of the engagement, but will be timely, accessible to every participant and the broader community, and will protect the privacy and confidentiality of participants.

For longer-term engagement projects, Council will report back at key progress milestones, so that the community is kept informed and maintains interest and confidence in our process.

7. HUMAN RIGHTS CHARTER COMPATIBILITY

This Policy has been assessed as being compatible with the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (Vic).

8. ASSOCIATED INTERNAL DOCUMENTS

- Glen Eira Council and Community Plan 2017-2021
- Glen Eira's Community Engagement Strategy 2018-2021
- Glen Eira's Community Engagement Toolkit

9. EXTERNAL REFERENCES/RESOURCES

- *Local Government Act 2020*
- *Local Government Act 1989*
- International Association of Public Participation – Core Values for Public Participation and associated resources
- Public Participation in Government Decision-making: Better Practice Guide (January 2015)
- Public Participation and Community Engagement: Local Government Sector (May 2017)
- Public Participation in Government Decision-Making (January 2015)