

7.5.1 REVISED COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT POLICY

Responsible Director:	Imogen Kelly, Executive Manager Communications and Customer Experience
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RECOMMENDATION

That Council adopts the revised Community Engagement Policy as set out in Attachment 1.

INTRODUCTION

Council is required, under the Local Government Act 2020, to have a Community Engagement Policy developed with input from the community that can be applied to the Community Vision, Council Plan, Financial Plan, Asset Plan, local laws, budget and policy development and property matters. The Community Engagement Policy, adopted by Council in August 2020, is due for review.

COUNCIL PLAN STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

A council with good governance, strong leadership and community involvement in decision making

A Council that provides governance and leadership for the benefit of our community through community engagement, advocacy, decision making and action.

BACKGROUND

The review of the Community Engagement Policy set out to hear from community members who have, and have not, participated in community engagement with Council over the last two years to inform the refresh of the Monash Engagement Policy and our community engagement practices.

The outcomes of this process are outlined in the consultation section of this report. Feedback reflected the need to update our guiding principles and the ways community engagement is delivered.

DISCUSSION

Proposed changes to the policy include:

1. Clear role of community engagement in-decision making
 - The policy now articulates that community engagement is one of a number of inputs informing Council's decisions.
2. Clear distinction between community engagement and stakeholder engagement
 - The policy differentiates between community engagement as a planned process to inform a decision whereas stakeholder engagement refers to ongoing relationships that continually inform the design and delivery of services and representation of constituents by elected officials.
3. Greater clarity on when community engagement is required

- The policy specifies community engagement should be conducted when the community can influence and is impacted by the decision being made. It outlines the range of decisions that are typically informed by community engagement.
4. Refined community engagement principles
 - The principles guiding community engagement have been reviewed and refined following community and stakeholder engagement.
 - The principles support genuine and meaningful participation and ensure engagement activities take account of the different needs of stakeholders.
 5. Guidance on the use and application of the 'inform' level on the IAP2 spectrum.
 - A new statement explicitly clarifies that if the IAP2 level never exceeds 'inform' for at least one stakeholder throughout the lifecycle of the community engagement process, this is considered communication and not community engagement.
 6. Clear position on community engagement for land acquisition.
 - A new statement clarifies how and when community engagement processes apply in relation to land acquisition, ensuring alignment with legislative requirements and managing community expectations particularly when consultation might compromise Council's negotiation position.


Other recommended changes to our practices:

Thoughtful community engagement planning allows for more transparent processes, where the decision to be made and points of influence are clear.

Improvement opportunities have been incorporated in a new template to guide community engagement planning and community engagement staff are providing support to teams.

Drawing on internal and external feedback, we will ensure that:

1. Engagement plans are initiated early in the project planning cycle
 - Engagement planning will commence at the earliest stages of a project to clearly define the decision to be made, what the community can and cannot influence, and engagement objectives.
 - This supports shared understanding for decisions makers and the community to reduce risk of misaligned expectations.
2. Communities who have an influence and who are impacted are clearly identified.
 - Engagement planning will identify all cohorts in the community who are impacted by and who have influence over a decision.
 - Barriers to full and meaningful participation – such as accessibility, timing, language or digital access will be actively considered and addressed during the planning stages.
3. Clear feedback loops are embedded.
 - Council will provide feedback to the community on how input has influenced decisions, reinforcing transparency, accountability and trust in engagement processes.
4. The scope of the engagement is understood.
 - Council will routinely publish what decision is being made, things that people can influence and ways of providing feedback to build trust in our decision-making processes.
5. Communities have multiple ways to provide their feedback to address barriers to full and meaningful participation.



To support effective implementation of the policy, guidance and practical support will be provided to staff across all levels of community engagement planning and delivery.

Targeted capability-building opportunities, including formal accredited training will be available for staff who regularly undertake community engagement. In addition, we will continue to grow and strengthen the internal network, as a collaborative platform for support, sharing best-practice and continuous improvement.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications to this report.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

This policy is an update of the current Community Engagement Policy, adopted by Council in August 2020.

SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Good community engagement practice fosters trust in Council. Enabling and strengthening civic participation in the community are closely associated with the liveability of an area and community wellbeing.

HUMAN RIGHTS CONSIDERATIONS

Council must consider human rights when making decisions. Proper consideration to human rights must be undertaken before a decision is made and may impact on people's rights.

We confirm that this policy has been carefully reviewed to ensure it does not affect human rights. We are committed to respecting human rights and will continue to monitor the policy to ensure it remains compliant.

CONSULTATION

Four focus groups were held with a representative sample of the community. 100 people were selected from 272 expressions of interest, and 66 participants attended a focus group.

All submitters to the expression of interest had the opportunity to provide feedback on what we are doing well and what we need to get better at. The Youth Advisory Committee was consulted due to young people being underrepresented in the focus groups.

Throughout this first phase of engagement, participants shared ideas, concerns and expected principles and values to guide Monash's community engagement. These insights were grouped into key themes.

Key themes	
Inclusive and representative engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diverse interest groups, views and experiences • Include everyone who may be impacted or interested • Using multiple communication and promotion methods • Using multiple engagement methods • Equity across the municipality and demographics
Access to opportunities and meaningful engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural sensitivities and safety • Language barriers • Different abilities such as those who have disabilities or do not speak or read English • Using community leaders and groups • Using simple, accessible and engaging words and language
Transparent engagement by being open and honest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The need and purpose for the project and engagement, not only a tick box exercise • How and why decisions are made • What participants can expect when engaging
Respectful engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respect and value people's time • Undertake multiple stages of engagement and ongoing project updates • Report back to the community with what you heard, the decision(s) made and how engagement has informed decision(s) • Improve relationship building to establish trust and engagement
Promotion and engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be proactive • Importance of being engaging and welcoming • Be clear and informative
Education and communication to support engagement	<p>Participants want and need more information about:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council responsibilities and decision making • State Government responsibilities • Projects • Engagement opportunities

These themes informed the drafting principles that underpin the policy. These principles were subject to a further round of testing with the community to seek feedback on how well or not these reflected the earlier input we received.

Whilst 55% agreed or strongly agreed that the draft principles reflected what good community engagement by Council looks like to them, commentary highlighted the importance of seeing the principles in action and of the 24% who disagreed or strongly disagreed, reasons given largely related to distrust in processes that underpin the principles.

This feedback led to some changes to strengthen the principles and add another principle that addresses this lack of trust.

The feedback strengthened our policy position by introducing more specific commitments (removing barriers and identifying who is missing) and moving from intent to evidence (showing what changed and why), from process to decision transparency (clearly outlining constraints, trade-offs and limits of influence), and from values to accountability (tracking participation, reporting outcomes and explaining decisions).

GENDER IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Council has a legislative responsibility under the Gender Equality Act 2020 to conduct a Gender Impact Assessment (GIA) on all new policies, programs and services (and those that are up for formal review) which have a direct and significant impact on the community.

The GIA undertaken for the policy highlights the need to ensure that resources and engagement processes are accessible and transparent, in order to create opportunities for meaningful engagement.

CONCLUSION

The revised Community Engagement Policy strengthens Council's commitment to transparent, inclusive and meaningful community participation in decision-making. The updated policy clearly defines the role and scope of engagement, distinguishes it from stakeholder relationships, and provides practical guidance on when and how engagement should occur. It reflects extensive community input, incorporating key themes identified by focus group participants.

The proposed changes, alongside improvements to planning, early engagement, identification of impacted communities, and clear feedback loops, will enhance trust and ensure community contributions are genuinely considered. By embedding stronger principles and clearer expectations, the policy supports better decision-making aligned with community needs and legislative requirements.

ATTACHMENT LIST

1. Community Engagement Policy final [7.5.1.1 - 9 pages]



Community Engagement Policy (External)

Executive Department

OVERVIEW:
 This policy outlines guidelines and principles for community engagement. It is essential for Council to have this policy in place to ensure decisions are informed by the people who are impacted by them.

RESPONSIBLE MANAGER:	Executive Manager, Communications, Customer Experience and Facilities
RESPONSIBLE DEPARTMENT:	Communications, Customer Experience and Facilities

APPROVED or RESOLVED BY:

COUNCIL

DATE: [insert date approved/adopted]

EDNA NO: [insert EDNA reference number]

REVIEW DATE: 30 June 2030

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1. Introduction

This policy outlines Council's commitment to community engagement when making decisions that impact the community. It recognises that Council makes better decisions when we are informed by the people that are impacted by them. Council is committed to genuine, accessible, inclusive, informed, meaningful, respectful and transparent community engagement.

Community engagement is one input into Council's decision-making. Other considerations include but are not limited to:

- technical information
- financial analysis
- risk assessments
- benchmarking, data and research
- legal or regulatory requirements.

2. Scope

For the purposes of this policy, community engagement is defined as a planned process to gather information from the community to inform a decision.

It is distinct from the stakeholder engagement that occurs continuously in the design and delivery of council services and representation of constituents by elected officials.

This policy sets clear guidance for when Council will undertake community engagement and defines principles for how Council plans, designs, implements, evaluates and reports community engagement.

This policy does not apply where legislative requirements and regulations set specific engagement or consultation requirements such as statutory planning matters.

3. Community Engagement approach

We will undertake community engagement when:

- the community can influence the decision being made, and
- the community will be impacted by the decision

Being clear about the extent to which participants will be able to influence decisions is critical to establishing and maintaining trust in Council's commitment to genuine and meaningful community engagement. Depending on the scope for influence, Council will undertake community engagement in the following circumstances:

- **Strategic planning and policy development:** When developing or reviewing strategies, plans, policies, or long-term frameworks that shape the future direction, priorities, or service delivery of the municipality.



- **Projects, services, and infrastructure:** When proposing new, upgraded, or materially changed services, programs, facilities, or infrastructure that may affect how the community lives, works, or interacts with Council assets or spaces.
- **Statutory and regulatory requirements:** Where engagement is mandated by legislation, regulation, or other statutory obligations, including public exhibition, submissions, or formal consultation processes.
- **Significant changes or impacts:** When decisions may result in notable social, economic, environmental, cultural, or amenity impacts on individuals, groups, or the broader community.
- **Issues of high community interest or sensitivity:** When matters attract strong community interest, concern, or differing viewpoints, or where community values, identity, or wellbeing may be affected.
- **Service review or performance improvement:** To understand community needs, expectations, and experiences when reviewing services or seeking to improve outcomes, accessibility, or efficiency.
- **Budget and Resource Allocation:** Where appropriate, to inform decisions about priorities for investment, funding, or resource allocation, particularly when trade-offs are required.

Council may not undertake engagement when:

- Decisions are administrative or operational in nature with no reasonable scope to influence outcomes
- There is no practical opportunity for community input to affect the decision
- Matters relate to staffing, commercial-in-confidence, legal, or confidential issues
- An emergency or urgent situation requires immediate action to protect public health, safety, or assets

In all cases, Council will ensure that engagement is proportionate to the scale, risk, and complexity of the matter and transparent about what the community can influence.

The following principles guides how we plan, design, implement, evaluate and report community engagement.

Genuine - We believe we make better decisions when they are informed by the people impacted by them. We are committed to demonstrating how community input influences decisions. Where input cannot be adopted, we will explain why.

Accessible - We offer multiple ways for people to participate, that are easy and convenient for all. We remove known barriers to participation and regularly review who is (and isn't) engaging, adapting our approach to improve access.

Inclusive - We identify those impacted and interested by the decision and proactively design engagement activities to include people with diverse backgrounds, particularly those who are under-represented or less likely to participate. We track participation and take action when key voices are missing.

Informed - We promote engagement opportunities and provide timely, clear and balanced information in plain-language so the community can provide informed input.



Meaningful - We engage early, before decisions are made, and clearly define how community input will influence outcomes. We demonstrate impact by showing what changed as a result of feedback.

Respectful - We engage with the community in a respectful, culturally sensitive and safe manner, valuing people’s time, experiences and perspectives. We listen actively and ensure people feel heard, even when their views cannot be adopted.

Transparent – We are clear about the purpose of engagement, the level of influence the community has and what the community can and cannot influence. We openly report how input was considered, what decisions were made, and the reasons behind them.

4. Background

Council recognises the International Association for Public Participation’s (IAP2) Public Participation Spectrum as the international standard for effective community engagement. The spectrum helps Council determine the level of engagement and the extent to which community and stakeholders may influence a decision.

Throughout the lifecycle of community engagement processes, the IAP2 level may change. Stakeholders will also be treated differently, depending on the impact the decision is likely to have on them.

If the IAP2 level never exceeds ‘Inform’ for at least one stakeholder during a project, this is considered communication only and does not constitute community engagement.

IAP2 Level	IAP2 Public participation goal	Our promise to you
Inform	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	We will keep you informed.
Consult	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.
Involve	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	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.



Collaborate	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and identification of the preferred solution.	We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.
Empower	To place final decision-making in the hands of the public.	We will implement what you decide.

5. Legislative Context and Governance Statement

The *Local Government Act 2020* requires the Community Engagement Policy to be applied to the development of:

- The Community Vision, Council Plan, Financial Plan and Asset Plan
- Local laws
- Budget and policy development

Deliberative engagement practices must be used when developing the Community Vision, Council Plan, Financial Plan and Asset Plan. This involves informed discussion to consider all relevant information and weigh options carefully to help reach a decision.

The *Local Government Act 2020* also requires the following property matters to be undertaken in accordance with Council's community engagement policy:

- Purchase or compulsory acquisition of land
- Sale or exchange of land
- Lease of land for 10 years or more and/or greater than \$100,000 for any one year (unless included in the Adopted Budget)

For the purchase or compulsory acquisition, sale, exchange or lease of land, where engagement at the 'consult' or higher levels of the IAP2 spectrum would prejudice Council's negotiations or ability to enter into a contract of sale, we will communicate the decision as soon as practicably possible, unless the decision is deemed confidential under the *Local Government Act 2020*.

The policy is informed by Victorian Government legislation which sets specific engagement requirements for some Council activities:

- Equal Opportunity Act 2010
- Gender Equality Act 2020
- Land Acquisition and Compensation Act 1986



- Local Government Act 1989
- Local Government Act 2020
- Planning and Environment Act 1987
- Privacy and Data Collection Act 2014
- Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008
- Road Management Act 2004

6. Definitions

For the purposes of the policy, Council adopts the following definitions:

Word	Definition
Community	Refers to the people who have a stake and interest in the City of Monash and includes people who: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Live, work, study or conduct business or are involved in local community groups or organisations in the municipality • Visit, use or enjoy the services, facilities and public places located within the municipality
Community engagement	Community engagement is defined as a planned process to gather information from the community to inform a decision.
Deliberative engagement	Deliberative engagement is an approach to decision-making in which citizens consider relevant facts from multiple points of view, converse with one another to think critically about options before them and enlarge their perspectives, opinions, and understandings.
Stakeholder engagement	Interaction between Council and stakeholders on the design and delivery of services, and meetings or conversations with community members where they may provide feedback or comment on Council services. This also applies to elected councillors' discussions with constituents where there is no planned process underway to collect input to a decision before Council.



7. Responsibilities and Roles

Who	Role
Councillors	<p>Set strategic direction and expectations for community engagement.</p> <p>Consider community input when making decisions about projects, plans, strategies, policies, services and advocacy initiatives</p> <p>Clearly articulate how engagement has informed outcomes in the context of all evidence when making decisions, recognising that councillors may weigh evidence differently when forming their individual position.</p>
Executive Leadership Team	<p>Champion a culture of meaningful engagement across Council.</p> <p>Embed community engagement principles into strategies, policies, service planning, and decision-making processes.</p> <p>Ensure engagement approaches are proportionate to impact and risk and clearly articulate the extent of influence.</p>
Managers	<p>Plan and resource community engagement activities within their areas of responsibility.</p> <p>Establish the extent of influence available to the community in consultation with Executive Leadership and Council where appropriate.</p> <p>Ensure staff have the skills, tools, and support needed to undertake effective engagement.</p> <p>Promote collaboration across departments to deliver coordinated and inclusive engagement.</p>
Staff	<p>Uphold Council's commitment to accessible, inclusive, informed, meaningful, respectful and transparent community engagement.</p> <p>Consider community perspectives in day-to-day work and decision-making.</p> <p>Apply engagement principles relevant to their role and seek advice where needed.</p>
Community Engagement team	<p>Provide expert advice, frameworks, tools, and guidance to support high-quality engagement.</p> <p>Build organisational capability through training, coaching, templates, and evaluation.</p> <p>Support best-practice engagement aligned with recognised standards and Council policy.</p>



8. Gender Impact Assessment

Council has a legislative responsibility under the Gender Equality Act 2020 to conduct a Gender Impact Assessment (GIA) on all new policies, programs and services (and those that are up for formal review) which have a direct and significant impact on the community.

The GIA undertaken for the policy highlights the need to ensure that resources and engagement processes are accessible and transparent, in order to create opportunities for meaningful engagement.

9. Human Rights Considerations

Council must give proper consideration to human rights when making decisions. Proper consideration to human rights must be undertaken before a decision is made and may impact on people's rights.

We confirm that this policy has been carefully reviewed to ensure it does not affect human rights. We are committed to respecting human rights and will continue to monitor the policy to ensure it remains compliant.

10. Administrative Amendments

From time to time, circumstance may require minor amendments be made to this Policy. Where this does not materially alter the Policy, such amendments may be made administratively by the Chief Executive Officer.

Any amendment which materially alters the Policy must be approved by Council.

11. Review

This policy will be reviewed by Executive Manager, Communications, Customer Experience, Facilities by 30 June 2030.


12. Document Version

Version Number	Date	Author	Reviewed By	Approved By	Comments
3.0	27/06/2026	Belinda Lim	Imogen Kelly	Council	

13. Contact

If you have any questions about this Policy, please contact Council:

 By emailing: mail@monash.vic.gov.au

 By calling Belinda Lim, Community Engagement Coordinator phone: 9518 3555