



Community Engagement Policy

Policy outcome:	The City of Port Phillip will provide planned and impartial opportunities for community to meaningfully inform and participate in its decision making.
Responsible area:	Governance and Organisational Performance
Version:	2.0
Date approved/adopted:	3 December 2025
Planned review date:	December 2029

Table of Contents

1. Purpose	2
2. Scope.....	2
3. Background.....	3
3.1. Our definition of community engagement.....	3
3.2. About community engagement.....	3
3.3. How decisions are made	3
4. Our values, principles and commitment.....	4
4.1. Community Engagement Principles (as per the Act)	5
5. Engagement in practice	6
5.1. When we engage	6
5.2. When we communicate changes, rather than engage.....	7
5.3. How we engage	7
5.4. Who we engage	8
5.5. Managing other forms of feedback	8
6. Deliberative engagement practices	10
6.1. What is deliberative engagement?	10
6.2. When should deliberative engagement practices be considered?	11
7. Roles and responsibilities.....	12
8. Related legislation and documents.....	13
9. Definitions	14



1. Purpose

The purpose of this Policy is to define the City of Port Phillip's commitment to genuine, impartial, equitable, fit-for-purpose and transparent community engagement.

2. Scope

This policy applies to anyone working with or for the City of Port Phillip who are involved in community engagement, such as councillors, staff, consultants, contractors, and volunteers. It includes, but is not limited to:

- Planning, delivery, reporting and reviewing community engagement activities.
- Talking with the community about issues, ideas, plans, projects, or services that involve Council decisions.
- Activities where Council is required to engage the community, as specified in the Local Government Act or other legislation.

This policy does not apply to:

- Everyday services and interactions, like social media posts, customer service, or complaints.
- Outreach or relationship-building activities which support service delivery and day-to-day operations.
- Community-led advocacy or campaigns that happen outside Council's planned engagement activities.

In some cases, state or federal legislation have their own requirements for how community engagement must be undertaken. On those occasions, Council staff must follow those regulations while also trying to maintain the values and goals of this policy as much as possible.



3. Background

3.1. Our definition of community engagement

Community engagement is a planned, two-way and impartial process that provides opportunities for people to meaningfully inform and participate in the City of Port Phillip (Council)'s decision making.

3.2. About community engagement

Community engagement plays an important role in ensuring Council's decisions are based on community need and aspirations for the future. It enables people to have a say on decisions that affect them and helps the City of Port Phillip build relationships which contribute to vibrant and active communities.

Victoria's *Local Government Act 2020* (Act) requires local governments to engage with their communities and stakeholders on a range of council policies, plans and projects (Section 56). It also sets out principles for how councils should go about engaging with their communities. This Community Engagement Policy (Policy) outlines what these principles mean and look like in a local Port Phillip context.

We use the Engagement Institute's (IAP2) Public Participation Spectrum to guide how we involve the community in decision-making. This framework helps us determine the right level of community involvement, clarify how much influence the community can have, and clearly communicate our commitment to the community.

3.3. How decisions are made

Community engagement helps the City of Port Phillip make better decisions by listening to the views and needs of different people in our community. It gives councillors and Council staff a better understanding of what it's like to live, work, and visit here.

Community engagement helps guide decisions, but it doesn't replace the role of councillors and Council staff in making final choices. It adds value by helping Council understand what matters most to people and how decisions might affect them.

Inputs into the decision-making process include:

- **Community engagement:** We consider community needs, insights, knowledge, and aspirations when making decisions.
- **Research, data, and customer feedback:** We review customer requests and complaints, analyse research and statistics, and draw on data from other government agencies and previous engagement findings.
- **Legislation, policies, and best practice:** We apply the principles of the Local Government Act and other relevant legislation, policies, and strategic plans, while incorporating best practice approaches.



- **Expertise and experience:** We rely on the professional knowledge of Council officers, external experts, and councillors' understanding of the community to guide advice and recommendations.
- **Resources and feasibility:** We assess our financial, human, and physical resources to ensure decisions are achievable, sustainable, and aligned with organisational capacity.
- **Lived experience and advisory input:** We seek input from people with lived experience, including members of Council's Advisory Committees, to enrich our understanding and decision-making.

4. Our values, principles and commitment

Our commitment to community engagement is grounded in our values. These values guide our Policy and flow on to every engagement activity and program, setting clear expectations for how we work with our diverse communities:

- **Inclusivity:** We strive to reach all parts of our diverse community.
- **Equity:** We make sure everyone has a fair chance to participate.
- **Transparency:** We are open about how feedback will be used.
- **Accessibility:** We remove barriers to participation.
- **Responsiveness:** We listen and adapt based on what we hear.
- **Accountability:** We report back on the impact of community input.

The table below shows how the principles in the Local Government Act inform how we work at Port Phillip.



4.1. Community Engagement Principles (as per the Act)

What this means for our community

Community Engagement Principles (as per the Act)	What this means for our community
1. A community engagement process must have a clearly defined objective and scope.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We'll make a plan for each project that involves the community. Each plan will explain what the project is about and what parts you can help shape. We'll only ask for your thoughts on things that can actually be changed.
2. Participants in community engagement must have access to objective, relevant and timely information to inform their participation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We'll give you clear, fair, and easy-to-understand information at the start so you know what's going on.
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.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We'll make sure the people most affected get a chance to have their say. We'll try to hear from lots of different people using different ways to connect. We'll keep track of who gives feedback. We'll use different tools and networks to reach more people.
4. Participants in community engagement are entitled to reasonable support to enable meaningful and informed engagement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We'll work with you to find out what makes it hard to join in and try to fix that. We'll ask how you prefer to take part and make sure it's easy, safe, and fair. We'll offer a range of options to make sure you can join in in a way that suits you, including online and in person. We'll be respectful of different cultures. We'll meet you where you feel comfortable. If needed, we'll translate information or provide interpreters.
5. Participants in community engagement are informed of the ways in which the community engagement process will influence Council decision making.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We'll explain what the engagement is for and what it covers. We'll tell you what you can and can't help influence. We'll let you know what we heard from the community and how it helped shape decisions. We'll explain that your input is one part of the decision-making process. We'll share the final outcomes and how your feedback made a difference.



5. Engagement in practice

5.1. When we engage

We undertake engagement processes when:

- There is a proposed project, policy, plan, strategy, or service which requires a decision that will impact all or some of the community.
- Council has a legislative requirement to engage with the community.

Community engagement requirements and standards are specified in, but not limited to, the following legislation and guiding documents:

- Climate Change Act 2017.
- Coastal and Marine Management Plan Guidelines 2023.
- Domestic Animals Act 1994.
- Emergency Management Act 2013.
- Environmental Protection Act 2017.
- Equal Opportunity Act 2010.
- Geographic Place Names Act 1998.
- Local Government Act 2020.
- Local Government (Planning and Reporting) Regulations Schedule 1 Governance and Management Checklist.
- Marine and Coastal Act 2018.
- Planning and Environment Act 1987.
- Public Administration Act 2004.
- Public Health & Wellbeing Act 2008.
- Road Management Act 2004.
- Gender Equality Act 2020.
- Disability Discrimination Act 1992 and Victorian Disability Act 2006.
- Victorian Charter of Human Rights.



5.2. When we communicate changes, rather than engage

There may be times where there is very limited or no opportunity for the community to influence decisions. This is called the 'Inform' level of involvement in the Public Participation Spectrum. When this happens, we'll let the community know upfront and explain why.

This might happen when:

- We need to act quickly in an emergency or for safety reasons.
- Another agency is in charge and makes the final decision.
- Legal or business rules stop us from involving the community.
- We're doing routine maintenance or replacing something with the same type.

5.3. How we engage

We engage with the community in different ways, depending on the situation. Our goal is to make sure engagement is meaningful and provides value. The way we engage will depend on:

- What decision needs to be made.
- How the decision or project affects the community.
- How much say the community has in the decision.
- How complex or important the issue is.
- Which community members are most affected.
- The resources needed to run the engagement.
- Any legal requirements we must follow.

We may hire external consultants to help with engagement when:

- The topic is complex or sensitive.
- The project has a big or long-term impact.
- Our staff don't have enough time or the right expertise.
- An independent facilitator would improve the process.



5.4. Who we engage

When planning each engagement approach, Council officers identify those most likely to be impacted by or interested in a proposed project or decision. This may include people who live, work, study, own property, or spend time in the City of Port Phillip.

We are committed to reaching out to the right people at the right time, using methods that suit their needs. We strive to make our engagement processes equitable, accessible, and inclusive. This sometimes means dedicating additional time, resources, or tailored approaches to connect with individuals who may be unable or unlikely to participate through our standard engagement channels.

Our goal is to ensure we hear from a significant and equitable cross-section of our diverse community. This enables decision-makers to consider a broad range of perspectives, not just those of the most vocal participants.

5.5. Managing other forms of feedback

To ensure all community feedback is properly considered and recorded, we strongly encourage feedback to be submitted through designated engagement channels and within the specified engagement periods.

We provide accessible and tailored engagement methods, designed to suit the specific needs of each project and support meaningful engagement. As a result, community members are no longer required to submit formal written submissions that were required under the previous Act.

If feedback—including formal submissions and emails—is received outside the designated channels or after the engagement period, Council will endeavour to review and include it in engagement reports. However, this may not always be possible.

All feedback will be considered equally, no matter which channel it comes through—whether submissions, emails, surveys or other methods. The method by which feedback is received will not influence its weight in the analysis. Key points and themes from all feedback will be included in the overall analysis and won't be reported separately by channel.

Petitions will be managed in accordance with Council's Governance Rules; while the sentiments expressed will be considered in decision making, the full petition will not be included in the community engagement report. Similarly, feedback received via social media platforms will not be included in the report.

Public Participation Spectrum

The Public Participation Spectrum has been adopted from the [International Association for Public Participation – IAP2 International](#)

Level of influence	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
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
Our promise to the community	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will 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 look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.
The role of the community in decision-making	Listen	Contribute	Participate	Partner	Partner or lead
Examples of methods we will use to do this	Informative methods, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information sheets • Updates on Council websites • Pop-up conversations • Mail-outs or signage • Information sessions • Newsletters • Public notice 	Consultative methods, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Surveys • Focus groups • Workshops • Committees of Council • Pop-up conversations • Interviews • Ideas boards • Stakeholder meetings • Advisory Committee meetings 	Deliberative methods, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshops • Surveys • Focus groups • Interviews • Community panels • Advisory Committee workshops • Roundtables 	Deliberative methods, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-design workshops • Steering groups • Focus groups • Community panels • Roundtables 	Ballot or voting
Examples of Council projects or decisions and typical level of engagement	Projects where there is no opportunity to influence Council decision-making, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintenance upgrades • Projects where Council is not the decision-making authority • Low impact projects, such as single tree installations or traffic treatments. 	Statutory projects, policies, strategies or low to medium impact and interest projects such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public space upgrades • Transport projects • Capitol works. 	Medium to high impact and interest projects such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Major capitol works • Major public space upgrades • Key strategies or plans 	High impact and interest projects such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Major capitol works • Major public space upgrades • Community Vision • 4-year Council Plan 	Council elections



6. Deliberative engagement practices

The following outlines the City of Port Phillip's approach to using deliberative engagement practices.

6.1. What is deliberative engagement?

Deliberative engagement focuses on directly involving people in decision-making. Unlike other types of engagement, it gives participants more time and better access to background information, allowing them to consider issues in greater depth and provide more informed feedback.

Deliberative engagement aligns with the Involve, Collaborate, and Empower levels of influence on the Public Participation Spectrum. This approach requires a higher level of commitment from Council, including working collaboratively or in partnership with the community, and means that councillors will more fully consider the advice and recommendations provided.

Deliberation typically brings together people from diverse backgrounds and experiences, enabling a broad range of perspectives to be shared and thoughtfully considered. While a representative Community Panel is a common method, there are many effective ways to facilitate deliberation.

The key elements of deliberative engagement practice are outlined below. A full deliberative process will incorporate all of these elements, while a scaled-back process may select the most appropriate elements for the specific project.

- **Clear remit:** Deliberation is focused on a primary, complex question with a well-defined remit.
- **Representative:** Group selection is independently conducted, random, and stratified.
- **Deliberative:** The process must provide opportunities for reflection, dialogue, debate, and collective judgement on the issue at hand.
- **Informative:** Participants are given access to balanced, in-depth information and diverse perspectives, including expert input, to inform their discussions.
- **Adequate time:** There must be sufficient time allocated for learning, reflection, discussion, and reaching a decision.
- **Influential:** Decision-makers are expected to respect and give significant weight to the outcomes of the deliberation.
- **Transparent:** The process is open and accessible to the broader community to build trust.
- **Inclusive:** The process is designed to proactively address barriers to participation and may include additional engagement to ensure diverse voices are heard.
- **Independent facilitation:** An unbiased, expert facilitator guides the group, ensures equal participation, and helps produce an effective report.



6.2. When should deliberative engagement practices be considered?

Mandatory deliberation

Under the *Local Government Act 2020*, councils must use deliberative engagement when developing the following key plans; Community Vision, Council Plan, Financial Plan, and Asset Plan.

To respond to the legislation, we will form a representative panel of community members to carefully consider and make recommendations for the Community Vision and priorities for the next four-year Council Plan. These priorities will then help shape the long-term Financial Plan and Asset Plan.

Other opportunities for deliberation

Deliberative engagement can also add value to other projects. It's especially useful when dealing with complex issues, involving the community throughout the process, and building trust in decision-making.

A full deliberative process is most helpful when:

- The issue is complex and needs detailed community input.
- The organisation is committed to giving the community more influence, at the Involve or Collaborate levels of the Public Participation Spectrum.
- There are enough resources to support the process.

The Stakeholder Engagement Team should help assess whether these conditions can be met, using their expertise.

If these conditions can't be fully met, a scaled-back engagement plan may be more suitable. This approach can still include key deliberative elements. Scaling back helps to respect the time and effort of community members, maintain trust in the engagement process, and recognise the limits of Council resources.

What is a complex problem?

Issues that are complex and well suited to deliberative approaches typically share some or all of the following characteristics, and don't necessarily need to be large scale:

- Have no clear or simple solutions.
- Involve trade-offs and require balancing diverse needs, preferences, and sometimes conflicting values.
- May be contentious or controversial.
- Will benefit from a deeper understanding of public values and perspectives.
- Successful resolution relies on strong public confidence and a sense of fairness in the process.



7.Roles and responsibilities

Role	Responsibilities
Councillors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Actively promote opportunities for the community to participate in engagement activities. Encourage community members to use the designated engagement channels, such as surveys or scheduled in-person activities, to provide feedback during the official engagement period. Respect the impartiality of the engagement process and do not actively try to influence community sentiment. Enable Council officers to plan and carry out a fair and unbiased engagement process in accordance with this Policy. If feedback is received through other means (e.g., direct emails to councillors or submissions received outside the Have Your Say platform), ensure the feedback is recorded in a timely manner and encourage those community members to submit future feedback via the designated engagement channels. Ensure that all feedback, regardless of the method by which it is received, is considered equally and fairly. Consider the diversity of interests and needs of the community, especially those most impacted, when making decisions. Fully consider the findings in the community engagement report before making a decision, and ensure decisions are made in line with the level of influence and promise to community.
Leadership Network representatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote continuous improvement in community engagement by upholding this Policy, its processes, and leadership. Monitor Policy implementation and compliance. Ensure councillors and officers understand the Policy and their responsibilities. Clarify the purpose and scope of engagement, guiding officers on the community's level of influence. Oversee responsibilities to maintain engagement consistency with this Policy. Identify reputational and other risks, and assist in developing strategies to address them.
All Council officers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure community engagement is consistent with this Policy as appropriate to their role and function.
Stakeholder Engagement Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offer timely and appropriate advice to other Council areas on best-practice methods for community engagement. Oversee the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of this Policy. Develop and provide guidelines, tools, templates, and processes to ensure a consistent approach to planning, delivering and reporting on community engagement across Council.



8. Related legislation and documents

Child Safety

The City of Port Phillip is a Child Safe Organisation and has a legal and moral responsibility to understand and activate their role in preventing, detecting, responding and reporting any Child Safety concerns. Council has zero tolerance for child abuse and is actively committed to embedding a culture of safety, wellbeing and inclusion for children and young people. Council also commits to actively seeking the voice of children in decision making, where appropriate. Consideration has been given to the *Child Safe Standards* in the development of this Policy.

Gender Equality

Under the *Gender Equality Act 2020*, the City of Port Phillip has a positive duty to advance gender equality in our organisation and our community. This includes assessing the impacts of the City of Port Phillip's policies on people of different genders, backgrounds and identities, and considering how a policy that directly and significantly impacts the community can be changed to better support people of all genders and promote gender equality. Engagement activities should include collecting and analysing gender-specific data to support gender impact assessments and help ensure fair and inclusive decision-making. A gender impact assessment was completed as part of developing this Policy.

Privacy

When asking for community feedback, we often ask for demographic details like suburb, gender, age and diversity indicators. Depending on the engagement initiative, we may also request further personal information (such as household income or household make up) to help us understand community participation and ensure inclusivity. This data is used for analysis, may be included in reports, and is unidentifiable. Any personally identifiable information will not be shared with any third party and will be managed in compliance with our obligations under the *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014* and our *Privacy Policy*.

Relevant Legislation

- *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006.*
- *Child Safety Act 2015.*
- *Disability Discrimination Act 1992.*
- *Equal Opportunity Act 2010.*
- *Gender Equality Act 2020.*
- *Local Government Act 2020.*
- *Multicultural Victoria Act 2011.*
- *Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001*
- *Victoria's Equal Opportunity Act 2012.*
- *Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework 2018 – 2023*
- *Victorian Aboriginal Local Government Strategy 2021 – 2026*
- *Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006.*
- *Victorian Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014.*



9. Definitions

Term	Definition
Community	<p>Anyone affiliated with the City of Port Phillip, including individuals or groups who live, work, play, study, visit, invest in, or travel through the municipality.</p> <p>The term is flexible and can refer to everyone in the municipality or smaller groups defined by interest, identity, or location. Communities may be structured (like clubs or associations) or unstructured (such as young people), and often overlap or extend beyond municipal boundaries.</p>
Community engagement	Community engagement is a planned, two-way, inclusive and impartial process that provides opportunities for community members to meaningfully inform and participate in the City of Port Phillip (Council)'s decision making.
Community engagement approach	The overarching engagement plan that outlines timing, resources, and methods, developed after thorough analysis of those impacted or interested, with consideration to the engagement scope and level of influence
Community engagement principles	<p>The five principles outlined in section 56 of the <i>Local Government Act 2020</i>, which guide how councils engage with their communities.</p> <p>These principles focus on transparency, accessibility, inclusivity, informed participation, and demonstrating how community views are considered in decision-making</p>
Community engagement report	A document that formally presents a summary of key findings of a community engagement process. The report is used to communicate back to participants and the broader community on what we heard and provide context to decision-makers.
Complex Problem	An issue that is difficult to define, involves multiple stakeholders with differing views, and has no clear or single solution. These problems require collaborative approaches, like deliberative engagement, to bring together diverse perspectives and work towards informed, adaptive solutions.
Deliberative engagement	<p>An engagement process that enables individuals to draw on collective wisdom and expert advice to work through issues and explore potential solutions together, aiming to reach a shared recommendation.</p> <p>It provides participants with more time and better access to background information, allowing for deeper consideration and more informed feedback. The scale of deliberative engagement depends on factors such as community impact, interest, complexity, and available resources.</p>



Term	Definition
Engagement scope	<p>Engagement scope defines the boundaries of what will be discussed or decided, specifically outlining the negotiables (what the community can influence or change) and the level of influence the community will have in the decision-making process.</p> <p>Clearly defining the engagement scope ensures participants understand which issues are open for input and which are not, supporting transparency and effective participation.</p>
Representative sample	<p>A group of people selected to reflect the demographic characteristics of the broader community affected by an issue or decision.</p> <p>This means the sample mirrors key attributes such as age, gender, location, tenancy status, cultural background, or other factors considered relevant to the project, ensuring that the views collected accurately represent the diversity and perspectives of the whole community.</p>
Spectrum of Participation	<p>The Spectrum of Participation is a framework developed by the Engagement Institute (formally International Association for Public Participation) to guide community engagement by defining five levels of public participation, each with a different promise and degree of influence for the community.</p>
Submission	<p>A written statement or document provided by an individual, group, or organisation, expressing views, feedback, or recommendations on a specific issue, policy or proposal.</p>