



# 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.
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## 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 all councillors, Council officers, consultants, contractors, and volunteers who are conducting or involved in community engagement activities on behalf of the City of Port Phillip, including but not limited to:

- Planning, delivery, reporting and evaluation of any community engagement process or activity.
- Engagement with the community on issues, proposals, policies, plans, strategies, projects or services which involve a decision of Council.
- Activities of Council, Council officers, and councillors where the requirement to engage the community is specified in the Local Government Act or other legislation.

This Policy can act as a best practice guide, but does not cover:

- Organisational processes, services or interactions which are business as usual, such as social media interactions, customer service requests, service delivery or complaints.
- Outreach or relationship-building activities which support service delivery and day-to-day operations.
- Community-led advocacy or campaigning conducted outside of the City of Port Phillip's planned engagement process or mechanisms for participation.

Under certain circumstances, this Policy may be overridden by specific community engagement requirements established by state or federal legislation. When Council officers conduct community engagement in accordance with these legislative requirements, they must nevertheless strive to uphold the principles and objectives of this Policy to the greatest extent 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 supports the City of Port Phillip to make decisions that consider the range of perspectives and needs of our different communities. It is an important input into the decision-making process, providing councillors and Council officers with insights into the lived experiences and perspectives of people who live, work and visit here.

Community engagement informs but does not replace decision-making by elected representatives and Council officers. It can enhance decision-making in the best interests of the many Port Phillip communities, through understanding needs and priorities, and the impact of these decisions.

Inputs into the decision-making process include:

- **Community engagement:**  
We will take community needs, insights, knowledge and aspirations into account when making decisions.
- **Research and customer requests:**  
We will review and consider customer requests, complaints, research, statistics, data from other government agencies, and existing community engagement findings to inform our decisions.



- **Legislation, plans, policies, and best practice:**

We will apply the principles of the Act, as well as other relevant legislation, policies, and plans, and take best practice approaches into account when making decisions.

- **Operational expertise:**

We will draw on the operational expertise and subject matter knowledge of Council officers and external experts to guide our advice and recommendations.

- **Councillor experience and expertise:**

We will use councillors' discretion, understanding of the community, and personal experience to help shape recommendations and inform decisions.

- **Budget and resources:**

We will assess the availability of financial, human, and physical resources to ensure our decisions are practical, sustainable, and aligned with our organisational capacity.

## 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.

To demonstrate how we put our values into action, we have adopted the principles outlined in the Act and set out clear steps for bringing them to life.

Our principles below guide our approach to community engagement and underpin all our work.

Community engagement principles, as per the Act	We promise to...
1. A community engagement process must have a <b>clearly defined objective and scope</b> .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• develop a community engagement plan for every project that needs community engagement.</li> <li>• ensure every engagement plan will have a clearly defined objective and scope, approved by the project sponsor.</li> <li>• actively seek feedback only on aspects of a project that can be influenced.</li> </ul>



Community engagement principles, as per the Act	We promise to...
2. Participants in community engagement must have <b>access to objective, relevant and timely information to inform their participation.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• provide clear, impartial, and easy to understand information at the start of an engagement period.</li> </ul>
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"> <li>• identify and provide engagement opportunities to those most impacted.</li> <li>• actively seek diverse and equitable participation via a range of engagement channels.</li> <li>• track and report on who provides feedback.</li> <li>• use multiple methods and networks to broaden reach and opportunity for participation.</li> </ul>
4. Participants in community engagement are <b>entitled to reasonable support to enable meaningful and informed engagement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• work with our community to identify barriers to participation and reduce these in practical ways.</li> <li>• consult with our communities to understand their preferred ways of participating and design responsive programs that prioritise accessibility, inclusivity, safety and equity.</li> <li>• offer a range of methods, online and in-person, to participate.</li> <li>• engage in culturally safe and respectful ways.</li> <li>• meet people where they are comfortable.</li> <li>• where relevant and feasible, translate information into other languages and provide interpreters.</li> </ul>
5. Participants in community engagement are <b>informed of the ways in which the community engagement process will influence Council decision making.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• clearly state the purpose and scope for each engagement program.</li> <li>• communicate what the community can and can't influence.</li> <li>• report back on what we heard from our community in an appropriate timeframe.</li> <li>• clarify that engagement is one of several decision inputs.</li> <li>• report back to the community on outcomes and how feedback has informed the decision.</li> </ul>



## 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 decision-making. This is known as the 'Inform' level of influence on the Public Participation Spectrum. When this occurs, we will communicate this upfront and explain the reasons for this to the community.

This could include instances such as:

- When we must take urgent action during an emergency response or in the case of a safety concern.
- When we are not the leading agency or don't have the final decision-making power.
- When we are prevented by legal or commercial restrictions.
- When we are undertaking maintenance works, replacing like for like.

## **5.3. How we engage**

There are different levels and types of community engagement. To ensure that we are providing best value to our community, we will engage in a range of ways which are fit for the purpose of engagement.

This will depend on:

- what decision is to be made
- the impact the proposed project or decision has on the community
- the level of influence the community has on the decision
- the significance and complexity of the matter
- the community members who have been identified as most impacted by the decision
- the level of resourcing required, and
- legislative requirements.

To ensure effective use of Council resources, we will employ external consultants to plan, deliver and report on community engagement only when:

- the topic of engagement is complex or controversial
- a project has a large-scale and/or long-term impact
- staff capacity or expertise is constrained
- we are conducting an engagement process which would benefit from an independent facilitator.



## **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
<b>Goal</b>	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
<b>Our promise to the community</b>	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.
<b>The role of the community in decision-making</b>	Listen	Contribute	Participate	Partner	Partner or lead
<b>Examples of methods we will use to do this</b>	Informative methods, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information sheets</li> <li>• Updates on Council websites</li> <li>• Pop-up conversations</li> <li>• Mail-outs or signage</li> <li>• Information sessions</li> <li>• Newsletters</li> <li>• Public notice</li> </ul>	Consultative methods, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Surveys</li> <li>• Focus groups</li> <li>• Workshops</li> <li>• Committees of Council</li> <li>• Pop-up conversations</li> <li>• Interviews</li> <li>• Ideas boards</li> <li>• Stakeholder meetings</li> <li>• Advisory Committee meetings</li> </ul>	Deliberative methods, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Workshops</li> <li>• Surveys</li> <li>• Focus groups</li> <li>• Interviews</li> <li>• Community panels</li> <li>• Advisory Committee workshops</li> <li>• Roundtables</li> </ul>	Deliberative methods, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Co-design workshops</li> <li>• Steering groups</li> <li>• Focus groups</li> <li>• Community panels</li> <li>• Roundtables</li> </ul>	Ballot or voting
<b>Examples of Council projects or decisions and typical level of engagement</b>	Projects where there is no opportunity to influence Council decision-making, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintenance upgrades</li> <li>• Projects where Council is not the decision-making authority</li> <li>• Low impact projects, such as single tree installations or traffic treatments.</li> </ul>	Statutory projects, policies, strategies or low to medium impact and interest projects such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public space upgrades</li> <li>• Transport projects</li> <li>• Capitol works.</li> </ul>	Medium to high impact and interest projects such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Major capitol works</li> <li>• Major public space upgrades</li> <li>• Key strategies or plans</li> </ul>	High impact and interest projects such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Major capitol works</li> <li>• Major public space upgrades</li> <li>• Community Vision</li> <li>• 4-year Council Plan</li> </ul>	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

The *Local Government Act 2020* requires that a council's Community Vision, Council Plan, Financial Plan, and Asset Plan are developed in accordance with its deliberative engagement practices.

In a Port Phillip context, we will recruit a representative deliberative panel to deliberate on recommendations for a Community Vision and priorities for the upcoming four-year Council Plan period. Actions emanating from those priorities will help to inform the long-term Financial Plan and Asset Plan.

### Other opportunities for deliberation

Other initiatives may also benefit from incorporating deliberative engagement practices as part of their overall approach. Deliberation is especially valuable for addressing complex issues, fostering community involvement throughout the process, and building trust in decision-making.

A full deliberative engagement process is helpful when:

- A complex problem requires in-depth community input.
- There is organisational commitment to provide the community with a higher level of influence over decisions, aligned with the Involve or Collaborate levels on the Public Participation Spectrum.
- Adequate resources are available to support the deliberative process.

Identifying whether these conditions can be met should be done collaboratively with the Stakeholder Engagement Team, whose expertise will inform this assessment.

When these conditions cannot be fully met, it may be appropriate to develop a scaled-back engagement plan that incorporates the most relevant deliberative elements for the project. Scaling back respects community members' time and effort, preserves public trust in engagement processes, and acknowledges the finite resources available to Council.

### What is a complex problem?

Issues that are complex and well suited to deliberative approaches typically share some or all of the following characteristics:

- 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.

It is important to note that complexity is not determined by project size or scale.



## 7.Roles and responsibilities

Role	Responsibilities
Councillors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Actively promote opportunities for the community to participate in engagement activities.</li> <li>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.</li> <li>Respect the impartiality of the engagement process and do not actively try to influence community sentiment.</li> <li>Enable Council officers to plan and carry out a fair and unbiased engagement process in accordance with this Policy.</li> <li>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.</li> <li>Ensure that all feedback, regardless of the method by which it is received, is considered equally and fairly.</li> <li>Consider the diversity of interests and needs of the community, especially those most impacted, when making decisions.</li> <li>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.</li> </ul>
Leadership Network representatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promote continuous improvement in community engagement by upholding this Policy, its processes, and leadership.</li> <li>Monitor Policy implementation and compliance.</li> <li>Ensure councillors and officers understand the Policy and their responsibilities.</li> <li>Clarify the purpose and scope of engagement, guiding officers on the community's level of influence.</li> <li>Oversee responsibilities to maintain engagement consistency with this Policy.</li> <li>Identify reputational and other risks, and assist in developing strategies to address them.</li> </ul>
All Council officers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure community engagement is consistent with this Policy as appropriate to their role and function.</li> </ul>
Stakeholder Engagement Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Offer timely and appropriate advice to other Council areas on best-practice methods for community engagement.</li> <li>Oversee the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of this Policy.</li> <li>Develop and provide guidelines, tools, templates, and processes to ensure a consistent approach to planning, delivering and reporting on community engagement across Council.</li> </ul>



## 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 the collection and analysis of data disaggregated by gender to support gender impact assessments and promote equitable decision-making. A gender impact assessment has been completed in the development of 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

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



## 9. Definitions

Term	Definition
<b>Community</b>	<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>
<b>Community engagement</b>	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.
<b>Community engagement approach</b>	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
<b>Community engagement principles</b>	<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>
<b>Community engagement report</b>	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.
<b>Complex Problem</b>	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.
<b>Deliberative engagement</b>	<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
<b>Engagement scope</b>	<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>
<b>Representative sample</b>	<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>
<b>Spectrum of Participation</b>	<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>
<b>Submission</b>	<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>