

Port Phillip in Partnership:

Our Commitment to Community Engagement

1. Introduction: Why community engagement matters

At the City of Port Phillip, we believe that a vibrant, liveable city is built on the voices of its people. Our approach to community engagement is about more than just gathering feedback – it's about creating genuine partnerships with our community and empowering people to shape the future of their city.

This document outlines how we engage with our community, what guides our actions, and how we ensure everyone has a meaningful opportunity to participate in decisions that affect them.

Our vision is simple: An engaged and empowered community that actively contributes to Council's decision-making.

2. What is community engagement?

Community engagement is a planned, two-way process that invites people to influence and participate in Council decision-making. It's impartial, inclusive, and designed to ensure every interested person has the opportunity to participate.

3. Our commitment

As our city grows and changes, so do the needs and perspectives of our community. We are committed to listening, learning, and adapting, ensuring everyone has a voice in shaping Port Phillip's future.

4. Our guiding values, principles and commitment

Our approach is grounded in the values and principles set out in our Community Engagement Policy. These guide every interaction and set clear expectations for how we work with our community.

Our values are:

- **Inclusivity:** We strive to reach all parts of our diverse community.
- **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 outlined in the Local Government Act relate to our practices in Port Philip.

Community engagement principles, as per the Act	We will...
1. A community engagement process must have a clearly defined objective and scope.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• develop a community engagement plan for every project that needs community engagement.• ensure every engagement plan will have a clearly defined objective and scope, approved by the project sponsor.• actively seek feedback only on aspects of a project that can be influenced.
2. Participants in community engagement must have access to objective, relevant and timely information to inform their participation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• provide clear, impartial, and easy to understand information at the start of an engagement period.
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">• identify and provide engagement opportunities to those most impacted.• actively seek diverse and equitable participation via a range of engagement channels.• track and report on who provides feedback.• use multiple methods and networks to broaden reach and opportunity for participation.

Community engagement principles, as per the Act	We will...
4. Participants in community engagement are entitled to reasonable support to enable meaningful and informed engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • work with our community to identify barriers to participation and reduce these in practical ways. • Consult with our communities to understand their preferred ways of participating and design responsive programs that prioritise accessibility, inclusivity, safety and equity. • offer a range of participation methods, including online and in-person. • engage in culturally safe and respectful ways. • meet people where they are comfortable. • where relevant and feasible, translate information into other languages and 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"> • clearly state the purpose and scope for each engagement program. • communicate what the community can and can't influence. • report back on what we heard from our community in an appropriate timeframe. • clarify that engagement is one of several decision inputs. • report back to the community on outcomes and how feedback has informed the decision.

5. Context: Our Port Phillip communities

We consider what makes our Port Phillip communities unique and tailor our engagement approaches to our local context.

- **Age profile:** Nearly half (48.1%) of residents are aged 25–49, indicating a predominantly young to middle-aged adult population. Engagement strategies should leverage digital channels and flexible participation options to suit working-age adults and young professionals.
- **Cultural diversity:** One third (33.1%) of residents were born overseas, higher than the Victorian average. Engagement materials and events should be culturally sensitive, potentially multilingual, and inclusive of diverse backgrounds.

- **High proportion of renters and apartment dwellers:** Almost half (48.8%) of residents rent their homes. Engagement approaches should consider the mobility and different needs of renters and apartment dwellers, such as providing information via accessible channels.
- **Place of intersecting traditions:** The area we now call Port Phillip has been home to Bunurong, Boonwurrung and Wurundjeri people for over 55,000 years. There are currently 0.5% of the population who identify as Aboriginal and or Torres Strait Islander. Engagement practices should be culturally safe and responsive to our First Nations communities.
- **Household structure:** The average household size is 1.9 people, with a significant number of single-person and small households. Engagement should be accessible to individuals as well as families, and not assume traditional family structures.
- **Socioeconomic diversity:** There are pockets of disadvantage, such as in South Melbourne, alongside areas of relative affluence. Engagement should be designed to reach both higher and lower socioeconomic groups, possibly by partnering with local service providers and using both online and face-to-face methods.
- **Population growth and change:** The population is growing and expected to become more diverse over time. Ongoing engagement efforts should be adaptable and regularly reviewed to respond to demographic shifts.
- **Language and communication:** On fifth (21%) of residents speak a language other than English. The multicultural nature of the community suggests a need for plain English and translated materials, as well as outreach through multicultural community groups.
- **LGBTIQA+ communities:** Port Phillip is home to one of the largest and most vibrant LGBTIQA+ communities in Victoria, with about 26% of adults identifying as LGBTIQA+. The area has a strong history of support and celebration of these communities. Engagement programs should prioritise accessibility, inclusivity, safety, and equity to encourage participation.
- **Digital readiness:** The age profile and urban setting suggest high digital literacy, supporting the use of online engagement platforms, but this should be balanced with non-digital options for older adults and those less digitally connected.

6. How we engage: Our model in action

We use a variety of tools and methods to connect with our community, including:

- **Have Your Say website and digital tools**
- **Advisory Committees of Council**
- **Place-based engagement in local neighbourhoods**
- **Community engagement newsletters**
- **Tailored methods for specific projects and audiences**

Our approach is supported by clear guidelines, templates, and annual plans to ensure consistency and quality.

7. How we developed our approach

Our engagement approach is shaped by:

- Ongoing conversations with our community
- Benchmarking against best practice and other councils
- Reviewing relevant legislation and policies
- Analysing operational data and learning from past experience.

In November and December 2024, we heard from 290 people on what would make it easier for them to share feedback on Council projects. We heard that our community would like a wider range of engagement and communication methods, better promotion, and more inclusive practices, especially for those most impacted by Council decisions.

Our Community Engagement Policy and approach are designed to actively respond to this community input, fostering an engaged and empowered community that directly contributes to Council's decision-making.

8. Our focus areas

Focus area 1: Hearing from a wide variety of people

Objective: Ensure feedback reflects the diversity of our community.

How:

- Offer multiple ways to participate (online, face-to-face, paper surveys, etc.)
- Meet people where they are—at local events, community groups, and public spaces
- Collect demographic data to monitor reach and inclusivity, and adjust programs accordingly.
- Ask how people want to participate and tailor our programs to suit their needs.
- Offer place-based engagement activities in various neighbourhoods, as well as opportunities to meet councillors.

Success looks like: More first-time participation that reflects the diversity of those impacted.

Focus area 2: Promoting opportunities to participate

Objective: Make it easy for everyone to know how and when to get involved.

How:

- Use clear, simple language in all communications
- Promote opportunities through a mix of channels (newsletters, flyers, social media)
- Work with community leaders and networks to spread the word.
- Improve our online community engagement platform so that it's easier to find and use.
- Explore opportunities to build understanding and educate community members on how they can participate in Council decision-making.

Success looks like:

More people are aware of Council's engagement opportunities.

Focus area 3: Making engagement targeted and inclusive

Objective: Remove barriers so everyone can participate, especially those at risk of exclusion.

How:

- Identify who is impacted and who may be excluded, and design engagement accordingly.
- Partner with trusted community leaders and organisations.
- Develop guidelines and trial new methods for engaging underrepresented groups.
- Offer incentives or compensation, where feasible, to encourage participation from specific cohorts.

Success looks like:

Increased participation from groups who have traditionally been less involved.

Focus area 4: Reporting back and closing the loop

Objective: Show how community feedback makes a difference.

How:

- Publish engagement reports summarising what we heard and how it influenced decisions.
- Update the community at key milestones and after decisions are made.
- Explore new ways to share outcomes and next steps, broadening reach.
- Ensure we report back in a timely and effective manner.

Success looks like:

Consistent, timely reporting back on every project.

9. Roles and responsibilities

- **Councillors:** Consider all feedback, respect process impartiality, and make decisions in the community's best interest.
- **Staff:** Plan and deliver engagement that is appropriate and inclusive.
- **Community:** Stay informed, participate, and share opportunities within networks.

10. Monitoring, evaluation, and continuous improvement

We regularly collect and analyse data from a range of sources to assess the effectiveness and quality of our engagement program. This process is aligned with the principles and commitments outlined in our Community Engagement Policy.

Continuous Improvement

- **Annual Reviews:**

Each year, we conduct a thorough review of our engagement activities, outcomes, and processes. This includes analysing data, reviewing feedback from participants and staff, and benchmarking against best practice.

- **Public Reporting:**

We share the results of our monitoring and evaluation through annual public reports, ensuring transparency and accountability to our community.

- **Adaptive Practice:**

Insights from our monitoring and evaluation inform updates to our engagement methods, tools, and training. We remain flexible and responsive, adapting our approach as the needs and preferences of our community evolve.

Our goal is to foster a culture of learning and improvement, ensuring that our engagement is meaningful, effective, and trusted by the community.