

# Finance and Operations Committee

# Agenda

**Date:** Wednesday 27 January 2021

**Time:** 6pm

**Venue:** Civic Centre (Council Meeting Room)  
13 Mair Street, Benalla

Due to COVID-19 social distancing requirements, members of the community are encouraged to watch a live broadcast of the meeting at [www.benalla.vic.gov.au](http://www.benalla.vic.gov.au)

Any person wishing to make a submission under Section 7.3 of the *Governance Rules 2020* should contact the Council by emailing [council@benalla.vic.gov.au](mailto:council@benalla.vic.gov.au) or telephoning Acting Governance Coordinator Tracey Beaton on 03 5760 2600.

In accordance with the *Governance Rules 2020* clause 6.4 an audio recording will be made of proceedings of the meeting.

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# Agenda

<b>Chair</b>	Councillor Justin King	
<b>Councillors</b>	Councillor Danny Claridge Councillor Peter Davis Councillor Don Firth Councillor Bernie Hearn Councillor Punarji Hewa Gunaratne Councillor Gail O'Brien	
<b>In attendance</b>	Dom Testoni	Chief Executive Officer
	Robert Barber	General Manager Corporate
	Jane Archbold	Manager Community
	Tracey Beaton	Acting Governance Coordinator

## Acknowledgement of Country

*We acknowledge the traditional custodians of this land and pay respect to their elders and the elders from other communities who may be here today.*

*We also acknowledge all other peoples who have contributed to the rich diversity of this Country.*

## Apologies

**Recommendation:**

**That the apology/ies be accepted and a leave of absence granted.**

## Confirmation of the Minutes of the Previous Meetings

The minutes have been circulated to Councillors and posted on the Council website [www.benalla.vic.gov.au](http://www.benalla.vic.gov.au) pending confirmation at this meeting.

**Recommendation:**

**That the Minutes of the Finance and Operations Committee held on 2 December 2020 be confirmed as a true and accurate record of the meeting.**

**Governance Matters**

This Committee Meeting is conducted in accordance with the *Local Government Act 2020* and the Benalla Rural City Council *Governance Rules 2020*.

**a) Recording of Council Meetings**

In accordance with the *Governance Rules 2020* clause 6.4 meetings of Council will be audio recorded and made available for public access, with the exception of matters identified as confidential items in the agenda.

**b) Behaviour at meetings**

Members of the public present at a meeting must remain silent during the proceedings other than when specifically invited to address the Committee.

The Chair may remove a person from a meeting for interjecting or gesticulating offensively after being asked to desist, and the chair may cause the removal of any object or material that is deemed by the Chair to be objectionable or disrespectful.

The Chair may call a break in a meeting for either a short time, or to resume another day if the behaviour at the Council table or in the gallery is significantly disrupting the meeting.

**c) Disclosures of Conflict of Interest**

In accordance with the *Local Government Act 2020*, a Councillor must declare any Conflict of Interest pursuant to Section 130 of the Act in any items on this Agenda.

At the time indicated in the agenda, a Councillor with a conflict of interest in an item on that agenda must indicate they have a conflict of interest by clearly stating:

- the item for which they have a conflict of interest;
- whether their conflict of interest is general or material; and
- the circumstances that give rise to the conflict of interest.

Immediately prior to the consideration of the item in which they have a conflict of interest, a Councillor must indicate to the meeting the existence of the conflict of interest and leave the meeting.

**Business****1. Public submissions on any matter**

A person wishing to address the Committee on a matter not listed on the agenda must submit a 'Request to be heard' form by 10am on the day of the meeting. At the time of registering to speak persons must provide a summary of the matter on which they will be speaking. It must not be in contravention of the *Governance Rules 2020*.

Requests to speak will be registered strictly in the order of receipt of the request.

A total of 12 minutes will be allocated for public submissions with a maximum of three minutes to each speaker.

**Recommendation:****That the submission(s) be received.**

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**2. 2020/21 Community Sponsorship Program**

SF/4294

Tom Arnold – Community Development Coordinator

Jane Archbold – Manager Community

**PURPOSE OF REPORT**

The report presents funding applications under the 2020/21 Community Sponsorship Program.

**BACKGROUND**

The Community Sponsorship Program enables local community groups, clubs and organisations to seek funding to increase their capacity to work in partnership with the Council and others to address local needs and enhance the local community.

The Community Sponsorship Program distributes grants up to \$500 on a monthly basis, allowing local clubs, groups and organisations the opportunity to seek funds when the need arises.

**DISCUSSION**

Applications for consideration under the 2020/21 Community Sponsorship Program are detailed in the table below.

<b>Applicant</b>	<b>Details</b>	<b>Amount Requested</b>	<b>Proposed Assistance</b>
Better Benalla Rail	To develop and implement an information program to help ensure that community is fully informed about what is proposed at Benalla Railway Station in relation to works associated with the Inland Rail Project. In particular, BBR wants to highlight the benefits to the community of the line relocation option as opposed to the ATRC's new overpass option.  BBR propose to use the grant to engage in other forms of communication so that everyone is reached, for example, this may be the production of a brochure for distribution to households or the manufacture of banners for use at events such as markets and field days to raise awareness.	\$500	\$500
<b>Total</b>		<b>\$500</b>	<b>\$500</b>

**COUNCIL PLAN 2017-2021 (2020 REVIEW) IMPLICATIONS****Connected and Vibrant Community**

- *Strengthen community capacity, emergency management preparedness, resilience and participation.*
- *Improve community connectedness and respect for diversity.*
- *Encourage community members to be healthy, safe and active.*

**Engaging and Accessible Places and Spaces**

- *Improve accessibility and use of community spaces and places for all.*

**FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

The 2020/21 Budget allocates \$15,000 to the Community Sponsorship Program. To date, \$4,200 has been allocated.

To ensure transparency and accountability, where assistance is provided in meeting the cost of Council facility hire, the payment is reflected in relevant ledger accounts via an internal transaction. For example, if the Council agrees to meet the hire cost of the Benalla Town Hall a credit would be made to the Town Hall income ledger account and a debit made to the Community Support Program expense ledger account.

In addition, recipients of support throughout the financial year are detailed in the Annual Report.

**Recommendation:**

**That a \$500 grant from the 2020/21 Community Sponsorship Program be allocated to Benalla Better Rail.**

### 3. Community Engagement Policy

SF/1604

Tom Arnold – Community Development Coordinator

Jane Archbold – Manager Community

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#### PURPOSE OF REPORT

The report presents the *Benalla Rural City Council Community Engagement Policy* for adoption in accordance with requirements of the *Local Government Act 2020*.

#### BACKGROUND

At its meeting on 22 May 2019, the Council adopted a *Community Engagement Policy*.

Developed by a working group consisting of Council staff from various departments and other stakeholders, the policy provided clear guidelines in a user-friendly format to ensure effective community engagement across the Council.

#### DISCUSSION

The *Local Government Act 2020* (the Act) has reformed community engagement on plans, policies and decision making. The new legislation requires the Council to develop and maintain a Community Engagement Policy. The updated Community Engagement Policy (refer **Appendix 1**) must be adopted by 1 March 2021.

Section 55 of the Act empowers councils to decide on the best methods of engagement on anything that has a significant impact on the whole community (policies, plans, etc.) or on a specific community (play space upgrades; cycle paths, etc.). The main provisions to this new power are that the Council must apply 'deliberative engagement' practices for strategic plans, financial plans and local laws to increase participatory democracy at a local level.

The policy does not apply to statutory processes prescribed by other Acts, such as planning matters covered by the *Planning and Environment Act*.

In accordance with the Act, the policy will:

- a) be capable of being applied to the making of local laws
- b) be capable of being applied in relation to Council's 'budget and policy development'
- c) describe the type and form of community engagement proposed, having regard to the significance and complexity of the matter and the level of resourcing required
- d) include 'deliberative engagement' practices
- e) give effect to the community engagement principles outlines in section 56 of the Act
- f) specify a process for informing the municipal community of the outcome of the community engagement.

While updating the Policy, the Community Development Coordinator participated in several webinars and workshops. Resources accessible on the Victorian Government's online consultation platform *Engage Victoria* were also used to develop the policy and a desktop study of other councils' Community Engagement policies undertaken.

Once adopted, the updated policy will be complemented by the existing *Community Engagement Framework and Toolkit* (refer **Appendix 2**).

#### **COUNCIL PLAN 2017-2021 (2020 REVIEW) IMPLICATIONS**

##### **Connected and Vibrant Community**

- *Strengthen community capacity, emergency management preparedness, resilience and participation.*
- *Improve community connectedness and respect for diversity.*

##### **High Performing Organisation**

- *Strengthen community and stakeholder engagement in planning and decision making.*
- *Provide good governance and responsible management and planning.*

#### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

Costs associated with updating the *Community Engagement Policy* were met from existing budget allocations.

#### **Recommendation**

**That the *Benalla Rural City Council Community Engagement Policy* be adopted.**

## CP 30 Community Engagement

## Appendix 1

<b>Responsible Officer:</b>	Chief Executive Officer
<b>Document type:</b>	Council Policy
<b>Reference:</b>	CP 30
<b>Approved by:</b>	Council
<b>Date approved:</b>	
<b>Date of next review:</b>	

### Policy Objective

The *Local Government Act 2020* (the Act) has an increased focus on embedding robust community engagement practices into Council's strategic planning and decision making.

The Community Engagement Policy outlines the Council's commitment to encourage civic participation and identify the needs of the community through the use of deliberative, effective and inclusive engagement practices.

The policy, in conjunction with the Community Engagement Framework and Toolkit, will guide community engagement across the organisation to support decision-making, build relationships and strengthen communities.

### Policy Scope

Community engagement is an organisation wide responsibility. The community engagement policy applies to all Councillors, Council staff, consultants and contractors acting on behalf of the Council.

### Definition of Community Engagement

Community engagement is often depicted as a continuum, ranging from low-level engagement strategies such as consultation to high-level strategies such as empowerment.

IAP2 specifies five levels of 'best practice' public engagement:

- **Inform** and **Consult** - these first two levels typically occur when the council has already made a decision and wants to either communicate that decision to the community or seek opinions on the decision.

- **Involve** and **Collaborate**—the third and fourth levels involve a two-way flow of information, when the Council shares information within and across stakeholder groups during the decision-making process.
- **Empower**—the fifth level is when the Council and the community jointly make decisions.

Section 56 of the *Local Government Act 2020* sets out that a community engagement policy must:

- be developed in consultation with the municipal community
- give effect to the community engagement principles
- be capable of being applied to the making of the Council's local laws
- be capable of being applied in relation to the Council's budget and policy development
- describe the type and form of community engagement proposed, having regard to the significance and complexity of the matter and the level of resourcing required
- specify a process for informing the municipal community of the outcome of the community engagement
- include deliberative engagement practices which must include and address any matters prescribed by the regulations for the purposes of this paragraph and be capable of being applied to the development of the Community Vision, Council Plan, Financial Plan and Asset Plan and include any other matters prescribed by the regulations.

### **Definition of Deliberative Engagement**

The *Local Government Act 2020* sets out that Councils must include deliberative engagement practices within its community engagement processes. The Act specifically identifies the Community Vision, Council Plan, Financial Plan and Asset Plan as plans and strategies requiring deliberative engagement.

The principals guiding deliberative engagement are to ensure that Council provides the community the opportunity for increased input, collaboration, and co-design into Councils strategies and plans. A deliberative engagement process will ensure that sections of the community most impacted by a proposed plan or strategy are identified and consulted at an appropriate level.

### **Guiding Principles for Community Engagement**

Community Engagement Principals as set out in the *Local Government Act 2020* include:

- a community engagement process must have a clearly defined objective and scope
- participants in community engagement must have access to objective, relevant and timely information to inform their participation
- participants in community engagement must be representative of the persons and groups affected by the matter that is the subject of the community engagement

- participants in community engagement are entitled to reasonable support to enable meaningful and informed engagement
- participants in community engagement are informed of the ways in which the community engagement process will influence Council decision making.

The *Benalla Rural City Council Community Engagement Framework and Toolkit* (the Framework) sets out the processes, tools and resources to achieve this.

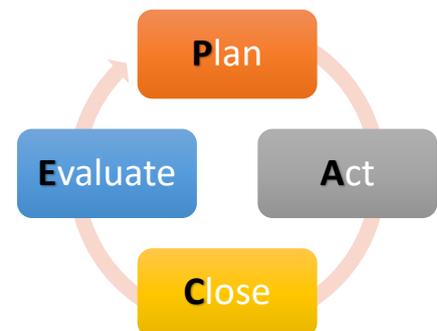
### **We commit to:**

- Open, honest and accountable community engagement.
- Well-planned, coordinated and accessible community engagement.
- Information being shared in a timely and balanced way.
- Assist the community to understand engagement aims, processes and outcomes.
- Treating all community members with respect and valuing diversity, ensuring feedback from a wide variety of people.
- Empowering community members to participate and contribute to decision making.
- Looking for flexible and innovative ways to listen to and engage with community members.
- Being informed and influenced by the results of community engagement.

### **Our Model for Community Engagement**

The Community Engagement Framework articulates an easy to use four step community engagement model to guide and support all Council departments when planning and implementing community engagement.

The **PACE** (plan, act, close, evaluate) community engagement model is informed by best practice evidence for effective community engagement and is underpinned by the Council's community engagement principles.



A summary of the four phases of the PACE model:

#### **1. Plan**

Good planning is crucial. This plan phase steps out the who, what, why, how and when of engagement activities with the community. ***A Community Engagement Plan Template and planning checklist*** has been developed to assist.

## **2. Act**

This is the action or consultation phase where the community engagement plan will be implemented. Key steps in this phase are:

- preparing resources and sharing information
- inviting participation
- conducting consultation activities.

## **3. Close**

Closing the feedback loop is an essential step in the community engagement process. It is important for community members to see that their involvement has made a difference by the Council sharing final decision outcomes with the community.

## **4. Evaluate**

Evaluating community engagement can be critical for informing future work with the community. Undertaking an evaluation will help the Council to improve its community engagement processes, celebrate success and learn from past experiences.

### **Why engage?**

The Council is committed to working with the community and considers community engagement an essential element of good governance.

The IAP2 spectrum of community engagement (inform, consult, involve, collaborate, empower) demonstrates that different levels of community engagement are appropriate for different scenarios or types of issues.

Some community engagement processes are undertaken to share information or support decision making, some are about relationship building whilst others are focused on community capacity building.

For example, there are times when the Council's level of engagement with the community may be limited. In these circumstances, engagement may focus on informing the community of the Council's decisions and actions.

### **Mandatory Engagement**

In certain circumstances the Council is legally required to consult with the community. In these cases, the Council will treat the legally required level of community engagement as the minimum standard.

The *Local Government Act 2020* stipulates that deliberative engagement must be undertaken in the development of the Community Vision, Council Plan, Financial Plan, Asset Plan and planning and financial management including revenue and rate planning. The Policy must also be able to be applied to the development of local laws and policy development.

Community engagement must also be undertaken in line with other relevant legislation and other statutory requirements. This may include but is not limited to:

- *Local Government Act 2020*
- *Road Management Act 2004*
- *Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*
- *Planning and Environment Act 2007*
- *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008*
- *Building Act 1993*
- *Commission for Children and Young People Child Safe Standards.*

The Council will engage the community on key matters that will result in a better outcome for the community and better-informed decisions.

Benalla Rural City Council will work with communities to identify the most appropriate, timely and effective engagement methods to continually improve public participation processes and outcomes.

## **References**

- *Benalla Rural City Council Plan 2017-2021*
- *Benalla Rural City Community Plan 2016-2036*
- *Benalla Rural City Council Community Engagement Framework and Toolkit*



# BENALLA

## RURAL CITY COUNCIL

Appendix 2

BENALLA RURAL CITY COUNCIL

# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FRAMEWORK AND TOOLKIT

MAY 2019

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## About this framework and toolkit

The Benalla Rural City Council Community Engagement Framework outlines Benalla Rural City Council's commitment to genuine and purposeful engagement of the local community. The *Benalla Council Plan 2017-2021* captures this key strategic focus for Council on ***strengthening community and stakeholder engagement in planning and decision making***.

This framework has been developed to guide and support thoughtful community engagement for all levels of decision making across all Council departments. It is based on principles that respect the right of all community members to be informed, consulted, involved and empowered.

The Community Engagement Framework provides Council staff members with a clear, consistent four step approach to community engagement: ***Plan, Act, Close, Evaluate (PACE)***. It also offers an understanding of the different forms of engagement, some helpful tools and an awareness of other available resources.

During the most recent Council plan consultation community members continued to voice their interest in being consulted and involved in matters of importance, verifying the value of an informed community engagement approach by Council.

*"Keep people informed about what Council is doing."*

*"Let the community know about work schedules for roads, footpaths etc."*

*"Keep the Council website up to date."*

## What is community engagement?

Cavaye (2004) defines community engagement as: ***"Mutual communication and deliberation that occurs between government and citizens that allows citizens and government to participate mutually in the formulation of policy and the provision of government services"***.

Community engagement is often depicted as a continuum, ranging from low-level engagement strategies such as consultation to high-level strategies such as empowerment<sup>1</sup>

Community engagement can take many forms and the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) has developed the 'IAP2 public participation spectrum' to help describe the public participation process.

IAP2 specifies five levels of public engagement:

- **Inform and Consult**—these first two levels typically occur when a council has already made a decision and wants to either communicate that decision to the community, or seek opinions on the decision.

		INCREASING IMPACT ON THE DECISION 				
		INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GOAL		To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure 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.
	PROMISE TO THE PUBLIC	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.

- **Involve and Collaborate**—the third and fourth levels involve a two-way flow of information, when a council shares information within and across stakeholder groups during the decision-making process.
- **Empower**—the fifth level is when the council and the community jointly make decisions.

<sup>1</sup> Arnstein, 1969; Cavaye, 2004; Doherty & Beaton, 2000; Lenihan, 2009; IAP2, 2014; Tamarack Institute, 2003; USDHHS, 2011.

## The benefits of community engagement

Community engagement is a core responsibility of Local Government. At times this responsibility to seek community input is deemed as 'statutory consultation' and at other times community views are sought to support balanced decision making.

There are many benefits for community engagement in the local government context with evidence highlighting that a planned approach will lead to:

- better project and service delivery outcomes
- improved quality of policies being developed
- more resilient relationships with the community
- enhanced reputation and confirmation if council is meeting local needs
- increased understanding of community issues
- better shared partnerships and networks
- a better understanding of complex issues and emerging issues
- opportunities for a diversity of voices to be heard; and
- increased capacity for communities to identify priorities for themselves and own the Solutions.



## Our commitment to community engagement

The Benalla Rural City Council is committed to engaging the community in a meaningful way. We will provide clear, objective, user-friendly information and offer opportunities for community members to participate in decision making that affects them.

In 2019 Benalla Rural City Council adopted a Community Engagement Policy.

The policy states:

*“Benalla Rural City Council is committed to working with the community and considers community engagement an essential element of good governance. The Council will engage the community on key matters which affect them and whenever it believes that community engagement will result in a better outcome for the community and better-informed decisions.”*

The Community Engagement Framework builds on this policy, bringing it to life as a working document, supported by the toolkit.

### Legislative requirements

At times, Council is legislatively and/or legally required to engage with the community. In these cases, we will treat the legally required level of community engagement as the minimum standard.

Undertaking community engagement beyond the legally required levels will occur:

- where community input can improve a project or enhance decision making
- to help identify community needs and aspirations
- in response to community interest, and
- where Council resolves to consult the community.

Community engagement must be undertaken in line with relevant legislation and other statutory requirements. This may include but is not limited to:

- *Local Government Act 2020*
- *Road Management Act 2004*
- *Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*
- *Planning and Environment Act 2007*
- *Health and Wellbeing Act 2008*
- Commission for Children and Young People Child Safe Standards.

## **Our community engagement principles**

The Benalla Rural City Council's engagement principles have been informed by the International Association of Public Participation's (IAP2) core values. The following principles will underpin how we work with the community:

### **We commit to:**

- **Open, honest and accountable community engagement.**
- **Well-planned and accessible community engagement**
- **Information being shared in a timely and balanced way so the community understands engagement aims, processes and outcomes.**
- **Treating all community members with respect and valuing diversity, ensuring feedback from a wide variety of voices.**
- **Empowering community members to participate, build capacity and contribute to decision making.**
- **Being flexible and looking for new and innovative ways to listen to and engage with community members.**

## Who is OUR community?

Benalla Rural City is a diverse municipality with 13,861 residents (ABS Census 2016) and a range of community groups, businesses, organisations and key stakeholders.

Benalla Rural City



Quick facts about the Benalla municipality that may be worth considering when planning for community engagement:

- The median age is 49 years
- 16 per cent of the population are aged 0-14 years
- 26 per cent of residents are aged 65 years and over
- There are 3,681 families
- 2 per cent of residents are from Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander descent
- 17 per cent of households were both employed, working full time hours
- 12 per cent of residents' highest level of educational attainment was year 9 or below.
- 6 per cent of the population is unemployed
- 17 per cent of families are one parent families
- 29 per cent of households had a weekly income of less than \$650
- 6 per cent of households do not have a car
- 22 per cent of households do not have access to the internet at home.

Source: ABS Census Quickstats 2016.

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## Ways we engage our community

The Benalla Rural City Council actively engages the community to share information and consult on matters of importance in a wide variety of ways, such as:

- Benalla Rural City Council interactive website using polls, surveys and have your say
- Social media (Twitter, Instagram, Facebook etc.)
- Council publications
- Stories through the local newspaper
- Media releases
- Local radio/television
- Adverts
- Community meetings/forums
- Community surveys
- Telephone questionnaires
- Public Council meetings
- Direct mails/emails
- Feedback forums
- Postcards
- Open house sessions
- Stakeholder workshops
- Advisory and reference groups
- Specialist groups
- Friends of groups
- Kitchen table conversations
- Guest speakers
- Youth researchers.

We are committed to regularly reviewing our methods of community engagement and working to ensure that our approaches are effective, current and fitting for the local community.

## Our community engagement highlights

The Benalla Rural City Council has a long history of community engagement; a few examples of successful community engagement techniques are:

### ***The Youth Strategy Project***

In 2013 the Benalla Rural City Council undertook extensive community consultation to develop a whole of community Youth Strategy that considered the needs and aspirations of young people aged 12-24 who lived, worked or studied in the Benalla Rural City.

A strong youth voice was crucial for writing an informed plan that genuinely captured youth needs and aspirations. Partnerships with Benalla P-12 College and FCJ College were formed to support engagement activities and youth researchers.

### ***Community Engagement***

The Youth Strategy project engaged **youth researchers** to assist with developing surveys and focus group questions and to advise and assist Councils Youth Worker and Project Consultant on how to reach a wide range of young people. This approach was seen as crucial for ensuring that language was youth friendly and questions were relevant.

Consultation/engagement occurred over six months using the following methods:

- An online youth surveys
- Social media posts
- Ensign articles
- School newsletter articles
- Focus groups with young people, key service providers and Councillors
- Data presentations to youth researchers
- Feedback sought on Youth Strategy Summary and Final Report.

A total of 995 youth voices were captured over the length of the project.

### ***Successes***

- School partnerships were a very effective way of supporting youth engagement.
- Benalla Youth Service Providers Network (BYSPN) members also assisted the project to make connections to school aged young people who had disengaged from school.
- Youth researchers were invaluable- their guidance and suggestions were crucial to the project.
- Having a mix of focus groups to allow for rich interactive conversations.
- Taking the advice of youth researchers and ensuring that the survey wasn't too long or 'wordy'.
- The online survey was an effective and inexpensive way of reaching many young people.
- Testing the survey before launching it was crucial- crucial changes were made after testing.

## **Challenges**

- Engaging the 18-25-year-old age group was a challenge.
- Ensuring 'harder to reach' young people's voices were heard.
- Fitting in with busy school scheduling required time and flexibility.

## **Learnings**

- Always, test your engagement tools (e.g. surveys, focus group questions etc. with people first and ensure that testers haven't been involved in the design).
- Working with schools requires time- they are busy places so get in touch asap and allow enough time.
- Young people are capable and have so much to offer; engaging young people in a collaborative way provides learnings for project staff and builds the capacity and skills of local young people.
- Reward and recognise youth volunteers wherever possible (we nominated the activity for an award and provided young people with gift certificates).

## ***The Major Capital Projects Community Engagement Program***

*The Major Capital Projects Community Engagement Program* was designed to involve the community in the decision-making process to ensure that issues and concerns were obtained, understood and considered. The community were invited to rank the importance of a range of suggested capital projects and nominate other potential major capital projects.

Council passed the following resolution: That prior to the Council committing to any major capital projects, the Council engage in broad-based community consultation to determine community attitude to proposed projects.

Consultation was crucial in informing the Infrastructure Strategy which underpinned Council's 10-year Strategic Resource Plan.

## ***Community Engagement***

A community newsletter was developed to provide information to the community on non-negotiable and discretionary projects.

A community wide survey was also developed, and 6409 newsletters and surveys were posted to properties across the Rural City. A total of 914 residents completed a survey indicating a 14 per cent overall response rate.

Survey results were shared broadly with the community via a community newsletter mail-out.

### ***Successes***

- Council developed information on each potential project so the community could be well informed about potential projects (Council had knowledge of projects/needs so informing the community was a crucial step).
- A mail out ensured that all residents were reached.
- Residents were able to vote on specified projects AND they were also invited to share any new ideas.
- Results from the consultation were mailed out in Councils newsletter, ensuring that the feedback loop was closed.

### ***Challenges***

- 14 per cent of the community engaged by returning a survey, would have been good to have heard from more residents.
- There was some criticism from community on the format of sharing information on projects to pick-some residents shared that they felt they were being told what to do.

### ***Learnings***

- Present information in an easy to read format.
- Use pictures where appropriate.
- Spend time to think through the engagement process-don't rush it.
- Test your surveys with others before rolling them out.
- "Do it properly if you are going to do it".

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## Community engagement barriers

Communities or individuals can face a number of barriers that make engagement with Local Government challenging or unappealing such as:

- lack of confidence
- limited money
- limited literacy and numeracy skills
- mental or physical health issues
- limited mobility
- issues related to gender, sexuality or race
- values and beliefs
- language barriers
- age barriers
- lack of transport
- lack of internet access
- lack of social support
- time constraints
- insecure housing/homelessness
- caring responsibilities
- work commitments
- limited interest in the subject
- consultation 'fatigue'
- community divisions
- lack of understanding about what the information is being used for
- lack of feedback from previous involvement in engagement activities.

Incorrect assumptions made by government workers about how people best participate in engagement can also create significant barriers to engagement.

Apathy towards Local Government or a particular issue, a previous negative experience of engagement, and/or consultation fatigue are also additional factors that affect participation in engagement opportunities.

## Encouraging participation for all community members

A frequent challenge of community engagement work is how to ensure that those community members whose voices are heard are representative of the community. For a variety of reasons, certain community members may be harder to engage when seeking input or involvement.

The ***Capire Inclusive Community Engagement Toolkit*** identifies some of the groups that are often considered as 'hard to reach' due to their respective barriers to engagement:

- Homeless people
- Indigenous
- People experiencing family violence
- Older migrants
- Children
- The bereaved
- People experiencing trauma
- Drug and alcohol affected
- Young people Teenagers
- People in prison
- Professionals
- Youth offenders
- Residents in public housing
- People who have caring responsibilities
- Single parents
- Parents at schools
- People with health issues
- Fathers or mothers
- Newly arrived people
- Wheelchair users
- Hearing impaired
- Speech impaired
- Older people
- People living in rural or regional areas
- Transient people
- International students
- Temporary residents
- Business owner
- Same sex attracted
- People with a disability
- Vision impaired
- People with an intellectual disability

It is important to note that not everyone in the named groups would always be hard to reach, the circumstances for each individual may be different depending on their past experiences of engagement and the topic of focus.

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## **Our future challenges and opportunities**

The *Benalla Rural City Council Community Plan (2016-2036)* highlights current and future community challenges and opportunities that may be worth considering when undertaking community engagement.

### **Limited population growth**

Benalla Rural City has experienced slow population growth since 2000. This affects social networks, services, jobs growth and business opportunities. A well-planned approach to population growth is required, including agreement on the level of growth and planning to manage growth in such a way that living standards and our values are protected and enhanced.

### **Young people**

Young people are our future. Factors such as online communication, digital technology advances, cultural diversity and globalisation will reshape Benalla Rural City's future. Encouraging and empowering young people to build their skills and knowledge as well as good citizenship will be important to ensure continued youth involvement and participation.

Creating a community that is inclusive, socially cohesive and welcoming will build resilience and promote opportunities for young people living in Benalla Rural City.

Benalla Rural City has higher than average rates of disengagement from education and early school leaving. Re-engaging young people through education, employment and training is crucial for a thriving and prosperous community.

### **Ageing population**

We respect and value our ageing residents. They are vital to the prosperity of our community through their skills and experience, volunteering, mentoring and wisdom. It is also acknowledged that our ageing population will require access to health, social and accommodation services to meet their changing needs.

Benalla Rural City is considered a great place for older people to live and retire due to its proximity to Melbourne and good provision of health care and aged services. It is therefore important to find ways to plan and provide for adequate services, facilities and the workforce to support our older residents.

### **Population turnover**

There is a turnover of people coming and going across all age groups within the municipality. It is important to ensure that the community is as vibrant and attractive as possible, helping to encourage people to come, stay and return to Benalla Rural City. Population turnover creates opportunities for communities to re-invigorate themselves through innovation, new ideas and fresh community interaction.

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## **Vulnerable communities**

Benalla Rural City has significant levels of disadvantage, identified in the latest “Dropping Off the Edge: The Distribution of Disadvantage in Australia” Vinson Report.

The challenge for Benalla Rural City is to continue to address these levels of disadvantage. By working together, we need to consider opportunities to support our vulnerable residents and look at options to revitalise and strengthen our rural communities, many of which are at risk of decline.

## **Climate change**

By 2030 Benalla Rural City will experience more extreme weather events such as fire, drought and flood due to the impacts of climate change. Benalla Rural City can also expect warmer average annual temperatures, an increase in the number of days over 30°C and a reduction in the total average annual rainfall.

All these changes will impact on local community, infrastructure, agriculture and the environment. Climate change adaptation and mitigation is essential to managing risks and protecting the economy and the resilience of our communities.

## **Global economy**

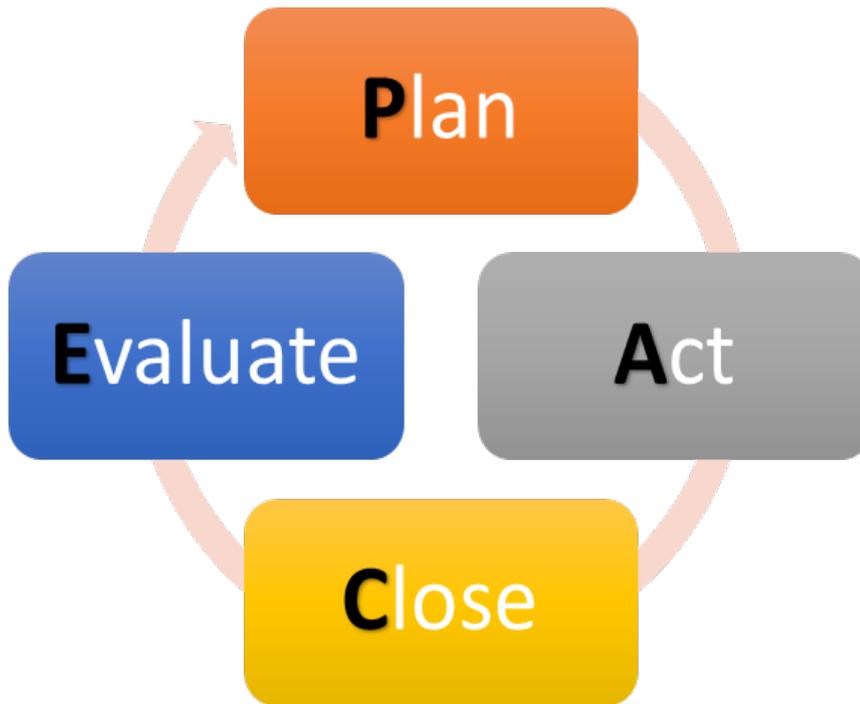
Benalla Rural City is exposed to the effects of international markets and economic cycles. A diverse economy with ongoing investment and good decision-making will help us manage both the challenges and opportunities this presents.

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## Our model for community engagement

An easy to use four step community engagement model has been developed to guide and support all council departments when planning and implementing community engagement.

The **PACE** (plan, act, close, evaluate) community engagement model is informed by best practice evidence for effective community engagement and is underpinned by Councils community engagement principles.



Each step of the ***PACE Community Engagement Model*** is supported by a range of tools, templates and checklists that can be adjusted and adapted as required.

## Step one: Plan

Planning is the first step to consider when thinking about inviting community participation/feedback. Good planning is crucial and will assist you to consider the who, what, why, how, when of your engagement activities with the community.

**A Community Engagement Plan Template** has been developed to assist you with your planning (see appendices section).



### What

Write down a description of the issue you are wanting to engage the community about. What is it all about? What level of community engagement are you planning for-**Inform, Consult, Involve, Collaborate, Empower** (see IAP2 levels on page four). What is the key information relating to the issue that the community should understand? Crucially, what level of impact does the issue have on the community?

### Why

Think about why you are seeking to engage the community. Why is it important? Is community engagement essential?

### Who

Consider who the key stakeholders are relating to the issue? Who does this issue impact the most? Are they people from a certain community, or a certain age group or culture or are they a special interest group (e.g. farmers, business owners, parents of young children)? Sometimes engagement can focus on a narrow section of the community and other times it may include diverse sections of the community. Thinking through who it is important to hear from and any barriers to involvement that they might have is crucial for your engagement planning.

### How

How are you going to engage the community? There are a number of methods that can be used to engage community, it is worthwhile thinking about the methods that would work best with the level of community engagement you are planning for (remember to consider the level of impact for the community).

International Association for Participation (IAP2) Public Participation Spectrum				
Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Newsletter	Survey	Face to face meetings	Steering committees/advisory groups	Ballots
Radio	Focus Groups	Workshops	Working groups	Taskforce groups
Newspaper	Interviews	Polling		
Media Releases	Community meetings			
Mail-outs	Kitchen Table			
Flyers	Conversations			
Social Media	Website			
Website	SMS			
Banners/Signage				

Consider who might help you, will you require any assistance? Would it be beneficial to partner with a community organisation or another Council department?

## Assess the level of community impact

The IAP2 spectrum of public participation takes account of the level of public impact of a service, project or activity. Added to this is the level of risk or significance that a service, project or activity may have for the organisation or community.

Once the level of impact has been identified using the guidelines below, the extent of community engagement can be better defined. Generally speaking, the higher the risk, and/or the more significant the impact, the greater the extent of community engagement.

Level of Impact	Definition	Extent of Engagement			
		Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate
<b>Low</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Minimum level of impact for community</li> <li>• Low level of risk</li> <li>• Little risk of controversy</li> <li>• Little interest likely from the community</li> <li>• Outcome may reflect a small change to service or activity</li> </ul>	✓	✓		
<b>Medium</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reasonable level of impact for the community</li> <li>• Medium level of complexity</li> <li>• Likely to raise interest, debate and varying views from the community</li> <li>• Outcome is likely to reflect some change or reduction to a service or activity</li> </ul>	✓	✓	✓	
<b>High</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Potential for significant level of impact for community</li> <li>• High level of interest from the community</li> <li>• More likely risk of controversy or conflict</li> <li>• Outcome will reflect change or loss of a service or activity</li> </ul>	✓	✓	✓	✓

**Budget is an important consideration** when planning for what methods you might use. Some methods are more time intensive and costly and might not compliment the available budget and timeframes. Consider what additional resources you might need to assist you with reaching the community, you may require a budget for catering, advertising, printing and or venue hire.

## When

Thinking through when your engagement might happen is important. The 'when' might be influenced by your project timelines, so planning when and allowing enough time is an important consideration. Rushed engagement can sometimes result in community members feeling like engagement is 'tokenistic' so being mindful of timeframes is vital.

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It is also important to consider things like:

- **The best time of day/week/month/year to engage:** this can be important if you are targeting certain groups e.g. small business owners may prefer a breakfast or evening meeting and engaging with farmers at busy times e.g. during harvest may result in lowered involvement as would surveying students during exam times or conducting consultations in December/January.
- **How often:** if you have a steering/working group how often they will meet should be planned for early on.
- **When you might give feedback back to the community:** a common community complaint is that they don't know what has happened as a result of their involvement. Consider when the best time to report back progress such as survey or poll results or any decisions made might be and plan for this.

## Checklist

### Step one: plan

#### *Have you?*

- Written down and thought through the issue/topic you are wanting to engage the community about?
- Considered the level of impact the issue has on the community?
- Confirmed what resources (budget) you have available?
- Created a Community Engagement Plan? (see template section)
- Captured a list of key stakeholders- who does this issue concern the most?  
*\*\*You can use the Stakeholder Analysis Template to assist you with this.*
- Identified and planned for any engagement barriers?
- Considered the range of engagement methods and decided on approaches?
- Thought about who might help you? Would partnerships be beneficial?
- Thought about your available timeframes and the best times to engage community?

## Step two: Act

Once your **Community Engagement Plan** is completed you are ready to begin community engagement. This is the action or consultation phase where you will implement your community engagement plan.

### 1. Prepare resources and share information

Write up relevant key information that you would like to share with the community- this can be through a range of mediums such as:

- media releases
- one-page flyers
- postcards
- online information
- newsletters
- emails
- phone calls.

Sticking to a few key simple statements often works well. Consider the audience for the information and write using easy English without jargon wherever possible.

If your engagement is over a period of time, consider when the best time to share information might be and what your key messages might be at each point.

### 2. Invite participation

Invite community participation, this can be done in various ways depending on the methods and level of engagement that you are looking for:

**Inform**

**Consult**

**Involve**

**Collaborate**

**Empower**

Invitations to participate can be:

- a phone call or email inviting involvement through an advisory group or steering committee
- a group email forwarded through key stakeholder networks
- a targeted email or written invitation for a focus group or workshop
- a community wide invitation in the local newspaper
- a community wide invitation via community newsletters; and
- invitations via social media.

### 3. Conduct consultation activities

Use your community engagement plan to assist in guiding your consultation activities. A range of consultation methods are listed below; ensure that you 'mix it up' and use a variety of print, electronic and face to face methods.

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It is helpful to have an idea of what success would look like in terms of your engagement. Is there a certain number of community members or groups that you would like to engage?

Don't forget to consider if internal or external partners should be activated to work together with you. Effective consultations are:

- timely
- community friendly
- flexible; and
- responsive to community needs.

Don't forget that collecting feedback on draft documents is consultation also.

## Consultation methods

Method	Description	Benefits	Limitations
<b>Surveys</b>	A structured consultation process where people respond to a set of written or verbal questions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Can reach broad numbers of people</li> <li>▪ Can be posted online</li> <li>▪ Anonymous</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ No social interaction</li> <li>▪ Not good for people with literacy issues</li> <li>▪ Surveys typically have low response rates</li> </ul>
<b>Interviews</b>	A face to face or phone discussion based on pre-determined questions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Easier to discuss sensitive issues</li> <li>▪ Creates a rapport</li> <li>▪ Can be comfortable</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Can be intimidating for some</li> <li>▪ No opportunity for group discussion</li> <li>▪ Time intensive (especially in rural areas)</li> </ul>
<b>Focus groups</b>	A small to medium group of people responding to an issue or group of questions. The aim is to get feedback; not make decisions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Interactive discussion</li> <li>▪ Can involve a diverse range of people</li> <li>▪ Community facilitators can be trained to assist</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Not a good way to discuss sensitive or personal issues</li> </ul>
<b>Forums</b>	People coming together to discuss and decide on issues. Forums can be for people from a mix of backgrounds or can be for a specific interest group.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Can reach a broad range of people</li> <li>▪ Provides social interaction</li> <li>▪ Can develop skills of community members in public speaking and facilitation</li> <li>▪ Empowering</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Time intensive with detailed planning required</li> <li>▪ Not a good way to discuss sensitive or personal issues</li> </ul>
<b>Reference or advisory groups</b>	A group of people providing feedback, support and advice back to a project or organisation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Enables regular and direct feedback</li> <li>▪ Incorporates community perspectives</li> <li>▪ Develops community skills in meetings, group work and communication</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Requires time, planning and support</li> <li>▪ Formal committee approaches can be a deterrent for some community members</li> </ul>
<b>Internet discussions</b>	Using the internet to post a survey, hold a discussion or request feedback.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Can reach large numbers of people</li> <li>▪ Allows for anonymity</li> <li>▪ Caters for geographic isolation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Depends on people having internet access</li> <li>▪ Requires some IT knowledge/skill</li> </ul>

Method	Description	Benefits	Limitations
<b>Kitchen table conversations</b>	A kitchen table discussion is a small, informal meeting that takes place in someone's home or a local cafe. Kitchen table discussions are hosted by volunteers who want to take part.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Interactive discussion</li> <li>▪ Can involve a diverse range of people</li> <li>▪ Community facilitators can be trained to assist</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Requires time, planning and support</li> <li>▪ Must be comfortable with group conversations</li> </ul>
<b>Sms text consultations</b>	Sending out text messages on mobile phones asking for opinions on an issue or question.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Large numbers of people can be targeted</li> <li>▪ Takes the consultation to people</li> <li>▪ Quick and easy to do</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Does not include people without access to a mobile phone</li> <li>▪ Access to mobile phone numbers is required</li> <li>▪ Difficult to define target groups</li> <li>▪ No personal contact</li> </ul>
<b>Public meetings</b>	Public meetings bring diverse groups of stakeholders together for a specific purpose. Public meetings are held to engage a wide audience in information sharing and discussion.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Introduces a project or issue to a community</li> <li>▪ Large numbers of people can be targeted</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Difficult to get broad community representation</li> <li>▪ Can be difficult to hear from all members</li> <li>▪ Strong voices can often dominate</li> <li>▪ Tricky to facilitate</li> </ul>
<b>Open houses</b>	An open house involves using a venue as a drop-in centre allowing people to gather information and share their views.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Can be interactive</li> <li>▪ Can reach a broad range of people</li> <li>▪ Creates a rapport</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Requires time, planning and support</li> </ul>
<b>Pop-up's</b>	Pop-up consultations are mobile and can be moved around targeting various communities or locations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Creates a visible presence</li> <li>▪ Can capture a diverse range of voices</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Not a good way to discuss sensitive or personal issues</li> </ul>
<b>Facebook polling</b>	Two question polls can be added to Facebook pages to invite feedback.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Can reach a broad range of people</li> <li>▪ Is anonymous</li> <li>▪ Quick and easy to create</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Requires Facebook membership and internet</li> <li>▪ Doesn't gather rich information</li> </ul>
<b>Postcards</b>	Postcards can invite written feedback on a range of questions and also provide information.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Can reach a broad range of people</li> <li>▪ Is anonymous</li> <li>▪ Large numbers of people can be targeted</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ No social interaction</li> <li>▪ Not good for people with literacy issues</li> <li>▪ Can have low response rates if not promoted effectively</li> </ul>

## Consultation tips:

- Be Flexible- be open to trying new things or tweaking your methods as you go- your plan does not need to be written in stone and should be adjusted to suit.
- Use Easy English- if your audience is the whole community easy English will support understanding across a range of backgrounds. Avoid jargon wherever possible, keep it simple and not too lengthy.
- Mix it up- rarely does one consultation tool work for everyone, using a mix of methods- e.g. survey, focus group, interviews, street pop-up's will support you to access a range of people in the community.
- Be mindful of your available resourcing- work within your budget to design your community engagement.
- Consider community expectations- be careful not to create unreasonable community expectations through your consultation. Be clear at the start with community members about resources, decision making and what you can and can't do.
- Always 'test' your tools- it is best practice to test your surveys, interview questions, focus group questions etc. Testing can help to ensure that your language is right and people understand what you are asking or sharing. Choose people who haven't been involved and ask them for feedback- they could be community members, young people or work colleagues.
- Timing is important- avoiding holiday times and consider what times might work best for differ cohorts e.g. young people, working families, single parents, farmers etc.
- Accessibility: all venues and information/content provided at consultation sessions needs to be accessible to those with a disability.
- Contact details: provide an opportunity for participants to share their contact details so they can be updated on the project and notified of the outcome. Ensure that participants understand how the information they share will be used and stored.

---

## ***Checklist***

### ***Step two: Act***

#### ***Have you?***

- Identified key stakeholders- who does this issue concern the most? (see template section)
- Chosen the engagement methods that will best fit the level of engagement you are after?
- Ensured accessible community venues?
- Tested your engagement tools e.g. surveys, focus group questions, written materials
- Been flexible in your approach, and adjusted your consultation if needed?
- Heard from the range of voices that are impacted by this issue/topic?

## Step three: Close

Closing the loop is an important step in the community engagement process. When community members can see that their involvement made a difference, they are more likely to get involved in future engagement.

It is common after a consultation for community members to wonder:

- What happened to my idea?
- Did you listen to what I said?
- Did my involvement make a difference?
- What even happened with that issue/decision?

Closing the feedback loop is one of the most important elements of the engagement process and without it you cannot show real respect for your participants' contribution.

There are a number of ways that you can close the feedback loop:

- **Share consultation results** in community friendly ways e.g. via social media, local newsletters, newspapers or face to face via presentations to key groups.
- Ensure that any **decisions made are publicised broadly** and participants who shared their contact details or were involved in collaborative ways i.e. through steering groups are contacted directly.
- When communicating about final decisions **provide a summary of the feedback and a clear rationale for the decision.**
- For issues of high community interest with high public impact **consider developing a summary of feedback received through the consultation.**
- Share any key documents broadly.
- Consider if a community celebration or launch might be appropriate.

The Council developed an interactive feedback session for youth researchers involved in the 2013 Youth Strategy consultation. Instead of a 'formal' presentation of the consultation findings, a quick guessing game style session was developed for each of the schools. A summary document of the Youth Strategy was also developed ensuring youth friendliness.

---

## Checklist

### Step three: Close

#### *Have you?*

- Broadly publicised any decisions made?
- Developed community friendly ways to share community consultation results?
- Summarised feedback in a community friendly way?
- Shared key documents/reports with community?
- Met together with key stakeholders e.g. project partners, advisory groups, steering committees to review findings?

---

## Step four: Evaluate

Community development workers often talk about the importance of evaluating and learning from each community engagement activity. Communities are not static; they are ever changing and what worked well with one group in a community may not work well at all with another.

Evaluating your engagement of community can be critical for informing future work with community. Ask yourself:

1. What worked well? What made this engagement a success, what learnings should I remember for next time?
2. What didn't work so well? What cautions should I remember for next time?
3. What can I do next time to improve my engagement with community?

When a community engagement activity is significant/involved it may be useful to develop a quick anonymous survey to invite feedback from key stakeholders on what worked well, what didn't work so well and suggestions to improve engagement activities in the future (see appendices section for example survey questions).

Undertaking an evaluation will help the Council to better improve its community engagement processes, celebrate success and learn from past experiences.

---

## Checklist

### Step four: evaluate

#### *Have you?*

- Thought through the process and reflected on successes and challenges?  
*\*\* See sample evaluation questions in appendices section*
- Asked others who were involved for their feedback?
- Considered if a survey of key stakeholders/community members would be appropriate?
- Captured your key learnings to share with colleagues?

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## **Appendix: Engagement tools**

## Community Engagement Plan Template

#	Consultation Method	Target Group	Timeframe	Resources Required	Partners	Comments/Details	Strengths/Limitations
	e.g. survey, open house, focus group etc.	e.g. parents, all residents, businesses, young people, farmers etc.				e.g. A series of workshops will be planned to capture key stakeholder and community input and to share project information.	Surveys are inexpensive and can reach many but can typically have a low response rate.

## Stakeholder Analysis Template

Stakeholder Group	Level of Impact (low, medium, high)	What is important to the stakeholder?	Potential value contribution to the issue	Potential threat to the issue	Strategy for engaging the stakeholder	Contact person

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## Sample Evaluation Questions

These questions may be useful to consider when evaluating your community engagement. You may ask these questions of yourself, other colleagues or key stakeholders/steering group.

- Were the right community members at the table/involved?
- Was there enough time for the community to participate and respond?
- Did the engagement process allow for all voices to be heard and equally valued?
- Were consultations accessible? e.g. time, venue, method
- Did community members involved inform the development of the consultation plan?
- Did you hear from the range of voices that would have been affected by the issue?
- Were 'hard to reach' and under-represented stakeholders engaged?
- Was the response rate you were aiming for reached?
- Was the budget adequate?
- What engagement techniques were most effective?
- What engagement techniques were least effective?
- Did community members build their own capacity through their involvement?
- What would you do again and why?
- What would you be cautious about doing again and why?
- Are there skills that you would like to further build to improve future community engagement?



# **BENALLA**

## **RURAL CITY COUNCIL**

Benalla Rural City Council  
2019

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#### 4. Mayoral and Councillor Allowances

SF/2485-06

Dom Testoni – Chief Executive Officer

##### PURPOSE OF REPORT

The report commences the statutory review of allowances payable to the Mayor and Councillors.

##### BACKGROUND

At its meeting on 18 November 2020, the Council resolved:

1. *That a review of Mayoral and Councillor allowances start in February 2021 with a public submission process under section 223 of the Local Government Act 1989, should a determination not be made by the Victorian Independent Remuneration Tribunal.*
2. *That, pending the outcome of the review, the Mayoral allowance be fixed at \$61,312 per annum plus a sum equivalent to the Superannuation Guarantee contribution.*
3. *That, pending the outcome of the review, Councillor allowances be fixed at \$20,523 per annum plus a sum equivalent to the Superannuation Guarantee contribution.*
4. *That, pending the outcome of the review, the level of allowances be adjusted as required by the Minister for Local Government or an Order in Council published in the Victoria Government Gazette, or a determination from the Victorian Independent Remuneration Tribunal.*

##### DISCUSSION

Under the *Local Government Act 2020* (LGA 2020) the Mayor and Councillors are to be paid allowances within ranges determined by an external body. The level of allowances paid within these set ranges is to be determined by Council resolution. The Mayor and the Councillors may each choose to receive their full allowance, a specified part or take no allowance.

The external body responsible for determining allowance ranges has historically been the Minister for Local Government. Under the LGA 2020 this is transitioning to the Victorian Independent Remuneration Tribunal.

Until the Tribunal has made its first determination, the LGA 2020 specifies that allowances are to remain as previously governed by the relevant provisions of the *Local Government Act 1989* (LGA 1989).

In accordance with the LGA 1989, the Council needs to determine the levels at which Mayoral and Councillor allowances are to be paid within the first six months following the general election.

Proposed allowances are to be open to submissions from the public prior to being adopted with allowances paid at these levels from the time of the Council resolution determining them. Submissions on proposed allowances will be called for in accordance with section 223 of the LGA 1989.

Allowances will be reviewed again when the first determination of the Victorian Independent Remuneration Tribunal has been made.

### ***COUNCIL PLAN 2021-2024 (2020 REVIEW) IMPLICATIONS***

#### **High Performing Organisation**

- Strengthen community and stakeholder engagement in planning and decision making.
- Provide good governance and responsible management and planning.
- We are compliant with our legislative and risk management responsibilities.

#### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

Municipalities are divided into three categories based on their income and population. Benalla Rural City Council is a 'Category 1' Council subject to the allowances below:

Councillors: Between \$8,833 and \$21,049

Mayor: Up to \$62,884.

Allowances are also subject to the addition of the equivalent of the Superannuation Guarantee (currently 9.5 per cent) and the reimbursement of any necessary out-of-pocket expenses councillors incur while performing Council-related duties.

The Benalla Rural Council Mayor (\$61,312 per annum) and Councillors (\$20,523 per annum) are currently paid at a 2.5 per cent reduction to the maximum allowances payable. An amount equivalent to the reduction (approximately \$5,000 annually) has been donated to an appropriate charity or project determined by the Council.

Allowances are paid monthly in advance with provision made within the Council's budget to fund Mayoral and Councillor allowances and equivalent Superannuation Guarantee contributions.

**Recommendation:**

**That the Finance and Operations Committee, acting under its delegated authority of the Council, resolve:**

- 1. That public notice be given that the Council has determined to set the Mayoral allowance at the maximum level for a Category 1 Council (\$62,884 per annum) plus a sum equivalent to the Superannuation Guarantee Contribution.**
- 2. That public notice be given that the Council has determined to set Councillor allowances at the maximum level for a Category 1 Council (\$21,049 per annum) plus a sum equivalent to the Superannuation Guarantee Contribution.**
- 3. That public submissions on the review of Mayoral and Councillor allowances be invited in accordance with section 223 of the *Local Government Act 1989* for a period of at least 28 days commencing Wednesday 3 February 2021.**
- 4. That public submissions on the review of Mayoral and Councillor allowances be heard at the Finance and Operations Committee meeting on Wednesday 31 March 2021.**
- 5. That the review of Mayoral and Councillor allowances be finalised at the Council meeting on Wednesday 14 April 2021.**

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## 5. Councillors' Expenses for the quarter ended 31 December 2020

SF/1557

Gail Brown – Executive Assistant to the CEO, Mayor and Councillors

### PURPOSE OF REPORT

The report details expenditure associated with Councillors' mobile phone usage, attendance at professional development courses and conferences and seminars, and reimbursement of expenses incurred during the quarter ended 31 December 2020.

### Councillors' Information and Communication Expenses

Councillors' information and communication expenses are detailed in the table below:

Councillor	2020/2021 Q1	2020/2021 Q2 (Nov-Dec)	2020/2021 Q3	2020/2021 Q4
Cr Claridge	\$163.20	\$163.20		
Cr Davis	\$43.50	\$43.50		
Cr Firth	\$43.50	\$43.50		
Cr Gunaratne	N/A	\$109.00		
Cr Hearn	\$163.20	\$163.20		
Cr King	N/A	\$29.00		
Cr O'Brien	N/A	\$109.00		
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$413.40</b>	<b>\$660.40</b>		

### Councillors' attendance at training courses, conferences and seminars

The Council at its meeting on 15 September 2004 approved a policy on training and development for Councillors. The policy provided that a quarterly report be submitted to the Council detailing year to date expenditure on Councillors' attendance at professional development courses or conferences and seminars.

Following is detail of sessions attended online by Councillors (including at no cost).

<b>Date</b>	<b>Councillor</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Registration Ex GST</b>
19-Oct-2020	Mayor and Councillors	2020 MAV Councillor Service Awards Presentation (Zoom)	\$0.00
22-Oct-2020	Mayor, Cr Danny Claridge	VLGA Connect Live Panel Discussion: Election-Related Integrity Issues and New Local Government Standards of Conduct	\$30.00
27-Nov-2020	Mayor and Councillors	MAV Councillor Induction	\$0.00
17-Dec-2020	Mayor, Cr Danny Claridge and Deputy Mayor Cr Bernie Hearn	MAV Mayoral Induction Day 1	\$0.00
18-Dec-2020	Mayor, Cr Danny Claridge and Deputy Mayor Cr Bernie Hearn	MAV Mayoral Induction Day 2	\$0.00

#### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

The *2020/2021 Budget* allocates \$6,225 for Councillor professional development.

To date, the actual spend against the allocation is \$30.

**Recommendation:**

**That the report be noted.**

**6. CEO Credit Card for the quarter ended 31 December 2020**

SF/3905

Gail Brown – Executive Assistant to the CEO, Mayor and Councillors

**PURPOSE OF REPORT**

The report details expenditure associated with the corporate credit card issued to the Chief Executive Officer for the quarter ended 31 December 2020.

**BACKGROUND**

As part of an audit of the Council's 2017/18 financial statements, the Victorian Auditor General's Office recommended that the Chief Executive Officer's credit card transactions be reviewed and authorised by a Council member.

In response to the recommendation, transactions on the CEO's credit card are reported quarterly to the Council. **Appendix 1** details expenditure for the quarter ended 31 December 2020.

**Recommendation:****That the report be noted.**

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Monday, 18 January 2021 3:20:26 PM

# Transactions By User Report

Benalla Rural City Council

Account Type(s):All Accounts

User Name: DTESTONI

Data from: 01-10-2020 to: 31-12-2020(Statement Date)

Reference No Description Invoice No.	Tran Date Quantity	Tran Type Tax Evidence	Status Tax Code	Tax Receipt GL Code	DCR	Merchant Name Line Invoice	Expense Type Price	Purpose Net	Tax	Gross
<b>Dominic Testoni MasterCard DTESTONI7701 5550 05** **** 0217</b>										
MasterCard0000015579	25-11-2020	Purchase	Waiting GL Post	Yes		APPLE ONLINE AU	Expenses	IPads for Councillors		
IPads	1	No	C	100004 1206010 07			4737.00 @ (AUD 1)	4306.36	430.64	4737.00
									<b>Account Total</b>	<b>4737.00</b>
									<b>User Total</b>	<b>4737.00</b>



**Closure of Meeting**