

CP 30 Community Engagement Policy

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Policy Objective

Council is committed to undertaking genuine, purposeful engagement with our community to reflect our diverse communities views, aspirations, and experiences.

“Our community will be recognised for its strong leadership, collaborative partnerships, extensive networks, and high level of community engagement and participation.”

– *Benalla Rural City Council Community Vision 2036*

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 spectrum, ranging from low-level engagement strategies such as providing information to high-level strategies such as empowerment.

The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) specifies five levels of ‘best practice’ public participation:

- **Inform:** to provide balanced and objective information to assist the public in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.
- **Consult:** to obtain feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.
- **Involve:** to work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.
- **Collaborate:** to partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of a preferred solution.
- **Empower:** to place the final decision in the hands of the public.

Why Engage?

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

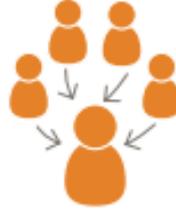
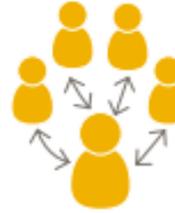
The *International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) Public Participation Spectrum* of community engagement (inform, consult, involve, collaborate, empower) demonstrates that different levels of community engagement are appropriate for different scenarios or types of issues.

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.

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.

IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum



					
	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
Purpose	<i>"Here's what's happening."</i>	<i>"Here are some options, what do you think?"</i>	<i>"Here's a problem, what ideas do you have?"</i>	<i>"Let's work together to solve this problem."</i>	<i>"You care about this issue and are leading the initiative, how can we support you?"</i>
Councils' role	To keep our community informed	To inform, listen, acknowledge concerns or aspirations and provide feedback on how community input influenced the decision	To work with our community to ensure their concerns or aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how community input influenced the decision	Council will work with our community for advice and ideas and incorporate their advice and recommendations to the maximum extent possible	Council will implement or support our community's decision
Community role	Listen	Contribute	Participate	Partner	Partner or Lead
Example techniques	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Newsletters • Social media • Fact sheets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public Comment • Focus groups • Surveys • Public meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshops • Deliberative polling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community advisory committees • Co-design 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delegated decision to community • Citizen juries • Ballots

The 'empower' level on the spectrum has limited application within the Local Government context as the elected Council are the decision-making body. However, there may be occasions where non-financial empowerment may occur.

Guiding Principles For Community Engagement

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

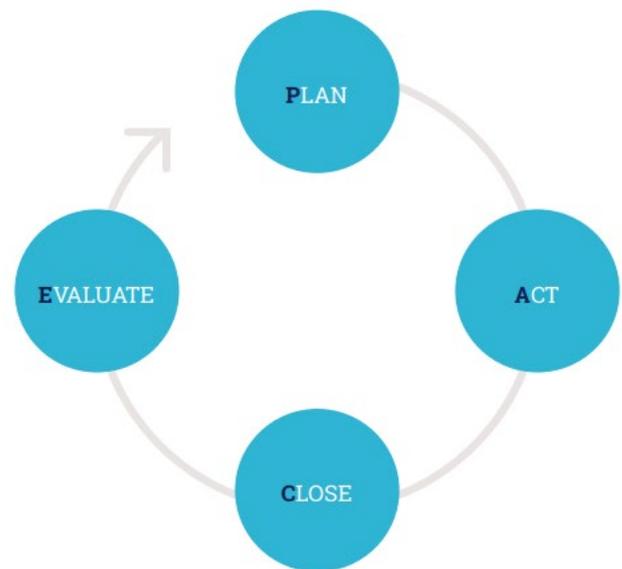
- a community engagement process must have a clearly defined objective and scope;
- participants in community engagement must have access to objective, relevant and timely information to inform their participation;
- participants in community engagement must be representative of the persons and groups 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.

Our Model For Community Engagement

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

The 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; and
- 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 their involvement has made a difference by the Council sharing the outcome 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.

Expenses

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* (the Act) sets out that Councils must include deliberative engagement practices within its community engagement processes. The Act identifies key Council plans and strategies requiring deliberative engagement:

- Community Vision
- Council Plan,
- Financial Plan
- Asset Plan

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*

Related Policies

Benalla Rural City Council Plan 2021-2025

Benalla Rural City Council Community Vision 2036

Benalla Rural City Community Plan 2016-2036

Benalla Rural City Council Community Engagement Framework and Toolkit

International Association for Public Participation (IAP2)

Related Legislation

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

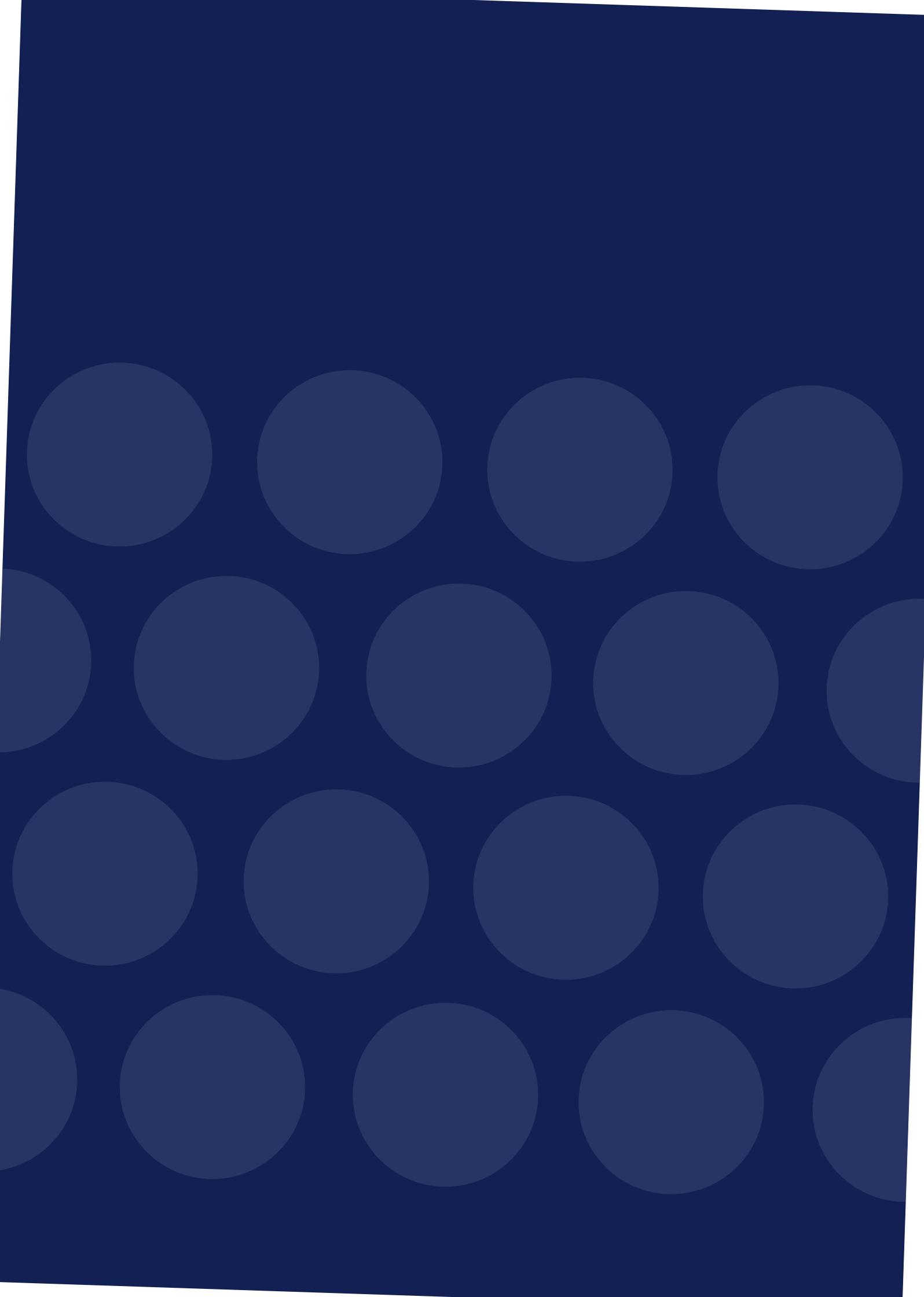
Building Act 1933

Commission for Children and Young People Child Safe Standards

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FRAMEWORK AND TOOLKIT

2022 UPDATE





CONTENTS

About this Framework and Toolkit	2
The Benefits of Community Engagement	3
Our Community Engagement Principles	4
Our Model for Community Engagement	6
Step One: Plan	7
Step Two: Act	10
Step Three: Close	11
Step Four: Evaluate	12
Appendix: Engagement Tools	13
Community Engagement Plan Template	14
Stakeholder Analysis Template	15
Possible Consultation Methods	16
Consultation Tips	18
Sample Evaluation Questions	19
Potential Community Engagement Barriers	20
Encouraging Participation for All Community Members	21
Current Engagement Methods	22

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.

This framework has been developed as a resource for both Council and community to support the delivery of thoughtful and deliberative community engagement. Benalla Rural City Council's engagement principles and process have been informed by the International Association of Public Participation's (IAP2) core values and spectrum. 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 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.

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.

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.

2019 Benalla Rural City Community Engagement Policy

Our community will be recognised for its strong leadership, collaborative partnerships, extensive networks, and high level of community engagement and participation.

COMMUNITY VISION 2036

The Community Engagement Framework and Toolkit builds on Council's policy, bringing it to life as a working document, supported by the toolkit.

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 and incorporate community aspirations.



OUR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PRINCIPLES

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.

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:

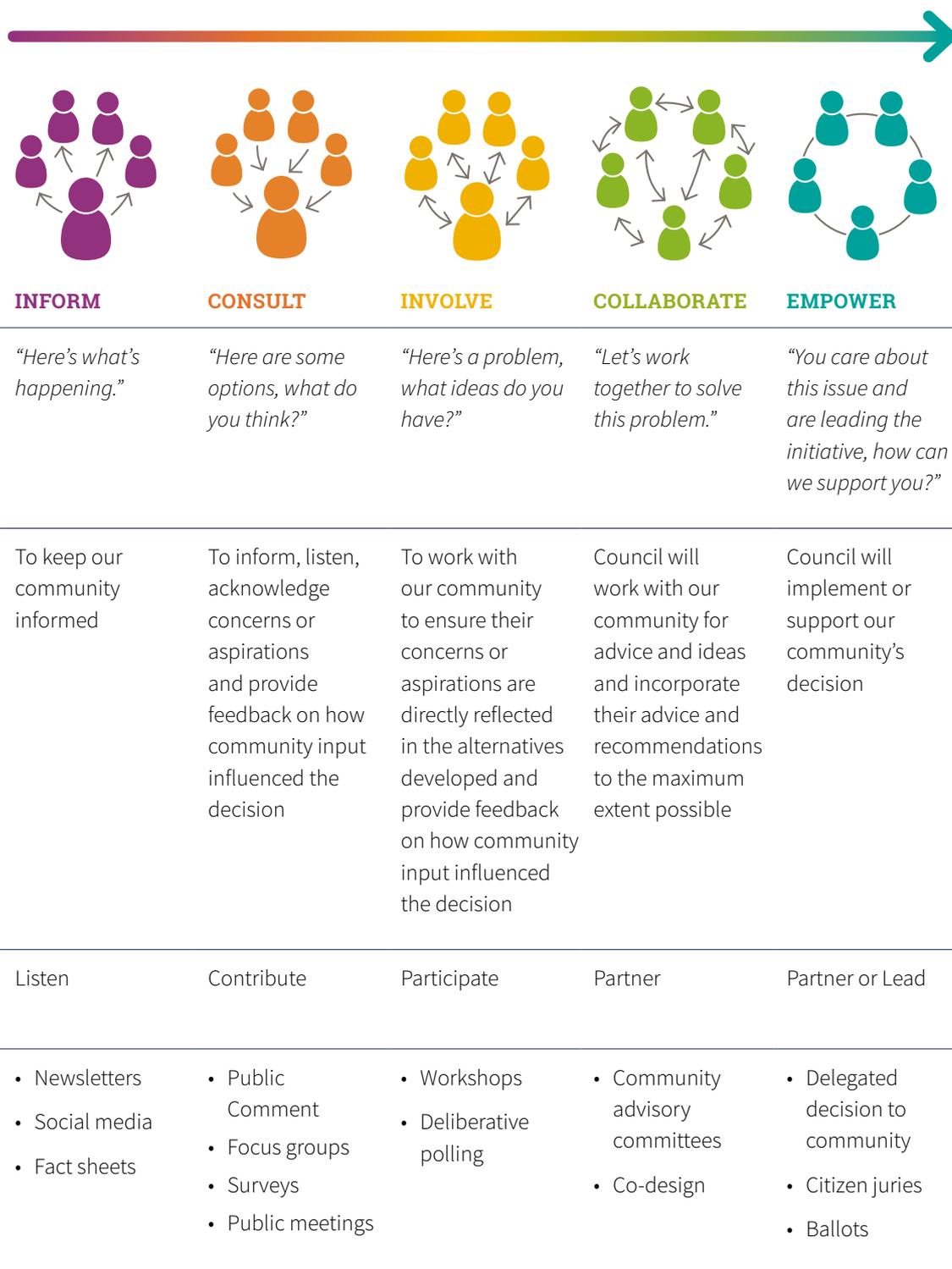
- where community input can improve a project or enhance decision making
- to help identify community needs and aspirations
- in response to community interest, and
- where Council resolves to consult the community.

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

IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum

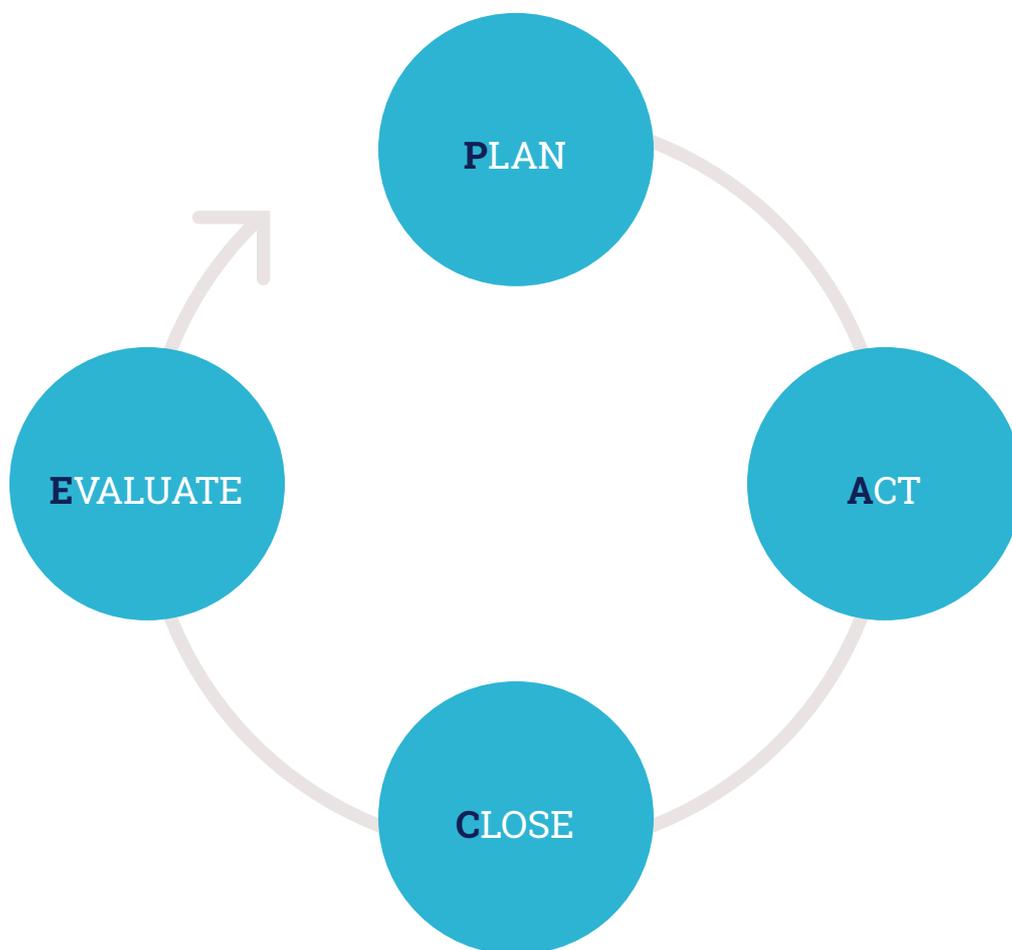


The 'empower' level on the spectrum has limited application within the Local Government context as the elected Council are the decision-making body. However, there may be occasions where non-financial empowerment may occur.

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

Good planning is crucial and will assist you to consider the who, what, why, how and 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

What is the issue you are wanting to engage the community about? 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 specific community, or a certain age group or culture or are they a special interest group (for example, 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 to think 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.

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

Budget is also 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.

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.

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.

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.

Generally speaking, the higher the risk, and/or the more significant the impact, the greater the extent of community engagement. The table on the following page has been designed to assist Council staff to identify the potential level of engagement required:

Council assesses the impact across four levels:

Level 1 – High Impact, whole or large part of LGA

Level 2 – High Impact, local (specific neighborhood, group or rural township)

Level 3 – Lower Impact, whole or large part of LGA

Level 4 – Lower Impact, local (specific neighborhood, group or rural township)

LEVEL OF IMPACT	CRITERIA (ONE OR MORE OF THE FOLLOWING POINTS)	EXAMPLE
Level 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High level of real or perceived impact, interest or risk across whole or large part of LGA. Significant impact on attributes that are considered to be of high value to the whole or large part of LGA, such as the natural environment or heritage. Significant impact on the health and safety of the whole or large part of LGA community. Potential high degree of controversy or conflict. Potential high impact on State or regional strategies or directions. Strategy or project has legislated engagement requirements. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Council Plan Community Vision Long Term Financial Plan Other key strategic policy or plans, e.g. Asset Plans, Road Management Plan Provision of new regional facility Removal or change to existing key facility
Level 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High level of real or perceived impact or risk on a local area, small community or user group/s of a specific facility or service. The loss of or significant change to any facility or service to a local community. Potential high degree of controversy or conflict at the local level. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Removal or relocation of playground Asset or Facility upgrades, e.g. Devenish drainage improvements Local street closure Car parking changes
Level 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lower, although still some real or perceived impact or risk across whole or large part of LGA. Potential for some controversy or conflict. Potential for some although not significant impact on State or regional strategies or directions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minor regional facility changes e.g. Aquatic centre Changes to customer service e.g. COVID closures Community studies, e.g. youth survey Community events, e.g. Benalla Festival
Level 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lower level of real or perceived impact or risk on a local area, small community or user group/s of a specific facility or service. Only a small change or improvement to a facility or service at the local level. Low or no risk of controversy or conflict at the local level. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Street closure due to road works Street scaping e.g. dining pods Playground upgrades

Once the level of impact has been established the table below can be used as a guide on the potential engagement techniques that may be most appropriate. The table below provides examples aligned with the IAP2 spectrum of public participation. It is important to note that engagement methods should be tailored for each service, project or activity. Examples below may not be appropriate in all instances, further examples of engagement methods can be found in the appendices.

		LEVEL 1 HIGH IMPACT LGA	LEVEL 2 HIGH IMPACT LOCAL	LEVEL 3 LOWER IMPACT LGA	LEVEL 4 LOWER IMPACT LOCAL
INFORM	Social media	●	●	●	●
	Benalla Ensign	●	●	●	●
	Displays (Customer Service, Library etc.)	●	●	●	●
	Website	●	●	●	●
	Council News mailout	●	●	●	●
	Email (community lists or providing updates)	●	●	●	●
	In person	●	●	●	●
	Telephone	●	●	●	●
	Banners and posters	●	●	●	●
CONSULT	Online and written submissions	●	●	●	●
	Pop-up booths	●	●	●	●
	Information sessions	●	●	●	●
	Surveys	●	●	●	●
INVOLVE	Workshops	●	●	●	●
	Focus group session	●	●	●	●
	Have Your Say (website)	●	N/A	●	N/A
	Meetings with key stakeholders / users	●	●	●	●
	Meeting with target community groups e.g. youth, rural, CALD	●	●	●	●
COLLABORATE	Strategic Reference Groups	●	●	●	●
	Deliberative Polling	●	●	●	●
	Community Summit	●	●	N/A	N/A
	Community advisory committees	●	●	●	●

● Recommended ● Desirable ● Optional

Summary of key points

- Think through the issue/topic you are wanting to engage the community about
- Consider the level of impact the issue has on the community
- Confirm what resources (budget) you have available
- Create a Community Engagement Plan (see template section)
- Identify and plan for possible engagement barriers
- List of key stakeholders- who does this issue concern the most? (You can use the Stakeholder Analysis Template to assist you with this.)
- Consider the range of engagement methods and decide on approach
- Think about who might help you and potential partnerships
- Think 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:

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 in the appendices; ensure that you 'mix it up' and use a variety of print, electronic and face to face methods.

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.

Summary of key points

- Identify key stakeholders- who does this issue concern the most? (see template section)
- Choose the engagement methods that will best fit the level of engagement
- Ensure venues chosen are accessible
- Test your engagement tools e.g. surveys, focus group questions, written materials
- Be flexible in your approach, and adjust your consultation if needed
- Hear 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.

Summary of key points

- Publicise any decisions made
- Develop community friendly ways to share community consultation results
- Summarise feedback in a community friendly way
- Share key documents/reports with community
- Meet together with key stakeholders e.g. project partners, advisory groups, steering committees to review findings

STEP FOUR: EVALUATE

An important step for effective community engagement is 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:

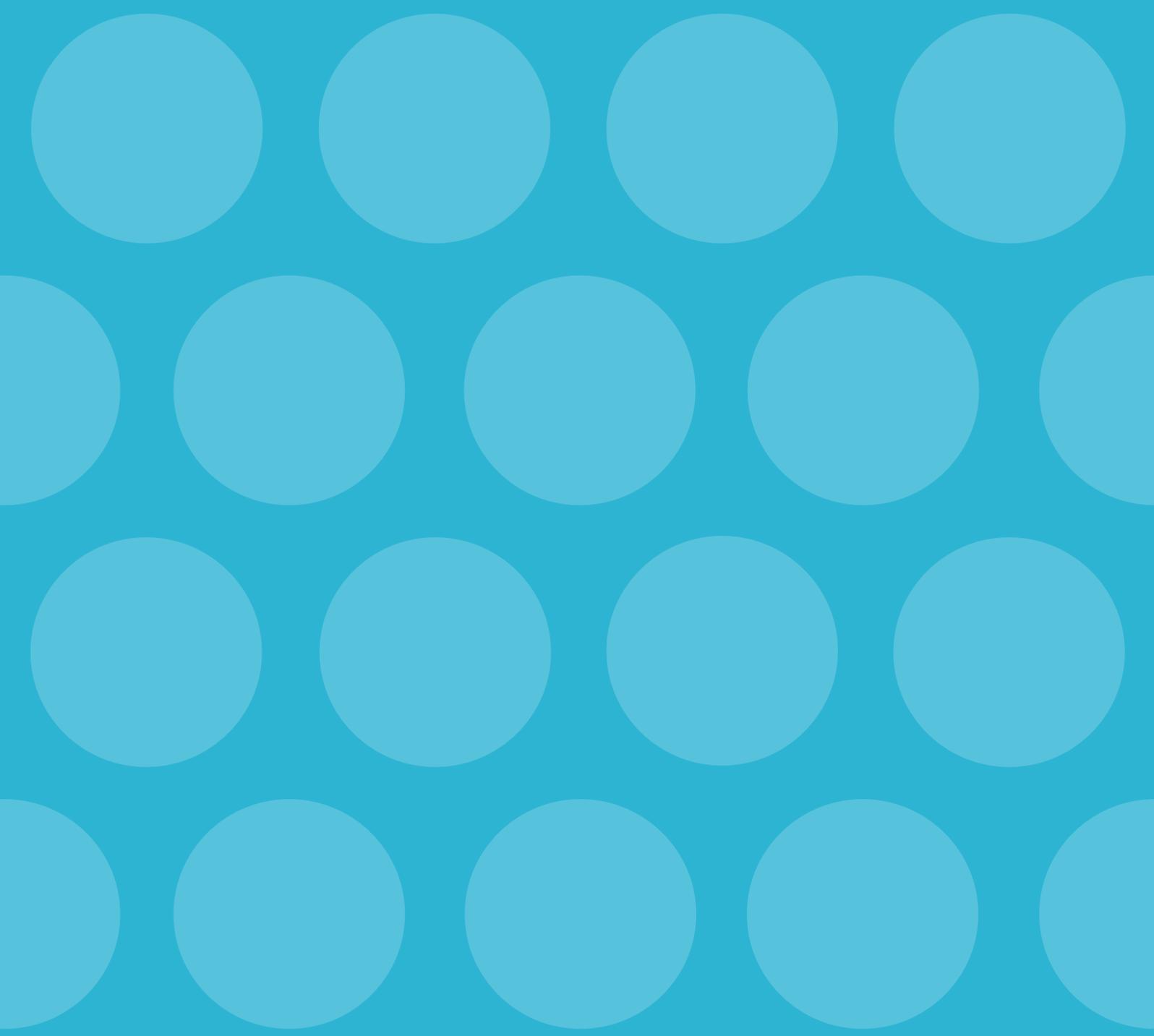
1. What worked well? What made this engagement a success, what learnings should I remember for next time?
2. What didn't work so well? What cautions should I remember for next time?
3. What can I do next time to improve my engagement with community?

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).

Summary of key points

- Think through the process and reflect on successes and challenges (See sample evaluation questions in appendices section)
- Ask others who were involved for their feedback
- Consider if a survey of key stakeholders/ community members would be appropriate
- Capture your key learnings to share with colleagues.

APPENDIX: **ENGAGEMENT TOOLS**



ENGAGEMENT TOOL:

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.

ENGAGEMENT TOOL:

STAKEHOLDER ANALYSIS TEMPLATE

STAKEHOLDER GROUP	LEVEL OF IMPACT (1,2,3,4)	WHAT IS IMPORTANT TO THE STAKEHOLDER?	POTENTIAL VALUE CONTRIBUTION TO THE ISSUE	POTENTIAL THREAT TO THE ISSUE	STRATEGY FOR ENGAGING THE STAKEHOLDER	CONTACT PERSON

ENGAGEMENT TOOL:

POSSIBLE CONSULTATION METHODS

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

METHOD	DESCRIPTION	BENEFITS	LIMITATIONS
Kitchen table conversations	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"> • Interactive discussion • Can involve a diverse range of people • Community facilitators can be trained to assist 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires time, planning and support • Must be comfortable with group conversations
Sms text consultations	Sending out text messages on mobile phones asking for opinions on an issue or question.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large numbers of people can be targeted • Takes the consultation to people • Quick and easy to do 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does not include people without access to a mobile phone • Access to mobile phone numbers is required • Difficult to define target groups • No personal contact
Public meetings	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"> • Introduces a project or issue to a community • Large numbers of people can be targeted 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficult to get broad community representation • Can be difficult to hear from all members • Strong voices can often dominate • Tricky to facilitate
Open houses	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"> • Can be interactive • Can reach a broad range of people • Creates a rapport 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires time, planning and support
Pop-up's	Pop-up consultations are mobile and can be moved around targeting various communities or locations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creates a visible presence • Can capture a diverse range of voices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not a good way to discuss sensitive or personal issues
Facebook polling	Two question polls can be added to Facebook pages to invite feedback.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can reach a broad range of people • Is anonymous • Quick and easy to create 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires Facebook membership and internet • Doesn't gather rich information
Postcards	Postcards can invite written feedback on a range of questions and also provide information.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can reach a broad range of people • Is anonymous • Large numbers of people can be targeted 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No social interaction • Not good for people with literacy issues • Can have low response rates if not promoted effectively

ENGAGEMENT TOOL:

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 for example, young people, working families, single parents, farmers

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.

ENGAGEMENT TOOL:

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?
.....

ENGAGEMENT TOOL:

POTENTIAL COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT BARRIERS

Communities or individuals can face 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
- apathy towards Local Government or a particular issue
- lack of social support
- time constraints
- insecure housing/homelessness
- consultation fatigue
- previous negative experience of engagement
- caring responsibilities
- work commitments
- limited interest in the subject
- community divisions
- lack of understanding about what the information is being used for lack of feedback from previous involvement in engagement activities.
- incorrect assumptions about how people best participate in engagement can also create significant barriers to engagement.

ENGAGEMENT TOOL:

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 or those most impacted by the topic of engagement. 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 | • people with health issues |
| • indigenous | • fathers or mothers |
| • people experiencing family violence | • newly arrived people |
| • older migrants | • wheelchair users |
| • children | • hearing impaired |
| • the bereaved | • speech impaired |
| • people experiencing trauma | • older people |
| • drug and alcohol affected | • people living in rural or regional areas |
| • young people, teenagers | • transient people |
| • people in prison | • international students |
| • professionals | • temporary residents |
| • youth offenders | • business owner |
| • residents in public housing | • same sex attracted |
| • people who have caring responsibilities | • people with a disability |
| • single parents | • vision impaired |
| • parents at schools | • 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.

ENGAGEMENT TOOL:

CURRENT ENGAGEMENT METHODS

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

