

Community Engagement Policy

Responsible Officer:	
Document type:	
Reference:	
Approved by:	
Date approved:	
Date of next review:	

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; and
- give effect to the community engagement principles; and
- be capable of being applied to the making of the Council's local laws; and
- be capable of being applied in relation to the Council's budget and policy development; and
- 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; and
- specify a process for informing the municipal community of the outcome of the community engagement; and
- 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:

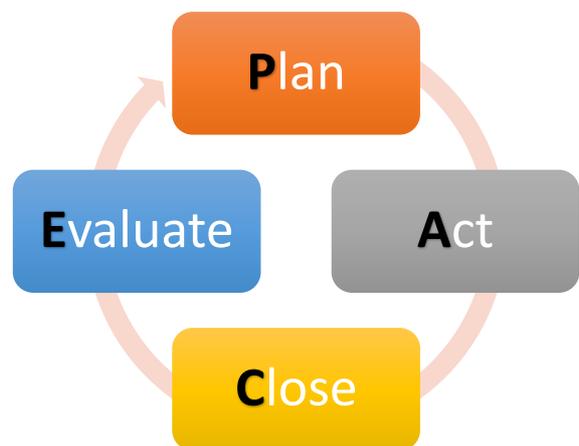
- Open, honest and accountable community engagement.
- Well-planned, co-ordinated and accessible community engagement.
- Information being shared in a timely and balanced way.
- Assist the community to understand engagement aims, processes and outcomes.
- Treating all community members with respect and 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; 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 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*
- *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.

Relevant Policies/Documents

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