

THE CITY OF
GREATER GEELONG

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT POLICY

VERSION: 1

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and Performance

Authorising Officer: Chief Executive Officer

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

The City of Greater Geelong acknowledges the Wadawurrung People as the Traditional Owners of this land. We also acknowledge all other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People who are part of the Greater Geelong community today.

We recognise the important civic leadership role that community engagement can play in promoting and fostering genuine reconciliation leading to real outcomes. We want to understand Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and histories; and to acknowledge the experiences and needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples living within the City of Greater Geelong region, so they feel listened to, respected and valued.

Introduction

PURPOSE

A collaborative partnership between Council and the community can be a powerful way to deliver positive changes across our region. Greater Geelong has a proud history of community-inspired leadership and our community is rich in lived experience and diverse in its expertise. The participation of everyone in our community is encouraged, welcomed, and valued because it helps us make better decisions and achieve better outcomes.

This policy is designed to ensure that Council not only meets its engagement obligations as described under sections 55 and section 56 of the Local Government Act 2020 (Vic), but truly harnesses the expertise and advice of the community it serves.

WHAT IS COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT?

Community Engagement is a collaborative process used by Council to connect with the community.

The purpose of the engagement process is to seek feedback and insights about issues that might affect, impact or interest the community, such as planning, decisions or general council activities.

Council uses both participatory and deliberative forms of engagement, to ensure that the skills and experience of the community are used to help Council make better decisions.

WHY IS ENGAGEMENT IMPORTANT?

Engaging with the community ensures that Council listens and makes decisions based on community lived experience and in line with community views and values.

Being heard and engaged in decision making empowers members of our community to contribute to the future direction of the places where they live and work. Authentic community engagement promotes greater trust and confidence in local democracy, builds stronger relationships and leads to better outcomes for all of us. That's why it is critical that the decisions which shape the region's liveability and prosperity are informed and influenced by the people who live, work, visit or do business in the region.

Community engagement brings people from different backgrounds, experiences and perspectives together to share their views and shape the future. While the views of the community may not always align, best practice community engagement helps demonstrate to everyone in the community that any decisions made by Council are made knowing the views of the people living within the region.

SCOPE

This policy provides direction on all formal, legislative and informal community engagement planning and activities conducted by Council and anyone carrying out delegated duties or functions of Council. This includes:

- Councillors
- City officers
- external providers
- contractors and
- volunteers.

The following engagements are outside the scope of this policy:

- those related to planning permit applications and planning scheme amendments governed by the *Planning and Environment Act 1987 (Vic)*
- legislated engagements governed under other Acts

Definitions

ACT

Local Government Act (Vic) 2020.

THE CITY

The City of Greater Geelong organisation led by the Chief Executive Officer.

COMMITTEE

A delegated committee, joint delegated committee or community asset committee under sections 63, 64 and 65 of the Act, respectively.

COUNCIL

The Greater Geelong City Council comprising Councillors and its Delegated Committees.

DELIBERATIVE ENGAGEMENT

Deliberative engagement is a process of engagement that brings participants closer to the decision makers than other forms of engagement; where participants are provided with a clear task or question, have access to appropriate resources and information, and are given the time and space required to deliberate and reach their consensus.

ENGAGEMENT

A process for improved decision-making that invites the feedback from, and incorporates the insights, wisdom and concerns of, affected stakeholders and also meets the needs of the decision-making body.

PARTICIPATORY ENGAGEMENT

Participatory engagement involves one-way information exchange either from Council to community or community to Council. Participatory engagement typically occurs when feedback is invited on service satisfaction, ideas, alternatives or draft documents.

STAKEHOLDERS

An individual or group with an interest in the decisions of Council, that is directly or indirectly impacted by the decisions made and the final outcomes.

Policy

WHO WE WILL ENGAGE WITH

We will engage with people likely to be affected by, or interested in, planning and decision-making by Council, including individuals, community groups, advisory committees, businesses and organisations, peak bodies and other levels of government.

However, we recognise that there are barriers to participation for some of these people and groups. Barriers could include abilities, language and cultural differences, carer and work responsibilities, technology, age and lack of access to transport.

To hear a full range of perspectives and make sure our decisions are meeting the needs of the community, we will tailor and plan our engagement processes to ensure the greatest number of people and groups can contribute. We will identify, reach out and engage directly with relevant people and groups where barriers are particularly significant, or certain people are under-represented. We will work to break down the barriers that see some people under-involved in decisions which affect their community.

Engaging with the community more broadly in this way will give us the best chance to make decisions that are informed and meet the needs of the community.

WHEN WE WILL ENGAGE

We will engage when Council anticipates decisions or plans are likely to impact the community. This may include situations where we are:

- making plans – for example, developing strategic plans or policies, or planning for emergencies
- changing something – for example changes to a service where those changes may have an impact on the community
- making a decision that is likely to impact people and the places they live, work, invest or play – for example, introducing a new project, initiative or service
- required by law to do so
- seeking to address an issue affecting the community that has been raised and requires a decision.

We may also engage in cases where Council:

- sees that the broader community has raised, or expressed an interest in, a policy, initiative or service
- requires assistance to identify community needs or aspirations
- desires to build capacity, provide information to increase knowledge and change behaviour
- seeks new, or wishes to strengthen, existing relationships with the community.

Situations where we may not engage

There are times when we may decide it is not appropriate to engage with the community. This would include situations where:

- decisions must be made immediately – for example, during a live emergency, or for occupational health and safety reasons
- decisions relate to the City's day-to-day organisation operations
- legal or commercial restrictions prevent it
- Council does not have the decision-making power.

HOW WE WILL ENGAGE

Community engagement principles

We will give effect to the five engagement principles described below in the design, delivery and reporting of all engagement activities.

1. A community engagement process must have a clearly defined objective and scope.
2. Participants taking part in community engagement must have access to objective, relevant and timely information to inform their participation.
3. Participants taking part in community engagement must be representative of the persons and groups affected by the matter that is the subject of community engagement.
4. Participants taking part in community engagement are entitled to reasonable support to enable meaningful and informed engagement.
5. Participants taking part in community engagement are informed of the ways in which the community engagement process will influence Council decision making.

In observance of the community engagement principles, we will:

- plan Council engagements to be proactive, timely, open and easily understood
- make sure engagement activities are inclusive, accessible and seek a diverse range of perspectives
- be upfront about how much opportunity there is to influence a decision
- define the community's role in any community engagement process
- provide community members with reasonable support to help them participate
- provide accessible information to support meaningful community participation
- let the community know how their input has influenced our decision
- be flexible and adaptive as we engage, including being open to changing our approach, and
- learn from each experience to review and improve future engagement practices.

Choosing the form of engagement

We will match the appropriate tools and techniques for engagement to suit the purpose and scope of the engagement, and the community members being engaged. This will ensure that we use the appropriate variety of tools, activities and methods to produce the most meaningful feedback.

For matters where the form of community participation and engagement is by an invitation to make submissions and to be heard at panel hearings, Council will continue to proceed in a manner modelled on section 223 of the Local Government Act 1989 and in line with the engagement principles above.

Factors that may influence the form of engagement you choose include:

- level of influence people and groups can have on the decision
- level of complexity and risk associated with a project
- specific project goals
- stages and timeframes of a project
- resources
- the legal and governance framework under which the Council operates.

Once the form of engagement for a given planning or decision-making process has been determined, the appropriate tools, activities and data-collection methods will then be identified. Broadly, the form of engagement can be described as either deliberative or participatory in nature.

Deliberative engagement

Deliberative engagement is a tailored process that brings participants closer to the decision makers than other forms of engagement. Deliberative practices, which may be co-designed, take place to allow for a representative group to deliberate on an issue in depth, over time, before coming to an informed consensus or decision.

Deliberative engagement methods include advisory committees, workshops, community panels, focus groups, citizen juries and ballots.

As part of the deliberative process, participants must:

- be provided with a clear task or question
- have access to appropriate resources and information and
- be given the time and space required to deliberate and reach the desired outcome, consensus or decision.

Deliberative engagement should be conducted when participants have a high level of influence over, or impact on the outcomes or decision to be made.

Council will engage deliberatively when developing things such as:

- the Community Vision
- Council Plan
- Asset Plan
- Financial Plan
- other projects or initiatives as considered appropriate.

Participatory engagement

Participatory engagement is an engagement process that enables participants to provide feedback that does not necessarily include a conversation or dialogue with us. Participatory engagement methods include informing people via fact sheets, websites and information sessions, or consulting with people through surveys, feedback forms, public meetings and drop-in sessions.

While participatory engagement may be a simpler process than deliberative engagement, it is valuable for hearing important and useful information from a broad range of people and groups.

Examples of situations where we may engage in participatory engagement include, but are not limited to:

- program development and evaluation
- determining satisfaction with services
- inviting community ideas or views
- seeking feedback on alternative draft documents, designs or plans
- gauging support for a proposal
- asking the community for local knowledge

HOW WE WILL REPORT ON ENGAGEMENT

We are accountable for reporting back to the community:

1. What we learnt during the engagement process – that is, the data and information collected as part of the process.
2. How this has influenced the decisions, plans and activities of Council.

In determining the best ways to report this information back, we will consider the people and groups involved, barriers to engagement, and the level of interest to the wider community.

Where it is valuable to do so, we will report back during the engagement process, so that the methods of exploring an issue with the community might be altered based on what we are learning and that newly identified stakeholders might engage as necessary throughout the process.

Methods for reporting back could include, but are not limited to:

- updates on Geelong Australia website
- updates on the project Have Your Say page
- posts on social media
- public notices and newspaper advertisements
- printed materials in community facilities
- direct communication, such as letters, phone calls and meetings, with the involved people and groups.

Implementing this Policy

RESPONSIBILITIES

Party/parties	Roles and responsibilities
Councillors	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Champion the commitment and principles for community engagement through leadership and decision-making.Adopt the Community Engagement Policy, oversee its implementation.
Executive Leadership Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Demonstrate behaviours that foster good engagement practice and drive the community engagement principles through policy, process and leadership.Implement and ensure compliance with this policy and hold staff accountable for its use and improvement.
Leadership Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Manage areas of responsibility to ensure community engagement is consistent with this policy.
All staff involved in community engagement planning and delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Design and deliver best-practice community engagement that aligns with this policy, in consultation with managers and the Corporate Affairs team.
Corporate Affairs' Community Engagement team	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Monitor the implementation of this policy and conduct periodic reviews to drive continuous improvement.Support Council to plan and deliver best-practice engagement processes.

MONITORING AND REPORTING

The City commits to monitoring processes, information sharing and decision making to understand the overall level of success in the policy's implementation. Key evaluation measures of success over each 12 month period will include:

- community satisfaction with community consultation and engagement (annual survey)
- number of engagements
- number of participants
- adequacy of representation of under-involved or hard-to-reach communities
- percentage of deliberative and participatory engagements
- timeliness and regularity of reporting back to the community

and may also include measures such as:

- diversity of engagement methods
- information delivery modes
- effectiveness of participant identification process across target groups

This evaluation will be presented to Council annually.

ADVICE AND ASSISTANCE

The *Responsible Officer: Manager Corporate Affairs*, is responsible for advising the organisation about this policy, monitoring its implementation, and assisting community members with questions about the policy.

RECORDS

The City must retain records associated with this policy and its implementation for at least the period shown below.

Record	Retention / Disposal Authority	Retention Period	Location
This policy	Manager, Corporate Affairs	Four years	Geelong Australia
Feedback archives	Manager, Corporate Affairs	Four years	CityWeb location

REVIEW

Council should review and, if necessary, amend this policy before 1 March 2025. A periodic review of this policy will also be undertaken to ensure necessary changes or updates are made in a timely manner.

References

External references

- *Victorian Local Government Act 2020 (Vic)*
- *Victorian Local Government Act 1989 (Vic)* (being progressively repealed)
- *Public Participation in Government Decision-making Better Practice Guide – Victorian Auditor-General’s Office 2015*
- *Public Participation and Community Engagement: Local Government Sector – Victorian Auditor-General’s Report 2017*
- *Public Participation in Government Decision-Making – Victorian Auditor-General’s Report 2017*
- *Victorian Government Draft Public Participation Framework (2020)*
- *Local Government Act 2020 – Principles Community Engagement (DELWP)*