

# Community Engagement Policy

Corangamite Shire

February 2021



**CORANGAMITE  
SHIRE**

# Council Policy



## Community Engagement

### Introduction

Corangamite Shire Council recognises that the involvement of the community in making plans and decisions is fundamental to good governance. The Corangamite community is rich with lived experience, knowledge and expertise, and public participation is valued by Council.

This policy establishes a clear standard of engagement, having regard to the significance, complexity and anticipated level of impact associated with decisions made regarding major plans, policies, strategies, projects and service planning.

Council is committed to:

- offering opportunities for the community to contribute to the decisions made by Council,
- effective communication of information between Council and the community,
- ensuring effective community representation,
- decision making that is transparent and works in the interest of the community, and
- ensuring effective community engagement planning.

### Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to:

- articulate Council's commitment to engage with the community on decisions and development of plans and policies and decisions that interest or affect communities;
- improve understanding of community and stakeholder engagement;
- outline how community engagement is integrated into Council activities in order to support decision making and strengthen relationships and partnerships; and
- build an organisational culture which values public participation and its contribution to fostering learning, innovation and collaboration.

### Scope

This policy applies to the planning, design, implementation and evaluation of community engagement activities as directed by Council, recommended by staff, or legislated by the Victorian *Local Government Act 2020*. Community engagement is the responsibility of all Council service areas, teams and employees. It also applies to contractors and consultants undertaking work on behalf of Council.

The policy does not apply to community engagement processes that are subject to prescribed processes imposed by other Victorian legislation such as land-use planning applications or other Council processes such as service requests or complaints.

Following an impact assessment, it is considered that the Policy aligns with Victoria's Gender Equality principles as defined in the *Gender Equality Act 2020* namely that all Victorians should live a safe and equal society, have access to equal power, resources and opportunities and be treated with dignity, respect and fairness.

## Definitions

Community	Refers to the people who have a stake and interest in the Corangamite Shire and includes people who live, work, study or conduct business or are involved in local community groups or organisations in the municipality.
Community engagement	Community engagement is a planned process with the specific purpose of working with individuals and groups to encourage active involvement in decisions that affect them or are of interest to them.
Public participation	A term used by the International Association for Public Participation's (IAP2) meaning the involvement of those affected (interested in or impacted by) by a decision in the decision-making process. We use the term interchangeably with Community Engagement, Stakeholder Engagement or Consultation.
Deliberative engagement	Deliberation is an approach to decision-making in which citizens consider relevant facts from multiple points of view, converse with one another to think critically about options before them and enlarge their perspectives, opinions, and understandings
Stakeholder	An individual or group with a strong interest in the decisions of Council and are directly impacted by their outcomes.
Consultation	The activity of seeking input on a matter.

## References

- Public Transparency Policy – Corangamite Shire Council
- Information Privacy Policy - Corangamite Shire Council
- *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*
- *Local Government Act 2020*
- *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014*
- *Equal Opportunity Act 2010*
- *Gender Equality Act 2020.*

## Policy Detail

### ***Principles and commitments to the community***

Council will use the principles and commitments to inform all community engagement processes. These principles are set out in Section 56 of the *Local Government Act 2020*.

Council makes the following commitments to the community under each of these five principles.

1. The community engagement process has a clearly defined objective and scope.
  - *All community engagement is planned by clearly identifying the purpose, scope and objectives of the community's participation, in the community engagement plan.*
  - *We will communicate the reasons for engagement with participants.*

2. Participants in community engagement will have access to objective, relevant and timely information to inform their participation.
  - *We will ensure the community has the information necessary to participate meaningfully in the engagement activities.*
  - *We will endeavour to provide information that is objective, relevant, timely and easy to understand.*
3. Participants in community engagement will be representative of the persons and groups affected by the matter.
  - We will identify the people, communities and stakeholders who are affected by and interested in the topic of engagement.
  - We will reach out to our community to involve and hear from participants that represent the affected and interested groups.
4. Participants in community engagement are entitled to reasonable support to enable meaningful and informed engagement.
  - We will seek to reduce physical, social, gender and cultural barriers to participation.
  - We will consider the needs and perspectives of all groups and individuals that may want to be involved in the process.
  - We will seek to obtain the views of a broad cross section of the community.
  - We will allow sufficient time for review of information and participation in varied engagement activities.
5. Participants in community engagement are informed of the ways in which the community engagement process will influence Council decision making.
  - We recognise the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) as the international standard for effective community engagement. We will be guided by IAP2 recommendations.
  - We will inform participants of the level of influence they will have, as described in the IAP2 spectrum's promise to the public, and we will ensure they know the outcomes of any decisions made.

### ***Level of community engagement***

This policy uses the IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum to guide the range and extent of participation at each of the five levels of engagement.

These levels will be selected in every instance to meet our commitment to the community:

- Inform: To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.
- Consult: To obtain public 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 identification of the preferred solution.
- Empower: To place final decision-making in the hands of the public.

Council will select the appropriate level of engagement, having regard to the significance, complexity and anticipated level of impact of the decision matter, and the stakeholders who may wish to be involved. Community engagement may include multiple levels of public participation at different stages of the engagement process, and different stakeholders may choose to engage at different levels.

The level of community engagement will be identified on the IAP2 spectrum at the project planning stage following an analysis of the outcome goal (see Appendix A). The community engagement plan will also identify the most appropriate communication tools and timeframes to ensure that both the community in general and particular interest group(s) are aware of the engagement opportunities and informed about the issue(s) under consideration.

### ***Type of community engagement***

The type or form of engagement practice undertaken can be broadly described as either deliberative or participatory. Some of Council's community engagement projects may include both types of practice.

#### ***Deliberative engagement***

Deliberative practices take place at the highest three levels of influence on the IAP2 spectrum, 'Involve', 'Collaborate' or 'Empower'. Deliberative engagement allows for discussion and the possibility of consensus if needed.

The key features of a deliberative process are to come to a decision after considering information from a variety of perspectives and prioritising and weighing solutions. By its very name, it requires a level of engagement that is measured, considered and has the involvement of others.

Deliberation can be scaled to fit the size and impact of the project. Some projects may require skilled facilitators to ensure a fair and equitable process.

Examples of deliberative practices include:

- A representative group participates in a series of sessions of information exchange in order to reach consensus.
- Online proposals and ideas are discussed by a panel of community members
- Participants are asked to consider, assess and prioritise a range of ideas
- Working with advisory groups
- Deliberative polling

Projects most suited to a deliberative approach include those where the outcome will have a far reaching or long-term effect, and issues where there is considerable community concern or division about the alternatives.

#### ***Participatory engagement***

Participatory practices take place at the first two levels of influence on the spectrum, 'Inform' and 'Consult' and involve one-way information exchange either from Council to community or community to Council.

Participatory engagement typically occurs when feedback is invited on ideas, alternatives or draft documents.

Examples of participatory practices are:

- Surveys
- Polls
- Ideas gathering
- Submissions

Participation at this level can be very broad, including by stakeholders who may choose to track the project but offer no direct input.

### **Statutory requirements**

Some elements of community engagement are directed by statutory requirements. Under the *Local Government Act 2020*, Council has a statutory obligation to develop a long-term Community Vision, Financial Plan and Asset Plan, as well as a four-year Council Plan.

Under the *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008*, Council has a statutory requirement to develop a four-year Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan. Council will meet its statutory obligations by ensuring the community will have an opportunity to participate in the development of these plans.

The *Local Government Act 2020* requires Council to develop a Community Engagement Policy and mandates the specification within it of the type of engagement to be employed regarding a number of decision matters.

As a guide, the type of community engagement to be implemented is set out below:

<b>Decision matter</b>	<b>Community engagement approach</b>
Community Vision	Deliberative engagement (in accordance with Section 88)
Council Plan	Deliberative engagement (in accordance with Section 90)
Financial Plan	Deliberative engagement (in accordance with Section 91)
Asset Plan	Deliberative engagement (in accordance with Section 92)
Budget	Participatory engagement (in accordance with Section 96)
Making or altering a Local Law	Participatory engagement (in accordance with Section 73)
Acquiring, selling or leasing land	Participatory engagement (in accordance with Sections 112, 114, 115)
Other statutory and non-statutory plans, strategies or policies, service planning and capital works projects	Level to be selected by Council depending on the complexity, interest in and impact of the matter.

### **Community engagement planning, implementation and evaluation**

To ensure effective community engagement, the following eight steps (or a combination) could be used to design, deliver and complete community engagement.

1. Clearly define the purpose and scope of the community engagement:
  - Document the project purpose, scope, engagement objectives, timelines, budget and the decision to be made. Identify any risks.
  - Take into account relevant legislation in framing the community engagement.
  - Determine initial expectation of the level of participation on the IAP2 spectrum.
  
2. Understand stakeholder and community interests:
  - Identify the stakeholders who are affected by, interested in, or who can influence or inform the decision.
  - Understand how stakeholders are affected, the nature and intensity of their interest, and capacity and willingness to participate.

- Consider if there are barriers to participation that need to be removed to ensure an appropriate balance of views.
  - Identify the preferred methods for engagement.
  - Ensure that participants understand their role and level of influence on the decision-making process.
3. Design an appropriate community engagement process:
    - Identify the stages of the engagement process and any negotiable or non-negotiable aspects.
    - Plan inclusive and accessible communications and methods to support the engagement.
    - Identify data requirements that are relevant and measurable, and how it will be analysed.
    - Plan how the data collected will be managed and ensure compliance with Council's privacy policy.
    - Identify the skills and resources needed to ensure an effective community engagement.
    - Document the approach and obtain authorisation.
  4. Deliver genuine and respectful engagement:
    - Ensure all activities are inclusive and accessible.
    - Be clear about the purpose and level of engagement.
  5. Review and interpret the engagement data:
    - Collate and review the data from each engagement activity.
    - Identify any limitations to the appropriate balance of information.
    - Analyse the data to identify themes, priorities and preferences.
  6. Apply the outcomes of the engagement to inform the decision-making process:
    - Prepare a report for Council applying the outcomes of the community engagement to inform the decision.
    - Where appropriate, provide further opportunity for community input, for example to comment on a draft document.
  7. Evaluate the community engagement process for improvement:
    - Assess whether community engagement objectives were achieved.
    - Document and apply the lessons.
  8. Close the loop on the community engagement:
    - Where possible, report feedback back to participants to ensure correct understanding.
    - Acknowledge participants' contributions to the engagement process.
    - Share the outcomes of the engagement with the community including how it contributed to the decision.
    - Communicate the next steps of the project.
    - Publish updates on the project on Council's website and other channels.

### ***Informing the community of outcomes***

Reporting of outcomes and updates can be made available online through Council's website, as well as provided directly to those who asked to be kept informed and have provided contact details.

Council may also choose to use communication channels such as Corangamite News, E News, Public notices, press releases, community newsletters and social media.

Communication channels for reporting outcomes will be described in the relevant community engagement toolkit.

### **Responsibilities**

Responsibilities for implementing this policy are shared as follows:

<b>Party/ parties</b>	<b>Roles and Responsibilities</b>
Councillors	Ensure that matters under consideration are informed by the planned level of community engagement. Balance the range of stakeholder views and concerns on an issue when making a decision.
Senior Officer Group	Consult with councillors to establish the engagement process to be used. Champion better practice community engagement through policy, process and leadership. Monitor implementation and compliance with this policy.
Managers	Manage areas of responsibility to ensure community engagement is consistent with this policy.
Staff	Undertake to make community engagement activities consistent with this policy.

### **Review Date**

February 2025.

It is considered that this Policy does not impact negatively on any rights identified in the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*.



**Appendix A**

***IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation***

IAP2's Spectrum of Public Participation is designed to assist with the selection of the level of participation that defines the public's role in any public participation process. The Spectrum is used internationally, and it is found in public participation plans around the world.

	<b>INFORM</b>	<b>CONSULT</b>	<b>INVOLVE</b>	<b>COLLABORATE</b>	<b>EMPOWER</b>
<b>PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GOAL</b>	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 concerns and aspirations are understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of a preferred solution.	To place the final decision making in the hands of the public.
<b>PROMISE TO THE PUBLIC</b>	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.