

SCS-017 Community Engagement Policy

TRIM Reference:	D23/142404	Due for Review:	September 2026
Responsible Officer:	Coordinator Communications and Community Engagement		

Purpose

This policy outlines the principles and commitments that underpin Council's approach to community engagement. It also includes the specific requirements of the *Local Government Act 2020*, and gives effect to the relevant engagement principles.

Community engagement is about sharing information, and seeking meaningful and influential input into decision making. It refers to planned processes, designed to work across communities and stakeholders to shape decisions or actions in relation to an issue or opportunity.

Policy Principles

Council values community input, insights, experience and feedback. We are committed to working with communities and other stakeholders to achieve locally relevant, sustainable decisions through effective engagement practices. We will be transparent, genuine, relevant, accessible and inclusive of diverse perspectives, in our approach to community engagement.

Council has an ongoing commitment to Reconciliation. We commit to working with Traditional Owners and other First Nations people within our municipality in our community engagement processes, to ensure their voices and perspectives are heard, understood and respected.

Scope

This policy applies to all community engagement activity undertaken by, or on behalf of Council, including work undertaken by consultants and volunteers.

This policy provides direction on community engagement activities including:

- Development and review of key strategic plans such as the Community Vision, Council Plan, Municipal Health and Wellbeing Plan, Financial Plan, Asset Plan, and Road Management Plan.
- Making of local laws.
- Development of annual budgets.
- Development of Council policies that directly impact the community.
- Planning and delivery of projects that create new assets or change service levels
- Activities requiring engagement under legislation.
- Capital works projects with an estimated cost of \$1,000,000 or less¹. Engagement processes for projects above this amount are governed by the *Planning and Environment Act 1987*.

Engagement processes that are governed by other legislation, such as planning permit applications and planning scheme amendments governed by the *Planning and Environment Act 1987*, are outside the scope of this policy.

¹ In these cases Council is exempt from a planning permit process, due to an exemption in the planning scheme for 'buildings or works with an estimated cost of \$1,000,000 or less carried out by or on behalf of a municipal council'.

Policy

Council is committed to undertaking community engagement in the following circumstances:

- when community input can enhance decision making or project outcomes
- to gain new information about community needs, aspirations and concerns
- when there will be a real or perceived change to existing services, programs or the use of public spaces and facilities
- when community members, business communities or other groups have a particular interest in the outcome of a decision, project or development
- when Council resolves to consult the community, and
- when legislation, policy or other agreement mandates.

Community engagement may not be deemed appropriate in circumstances where community influence is not possible, for example due to a legislative requirement or community safety issue. In these instances, Council will communicate relevant information and the rationale for not undertaking engagement.

In line with the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) Spectrum of Public Participation (see *Appendix A*), Council will assess the following when considering the selection of engagement level(s) and associated activities:

- the level of impact on the community and the level of community and stakeholder interest
- the complexity and associated risks of the issue/project/topic
- the type of engagement that is appropriate and/or legislated
- the resources available to Council.

Council will seek participant feedback to monitor and evaluate engagement, and continue to adapt and improve our processes.

Type and form of community engagement

The process for determining the type and form of community engagement will be governed by a management procedure aligned to the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation, and documented in community engagement plans,

Community engagement plans will outline how Council will:

- Inform community of issue/project, relevant background, and the opportunity to have a say
- Provide an avenue for community/stakeholders to provide feedback (eg. in person, online etc)
- Ensure the period of time is appropriate for the project, and consider context (eg. holiday periods etc)
- Ensure all feedback received is reviewed and made available for consideration by Council
- Provide an opportunity for feedback to be provided in person to Council (hearing of submissions process) where legislated, or deemed appropriate by Council
- Provide feedback on how community input affected the decision/outcome.

Participatory engagement

Participatory engagement encourages people to share their existing perspectives or preferences, based on their own local knowledge and/or lived experience. Participatory processes are used when it is appropriate to seek broad community input or feedback. Participatory engagement may also be used in the first stage of a more complex, multi-staged engagement process. Examples of participatory processes may include surveys, drop in sessions and submission processes.

Where Council invites community participation via a submission process, and engagement on the matter was formerly governed by section 223 of the *Local Government Act 1989*, Council will continue to model the process on this section of the Act. Examples include the declaration of special rates and charges, some types of drainage works, and the sale or exchange of Council owned land.

Deliberative engagement

Deliberative engagement processes aim to produce informed, and carefully considered views. It provides an opportunity to view opinion shifts that take place before and after deliberation, which can be useful for understanding the difference between informed views and raw public opinion.

Participants of a deliberative process hear and contribute multiple perspectives, options and trade-offs, and reach conclusions through in depth discussion and consideration of relevant facts. Examples of deliberative processes may include community working groups, project groups, and panels.

Council will undertake deliberative engagement in the following circumstances:

1. Where it has a legislated obligation, including:
 - a. Community Vision,
 - b. Council Plan,
 - c. Financial Plan and
 - d. Asset Plan, or
2. Where it wants its decision-making on a matter or initiative to be informed by this model of community engagement. This may be for complex, controversial, or strategic projects.

When Council undertakes a deliberative engagement process, the community engagement plan will be available on Council's website.

Local Government Act 2020 Principles

The *Local Government Act 2020* Section 56 establishes five community engagement principles applicable to Council. As required by Section 55 of the Act, this policy gives effect to these principles.

Principles	Council's commitment
Principle 1: A community engagement process must have a clearly defined objective and scope	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop community engagement plans in accordance with this policy. • Allocate appropriate funding and time to engagement planning and implementation.
Principle 2: Participants in community engagement must have access to objective, relevant and timely information to inform their participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide timely, accurate, impartial and accessible information about intended projects or decisions for consideration. • Provide opportunities for community members to come together where appropriate, to learn and share information, and have meaningful and informed deliberations.
Principle 3: Participants in community engagement must be representative of the persons and groups affected by the matter that is the subject of the community engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify stakeholders early in the process and determine the level to which different groups may be affected by decisions or plans. • Select accessible communication methods to ensure relevant parties are informed about opportunities to influence council decisions. • Encourage and support the inclusion of diverse perspectives, including children and young people, older people, people of all genders, people with disabilities and carers, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, and people who identify as LGBTQIA+.
Principle 4: Participants in community engagement are entitled to reasonable support to enable meaningful and informed engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider potential barriers to participation in engagement processes, including accessibility needs, information formats, communication channels, language and timing. • Develop plans which respond to identified barriers and needs, and support broad participation. • Prioritise respect, inclusivity and safety for all community members participating in, or affected by, engagement processes.

<p>Principle 5: Participants in community engagement are informed of the ways in which the community engagement process will influence Council decision making</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify the appropriate level of engagement according to the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) Framework. • Articulate how community perspectives will be incorporated into decision making and the nature of the scope and decisions to be made. • Share what has been learned and what actions or decisions have resulted from an engagement process.
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Related Procedure

Community Engagement Procedure

Capital Works Engagement Procedure (in development)

Child Safe Workplace

References

Documents

- [Surf Coast Shire Communications and Community Engagement Strategy 2022-25](#)
- [Surf Coast Shire Council Plan \(inc. Health and Wellbeing Plan\) 2021-25](#)
- [Community Vision](#)
- [Surf Coast Shire Child Safe Organisation Policy](#)
- [Surf Coast Shire Public Transparency Policy](#)
- [Surf Coast Shire Community Development Framework and Action Plan 2022-24](#)
- [Surf Coast Shire Governance Rules](#)

Relevant Legislation

- [Child Safe standards](#)
- [Equal Opportunity Act 2010](#)
- [Gender Equality Act 2020](#)
- [Health and Wellbeing Act 2008](#)
- [Local Government Act 1989](#)
- [Local Government Act 2020](#)
- [Subordinate Legislation Act 1994](#)
- [Public Administration Act 2004](#)
- [Road Management Act 2004](#)
- [Planning and Environment Act 2007](#)
- [Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006](#)

Other References

- [Paleert Tjaara Dja, Let's make Country good together 2020-2030](#) - Wadawurrung Healthy Country Plan
- [Meerreeengeeye ngakeepoorryeeyt](#) (meaning, Our Country, far seeing) - Eastern Maar Country Plan
- [International Association of Public Participation \(IAP2\) Spectrum of Public Participation](#)

Appendix A

IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation



IAP2's Spectrum of Public Participation was 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.

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.

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Document History

Version	Document History	Approved by – Date
1		Council resolution - 15 September 2020
2	Revised in July 2023	Council resolution - 22 August 2023