



# Community Engagement Policy

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<b>Department</b>	Council-wide
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<b>Authorising Officer</b>	Director Sustainability and Culture
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## 1. Statement and Purpose

Engagement is an intentional process with the specific purpose of working across organisations, stakeholders, and communities to shape the decisions or actions of members of the community, stakeholders, or organisation in relation to a problem, opportunity, or outcome.

Community Engagement is about involving people in the decisions that impact their lives. Successful engagement fosters integrity and builds trust in Council, resulting in more inclusive and representative outcomes.

This Policy outlines Council's commitment to the community on the principles and values that guide our community engagement. It will be supported internally by a Community Engagement Guide and Toolkit and suite of tools available for engagement with the public including Council's website.

## 2. Scope

This Policy applies to the planning, design, implementation, and evaluation of strategic community engagement activities which input into policy and planning decisions as directed by Council, recommended by staff, or legislated by the Victorian Local Government Act 2020 (the Act).

Complying with the Policy is the shared responsibility of all employees, Councillors, contractors and external consultants acting on behalf of Council.

It does not apply to consultation activities prescribed in other legislation, such as those related to planning permit applications and planning scheme amendments, governed by the Planning and Environment Act 1987. It does not apply to other council processes such as service requests or complaints.

### 3. Definitions

Community	<p>People who live, work, visit or utilise services and amenities in the Rural City of Wangaratta local government area. It can also refer to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• community of place (based on geographic location e.g. the Moyhu Community)</li> <li>• community of interest (based on common interests and activities, can be organised like a sports club or service group, or informal like cyclists or gardeners)</li> <li>• community of identity (based on an individual's shared perspective e.g. Aboriginal heritage, language speakers, particular age groups, or a religious community)</li> </ul>
Community engagement	An interactive process providing a range of opportunities for community to inform decision making, foster relationships and encourage capacity development.
Consultative engagement	A term used to describe engagements at the level of 'inform' or 'consult' on the IAP2 Spectrum of Engagement, with the related promise of keeping the community informed or seeking feedback on strategies, projects, policies and plans.
Deliberative engagement	Deliberative engagement practices are designed to create informed conversations among participants to build a deeper understanding of the complexities, trade-offs, compromises and alternatives when seeking to address complex issues. Participants are provided with a breadth of inputs, information and enough time and opportunity to engage and discuss in a welcoming and respectful environment, then provide recommendations and feedback which is reviewed and considered by Council.
IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation	The International Association for Public Participation's Spectrum which helps define the public's role in any participation process. The IAP2 Spectrum consists of five engagement levels – Inform, Consult, Involve, Collaborate, Empower.
Stakeholders	Sections of the community involved in engagement because of impact, interest or responsibility to deliver on an outcome. Can also refer to external organisations, and other levels of government involved in a decision. Always includes internal decision makers and implementers of decision outcomes.
The Act	Refers to the <i>Victorian Local Government Act (2020)</i>

## 4. Policy

The Rural City of Wangaratta commits to lead, promote and advocate for meaningful community engagement. This commitment recognises that Council works in partnership with our community, and that the community understands what is important to them, how they want to live, and how they want their neighbourhoods and towns to develop.

Wangaratta's engagement principles underpin how we design and deliver community engagement, across all stages of engagement in accordance with the Act and Victorian Auditor General Office's (VAGO) Better Practice Guide: Public Participation in Government Decision-making. The Act establishes five community engagement principles applicable to Council. This Policy reflects these principles.

Our community promise sits alongside these principles. Especially our commitment that we will take the time to talk to you, to listen to you and to help you, and we will always keep you informed of the things you need to know.

**TABLE 1: PRINCIPLES AND ACTIONS**

Principle	Rural City of Wangaratta's Commitment
1. A community engagement process must have a <b>clearly defined objective</b> and <b>scope</b> .	We will support engagement with a plan that is clear about: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the scope and objectives of engagement opportunities.</li> <li>the contribution participants will be asked to make, and the responsibilities associated with this.</li> <li>what the community can influence, and how they can participate, including what might be non-negotiable</li> </ul>
2. Participants in community engagement must have <b>access to objective, relevant and timely information</b> to inform their participation.	We will <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>provide appropriate time and resources to ensure that those affected can participate in a meaningful way.</li> <li>provide access to all relevant information about a project in a manner that participants can understand, so that their contributions may be fully informed.</li> </ul>

<p>3. Participants in community engagement must be <b>representative</b> of the <b>persons and groups affected</b> by the matter that is the subject of the community engagement.</p>	<p>We will</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complete stakeholder assessments for engagement projects, to ensure potential impacts of a project on community and stakeholder are identified, discussed and addressed</li> <li>• Make every reasonable effort to include community and stakeholders affected by a project.</li> <li>• Make reasonable adjustments where necessary to remove barriers to participation and ensure an inclusive approach.</li> <li>• Consider legislation that should shape the engagement approach, for example The Commission for Children and Young People’s Child Safe Standard 7: Strategies to promote the participation and empowerment of children, in recognition that children have a right to be heard and have their concerns and ideas taken seriously, particularly on matters that affect them.</li> </ul>
<p>4. Participants in community engagement are <b>entitled to reasonable support</b> to enable <b>meaningful and informed</b> engagement.</p>	<p>Communication tools will include information formats to support participation including language, graphics, and a range of accessible requirements.</p> <p>We will design engagement activities that are inclusive and accessible and make reasonable adjustments where necessary to remove barriers to participation. Methods will be delivered in a range of formats tailored to the issue</p>
<p>5. Participants in community engagement are informed of the ways in which the community engagement <b>process will influence Council decision making</b>.</p>	<p>We will inform participants of how their feedback will be used in the decision-making process.</p> <p>We will report back to the community in a timely and straightforward way how community feedback informed the decision-making process to demonstrate that results and outcomes are consistent with the commitment made at the beginning of the engagement.</p>

**4.1 WHEN WE WILL ENGAGE**

The Rural City of Wangaratta will engage the community in decision making processes when there is a legislated or statutory requirement. We will also engage when decisions and issues will have long-term impact on the community. Wherever possible, Council will plan for community engagement early in the project planning process, to ensure community feedback can genuinely inform project outcomes.

The Act requires deliberative engagement practices be applied to the development of the Community Vision, Council Plan, Financial Plan and Asset Plan. The Rural City of Wangaratta commits to using deliberative engagement for other projects, based on their assessed impacts. Further information about Council's deliberative practices is included in the staff community engagement guide and toolkit.

Community engagement may not be possible or feasible prior to making a decision where Council is required to respond quickly to avoid an immediate threat to the health, safety or wellbeing of the community.

Community engagement is not the sole determinant in a decision-making process. There are many other stakeholders and factors that need to be taken into consideration. These include existing policies and strategies, other levels of government, legislation and budget. In making a decision, the council takes all factors into consideration.

**TABLE 2: MINIMUM LEGISLATED ENGAGEMENT**

Strategic document, plan or process	Minimum engagement required
Community Vision*	Deliberative Engagement
Council Plan*+	Deliberative Engagement
Financial Plan*	Deliberative Engagement
Asset Plan*^	Deliberative Engagement
Making of local laws*	Consultative Engagement
Council Budget*	Consultative Engagement
Governance Rules*	Consultative Engagement
Acquiring, purchasing, selling, exchanging or leasing land (where required)*	Consultative Engagement
Other Council plans, policies, planning permits, planning scheme amendments, strategies, major projects, local projects and service delivery decisions	The level of community engagement required will be assessed in accordance with procedures or in accordance with the requirements of the relevant legislation.

Note: This table is not a definitive list of legislative requirements, but rather the key requirements under the *Local Government Act 2020*. Other Acts and Regulations may also specify community engagement or consultation requirements that are required to be considered circumstances, for example, but not limited, to the *Health and Wellbeing Act 2008* and the *Planning and Environment Act 1987*.

\* This engagement approach is required by the *Local Government Act 2020*.

+ Engagement process must be led by the Mayor in accordance with the *Local Government Act 2020*.

^ Deliberative engagement for the Asset Plan will be effective 2025.

## 5. Roles and Responsibilities

Role	Responsibility
Mayor and Councillors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adopt the Community Engagement Policy</li> <li>• Champion the principles of quality engagement through demonstrating leadership and modelling good practice</li> <li>• Stay informed of engagement activity &amp; attend as appropriate</li> <li>• Consider community engagement feedback as part of the decision-making process</li> <li>• It is also a requirement of the Act that the role of the Mayor is to lead</li> </ul>

	engagement with the municipal community on the development of the Council Plan (s18c)
Community Engagement Portfolio holder (Councillors)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supports Council's strategic work through the community accountability provisions in the new local government act including the broad implementation of the community engagement policy and principles</li> </ul>
CEO and Corporate Management team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advocate for and model a culture of good practice engagement</li> <li>• Ensure adequate resourcing of engagement</li> <li>• Communicate cross organizationally about engagement and outcomes</li> </ul>
Managers and Coordinators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure appropriate team members are trained and supported</li> <li>• Develop and provide information,</li> <li>• Promote the use of provided tools such as Connect Wangaratta</li> <li>• Report engagement findings and evaluation</li> </ul>
Team members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop and deliver community engagement plans in a consistent way that gives effect to the Council Plan and this Policy.</li> <li>• To utilise provided tools, such as Connect Wangaratta</li> <li>• Evaluate engagement processes</li> <li>• Report engagement findings and evaluation</li> </ul>
Communications and Marketing Team, including Community Engagement Advisor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure policy is up to date, implemented and reviewed</li> <li>• Ensure Council officers undertaking engagement have a good understanding of the Policy and toolkit.</li> <li>• Ensure Connect Wangaratta is utilised, monitored and evaluated</li> <li>• Advise on engagement projects and opportunities</li> </ul>
Advisory Committees and Community Reference Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advocate for quality community engagement and increased participation</li> <li>• Contribute ideas</li> <li>• Seek out ideas of other community members</li> </ul>
External consultants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advocate for quality community engagement and increased participation</li> <li>• Act in accordance with the CE Policy, utilising the tools provided by Council</li> </ul>
Community stakeholders, groups and individuals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Become informed about the role of Local Government</li> <li>• Participate in an active way by seeking out and requesting information</li> <li>• Contribute and share ideas</li> <li>• Advocate for quality community engagement</li> <li>• Be respectful of others' ideas and opinions</li> </ul>

## 6. Community Consultation

Engagement on this policy will take place in accordance with the Act, and will include engagement of internal stakeholders, and the wider Rural City of Wangaratta Community. Community members will have an opportunity to review and comment on the proposed policy prior to it being adopted by Council. *This section will be updated post community review to reflect any significant findings, feedback or changes.*

## 7. Human Rights

This policy has considered and complies with the Human Rights and Responsibilities contained in the Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006.

## 8. Equity Impact Assessment

This policy has considered and applied Council's Equity Impact Assessment Template and satisfies the provisions established in the *Gender Equality Act 2020 (Vic)*.

## 9. Monitoring and evaluation

A periodic review of this policy will be undertaken to ensure any changes required to strengthen or update the policy are made in a timely manner.

## 10. References and Related Policies

### Legislation

- *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*
- *Equal Opportunity Act 2010*
- *Local Government Act 2020 (Vic)*
- *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008*
- *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014*
- *Planning and Environment Act 1987*

### Internal policies and plans

- *Governance Rules*
- *Public Transparency Policy*
- *Community Engagement Toolkit*
- *Council Plan*

### Other references

- *Public Participation and Community Engagement: Local Government Sector, 10 May 2017, Victorian Auditor General*
- *International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) Public Participation Spectrum*

## 11.Review

The policy may be amended by the Council at any time.

It must be reviewed by the Council, and amended if necessary, at least every five years, or on changes to legislation that impacts this Policy, such as the Local Government Act 2020 (Vic)

<b>Version History</b>		
<b>Version Number</b>	<b>Date of change</b>	<b>Reasons for change</b>
1.0	25.10.2024	Initial Draft
1.1	11.11.2024	Incorporated feedback
1.2	03.03.2025	Adding Community Engagement Portfolio to Roles