Community Engagement Policy

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Related legislation:	• Local Government Act 2020 (Vic) • Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014 • Victorian Charter of Human Rights 2006 • Victorian Disability Act 2006 • Freedom of Information Act 1982 (Vic) • Health Records Act 2001 (Vic) • Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (Vic) • Equal Opportunity Act 2010 (Vic) • Public Records Act 1973 (Vic) • Privacy Act 1988 (Cth) • Copyright Act 1968 (Cth)		
Related strategic documents, policies, or procedures:	• Community Engagement Framework (in development) • Community Engagement Toolkit (in development) • Community Bushfire Risk and Engagement Guide (2019) • Customer Service Charter (2019) • VLGA Child Friendly Cities and Communities Charter (2018) • Communications Strategy (2018) • VAGO Public Participation in Government Decision-making: Better practice guide (2015) • International Association of Public Participation Australasia (IAP2): Spectrum of engagement • Youth Engagement Charter (2013) • Workplace Code of Conduct (in development) • Privacy and Data Protection Policy (2019) • Co-design Community Engagement, Victorian Government • Governance Rules • Part II Statement • Councillor Code of Conduct		

Date	Version Number	Details of Version	Modified by
16/12/2019	1	Revised policy	Manager Communications and Customer Service
16/02/2021	2	Revised policy to bring in line with Local Government Act 2020	Manager Communications and Customer Service

1. Purpose

Mount Alexander Shire Council recognises that the involvement of our communities in making decisions and plans is fundamental to good governance. This policy establishes a clear standard for the exchange of information between Council and the community through different methods. It will also guide decision making around how to solve common problems and deliver services.

2. Scope

This policy applies to the Councillors and employees (including full time, part time, casual employees, agency staff and students), volunteers and Community Asset Committees created under Section 65 of the Act. The policy is also applied in the management of contractors, volunteer groups and consultants of Mount Alexander Shire Council.

In setting out a vision for community engagement and the guiding principles, this Policy acknowledges that processes will be different for individual engagements, depending on the topic, stakeholders involved and the outcomes anticipated. Effective application of the Policy will involve a range of approaches and methods of community engagement based on best practice principles outlined in the IAP2 Spectrum of Participation. The organisation will apply a risk lens to determine the level of impact, the need for community engagement and the appropriate level.

Council may undertake community engagement on a variety of issues that are not specified in the Local Government Act 2020 where the community can influence a project or outcome. This may include:

- Development of strategies that guide future decision-making and service delivery.
- How Council allocates resources to services and projects through its annual budget.
- New or revised policies.
- Changes to service delivery, including discontinuing or altering a service, and identifying new opportunities or areas for improvement.
- Infrastructure projects, including construction, alteration or closure of buildings and facilities.
- A major issue is raised and requires a decision.
- Projects, including those that may significantly impact the environment.

This policy applies only to matters requiring a decision by the organisation.

Roles and Responsibilities
All Councillors and employees are responsible for the success of this Policy, as guided by the associated Framework, Tool Kit and protocols.

Councillors must ensure that appropriate community engagement has been undertaken to inform their decision making. Councillors to agree to the form of community engagement at the onset of key projects and as part of decision making at project completion.

Council's Executive Team will recommend to Council the appropriate level of community engagement, evaluate the effectiveness and lead improvements based on findings.

Council employees will ensure that sufficient consultation and community engagement has been undertaken based on the scope of this Policy.

Out of Scope
When a decision has already been made, or there is no genuine opportunity for the community to influence a decision Council will inform the community of its implementation, such as processes imposed by other Victorian legislation.

3. Policy

Mount Alexander Shire Council is committed to:

- Ensuring that community engagement is integrated into Council core business to support decision making, build relationships and strengthen communities and seek improvement opportunities.

- Assessing the need and scope of community engagement at the planning stage of any project or initiative, when:

  - A change in service, activities, user group or major infrastructure is considered
  - An issue is raised and requires a decision
  - More information or evidence is required
  - There is an opportunity for stakeholders to influence a Council project or its outcome

- Determining the level of community engagement based on a wide range of factors, including but not limited to:

  - Who is impacted by the project or decision
  - The extent of the impact on the community
  - Consideration of community concerns and priorities
  - Consideration of project timeframes and resources
  - An identified genuine need to engage
  - Legislative, mandated or regulatory requirements.

- Ensuring adequate resources are available to deliver the community engagement.

Other factors may also influence the level of community engagement undertaken such as budget limitations and need for urgent decisions in times of emergency.

The implementation of this Policy will be through the development of a Community Engagement Framework and Toolkit to support genuine community engagement. This will incorporate the IAP2 Spectrum of Participation, which defines the level of public participation and the publics' role in engagement, ranging from inform, consult, involve, collaborate and empower.

4. Principles

The Policy is underpinned by the following six (6) principles:

Transparent

This means that when Council engages with the community it:

- Has clearly defined objectives and scope
- Provides clarity on which aspects are negotiable or not
- Outlines the level of participation (inform, consult, involve, collaborate or empower).

Timely and relevant

This means when Council engages with the community it:

- Provides objective, relevant and clear information on the matter that is the subject of community engagement
- Allows reasonable timeframes for engagement.

Inclusive

This means that when Council engages with the community it actively seeks to:

- Engage with representatives including persons and groups affected by the matter that is the subject of community engagement.
- Engage with parts of the community who have historically not been involved in decision making.
- Reach marginalised and disenfranchised groups in the community.

Accessible participation

This means that when Council engages with the community it will:

- Provide a variety of communication methods that suit the needs of the community, and reasonable support, to enable meaningful and informed engagement.
- Support all participants to engage and reduce barriers to participation.
- Use culturally appropriate engagement methods.
- Support people to be involved in the ways that are most relevant to them.
- Engage with people in the places they are connected to, and in spaces that are welcoming and accessible.

Closes the loop

This means that when Council engages with the community it:

- Informs the community about how their input has or will influence Council's decision making.

Evaluate

This means that when Council engages with the community it:

- Evaluates the community engagement process to assess whether the objectives and outcomes have been achieved and identify opportunities for improvement.

5. Engagement

Community engagement is conducted for a specific purpose that has been identified by Council when it is required to make a decision.

In determining the need for engagement, officers consider the intended outcomes and benefits that will be derived from the engagement, what resources will be required and how the information gathered will influence Council's decision making. These considerations demonstrate when community engagement will enhance the work of Council.

Deliberative engagement methods will be used where required under the Local Government Act 2020. In keeping with past practices, deliberative engagement methods may be considered for other community engagement opportunities.

Deliberative engagement **does apply** to the following:

- The development of the Community Vision
- The development of the Council Plan
- The development of the Financial Plan
- The development of the Asset Plan.

The Community Engagement Guidelines for staff provide the detail on how to develop a deliberative community engagement process.

6. Definitions of Abbreviations Used

A table of terms and their definitions as they relate to the policy

Term	Definition
Community	People, organisations and Traditional Owners who live in, are ratepayers of and/or conduct business or activities in Mount Alexander Shire Council.
Community engagement	A planned process in which Council and the community exchange information through different methods and take actions to solve common problems, deliver services or make decisions.
Deliberative Engagement	Means a method of engagement process with a select group of participants. The process focuses on a defined issue. It weighs up options and provides recommendations to decision-makers.
International Association for Public Participation Australasia (IAP2)	IAP2 is a leading organisation in public engagement practice and has a series of tools which support the delivery of engagement, specifically core values, public participation spectrum, code of ethics for public participation practitioners, and quality assurance standards.
IAP2 Spectrum of Participation	Defines the level of participation and the public's role in an engagement process ranging from inform, consult, involve, collaborate and empower.
Risk levels	Determines the level of real or percieved impact (high to low) across the shire or on a local area, small community or user group of a specific facility or service.

Stakeholder	Individuals, group of individuals, organisations or political entities with a specific stake in an outcome of a decision or the impact of a strategy, project or proposition.
VAGO	Victorian Auditor-General Office
VLGA	Victorian Local Government Association

7. Human Rights Statement

Human Rights Statement

It is considered that this policy does not impact negatively on any rights identified in the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act (2006). Mount Alexander Shire Council is committed to consultation and cooperation between management and employees. Mount Alexander Shire Council will formally involve the Workplace Consultative Committee in any workplace change that may affect employees.