

# Community Engagement Policy

2021 - 2026

**Responsible Directorate:** Customer and Transformation

**Authorised By:** Council

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**BOROONDARA**  
*City of Harmony*

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. Purpose

The City of Boroondara is committed to engaging with Boroondara's diverse community and stakeholders using appropriate, effective and inclusive engagement practices. The Community Engagement Policy 2021 - 2026 (the policy) acknowledges participation in civic life is central to good health, developing strong and supportive networks and creating a positive community spirit.

The purpose of this policy is to outline how Council will fulfill its commitment to create genuine and transparent opportunities to enable community members to provide feedback about matters of interest to them through Council's decision-forming processes.

This policy describes the role of community engagement in the Council decision-forming process including, but not limited to:

- strategic projects
- community vision
- policy, plan and strategy development
- service delivery programs
- major projects
- capital works.

This policy provides direction to Council staff about identifying when and how to implement a range of community engagement strategies, and the policy applies whenever any level of public input or participation is sought from the community in relation to Council projects, strategies, plans, programs or service delivery.

Further to this policy, a Community Engagement Guide has been developed to assist Council officers undertake engagement activities. This guide provides a variety of resources including templates and examples and advice on a range of community engagement scenarios. The guide is updated regularly. It also provides information on deliberative engagement at the City of Boroondara.

## 1.2. Scope

This policy applies to all employees, contractors, agents and volunteers of Council who are involved in engaging with the community of Boroondara. This policy will also apply to agencies and individuals who provide services to Council, and will be included in all relevant external supplier contracts.

The policy outlines requirements to comply with Council's approach to community engagement.

It aims to:

- outline the principles that guide community engagement in Boroondara
- set out how and when community engagement activities are undertaken by Council staff, including employees, contractors, agents and volunteers of Council
- incorporate changes from the *Local Government Act 1989* to the *Local Government Act 2020* recognising Council's role in engagement, including when to undertake deliberative engagement
- outline a community engagement approach that takes in to account the diverse needs of our community and is based on industry standards for sound public participation
- promote consistency of approach across Council to ensure, when appropriate, all communities can receive opportunities for engagement and participation
- encourage a complete process in consultation activities that includes providing feedback to the community.

### 1.3. Corporate framework

#### ***Boroondara Community Plan***

The *Boroondara Community Plan* sets out the 10-year vision for our future based on the values, aspirations and priorities that the Boroondara community told us were important to them. It builds on what makes Boroondara a remarkable place to live now, and forms the foundation for us to work alongside our community and partners to achieve our vision together. As a key strategic document, the plan guides decision making and directly informs the Council Plan, Budget, strategies, policies and actions. The plan also identifies the health priorities Council will focus on, in partnership with local agencies, and responds to the requirements of the *Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008*.

#### ***Council Plan 2017-21***

The *Council Plan 2017-21* outlines the way Council seeks to achieve goals for Boroondara over the four-year Council term. The Council Plan aligns with the community priorities identified in the Boroondara Community Plan and outlines key focus areas for Council services. The *Community Engagement Policy* supports the theme 'Civic Leadership and Governance', with particular reference to the strategic objective: *Ensure that ethical, financial and socially responsible decision making reflects community needs and is based on principles of accountability, transparency, responsiveness and consultation.*

## 2. Background

### 2.1. Policy environment

The City of Boroondara continues its long-standing commitment to engaging with its local communities and stakeholders using best practice. The development of this policy is an opportunity to amend the previous policy and incorporate engagement aspects in the *Local Government Act 2020*.

### 2.2. Policy context

#### *The Local Government Act 2020*

The *Local Government Act 2020* states that a role of Council is to provide governance and leadership for the local community through advocacy, decision making and action. The primary objective of a Council is to endeavour to achieve the best outcomes for the local community with respect to the long term and cumulative effects of decisions. In making decisions, Council holds the responsibility to take into account the diverse needs of the local community.

Under the *Local Government Act 2020*, the 'local community' includes:

- people who live in the City of Boroondara
- people and bodies who are ratepayers
- people and bodies who conduct activities in the City of Boroondara.

#### *Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*

The *Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* is about the relationship between government and the people it serves, and sets out the basic rights, freedoms and responsibilities of all people in Victoria. This Act enshrines the human right to take part in public life, stating that "every person has the right to take part in public life, such as the right to vote or run for public office".

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1. Consultation

The *Community Engagement Policy 2021-26* builds upon, and replaces, the *Community Engagement Policy 2015-20*.

#### *Community consultation*

Community members were invited to provide feedback through an online survey via the Your Say website. The link to the online survey was promoted in the *Boroondara Bulletin*, a regular newsletter distributed to

all residents published in hard copy and electronically and promoted through social media channels. The survey was also available via hard copy on request and community members could provide feedback directly to the Community Engagement Specialist.

#### *Desktop research*

Desktop research included a detailed study of the community engagement policies developed by a number of Victorian municipalities and workshops facilitated by State Government. Information and clarity was sought on changes to the *Local Government Act 2020* to ensure that the policy meets relevant legislation.

#### *Internal consultation*

The policy has been developed in consultation with various key stakeholders within the City of Boroondara organisation.

## **4. Policy statement**

### **4.1. What is community engagement?**

Community engagement is a process in which the community has a role in Council's decision-making process. For Council decision-making to be an effective, transparent and accountable process, decisions are made by weighing and balancing community expectations with other factors such as:

- fiscal responsibility
- economic considerations
- health and safety considerations
- equity and diversity considerations
- environmental, social and cultural benefits throughout the City.

Engagement processes should be designed so that views are representative of the persons and groups affected by the matter. This means aiming to design engagement programs tailored to reach all groups and individuals in the community, including those whose views are less often heard, or who are more difficult to reach through traditional engagement approaches, such as:

- children and young people
- senior citizens
- people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- people who live with a disability, and their carers.

The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) is an international member association which seeks to promote and improve the practice of public participation, incorporating individuals, governments, institutions and other entities that affect the public interest throughout the world. The *IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum* consists of five levels of public participation, which are displayed in Table 1.

Council is committed to using the levels of public participation in its community engagement practices to create a shared language for engagement, in order to build community trust and understanding. Council staff will be supported by the Strategic Communications Team in selecting an appropriate level of engagement for their community engagement programs and to ensure they meet the intent of this policy. Application of this policy will be guided by the following principles as defined in the *Local Government Act 2020*.

<b>Principle</b>	<b>Our commitment to the community</b>
A community engagement process must have a clearly defined objective and scope	<p>Council will ensure all community engagement is planned and has clearly defined objectives and scope. This includes identifying the purpose and objectives of the community's participation in the engagement process.</p> <p>Council will ensure the purpose of the engagement is communicated clearly to the community and/or participants.</p>
Participants in community engagement must have access to objective, relevant and timely information to inform their participation	<p>Council will strive to provide information that is objective and relevant in a timely manner.</p> <p>Information provided is accessible and easy to understand.</p> <p>Council will ensure the community has the information necessary to participate meaningfully.</p>
Participants in community engagement must be representative of the persons and groups affected by the matter that is the subject of the community engagement	<p>Council will conduct appropriate research to identify stakeholders that will be impacted.</p> <p>Council will ensure that participants in the engagement are representative of those impacted in the community.</p> <p>Council will conduct engagement in accordance with Child Safe Standards ensuring that children are empowered and encouraged to participate in community engagement</p>
Participants in community engagement are entitled to reasonable support to enable meaningful and informed engagement	<p>Council will ensure engagement activities and information provided are accessible to the community.</p> <p>Council will ensure that everyone that would want to have a say, can have their say.</p> <p>Council will take into account the diverse communication needs of the community to ensure engagement is inclusive and accessible for all.</p>
Participants in community engagement are informed of the ways in which the community engagement process will influence Council decision making	<p>Council will be transparent with the community on the level of influence the community has on an engagement process. These will be based on the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2).</p>



Council will refer to the model of engagement developed by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) known as the *Public Participation Spectrum*. The spectrum outlines the types of engagement that can be undertaken with stakeholders and communities and shows different levels of participation as appropriate to the circumstances are legitimate in decision-forming processes.

Council uses the IAP2 Spectrum (see Table 1 below) as a guide to reflect international best practice. It is important to note Council operates as a body elected by the community to provide good governance in Boroondara for the benefit and wellbeing of the Boroondara community. While the *Empower* level of public participation is described as placing decision-making in the hands of the public, it is important for decisions to be made by those elected by the community to make decisions on their behalf. This ensures both balanced representation and the necessary accountability between decision makers and those impacted by the decisions made. References to 'Empower' within the IAP2 Spectrum and this policy will therefore be interpreted as attaching significant weight to recommendations made by groups formally established by Council for the purpose of providing recommendations regarding a particular matter.

### *The IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum*

Table 1: IAP2 Spectrum for Public Participation (represented to reflect City of Boroondara context)

	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
<b>Public Participation Goal</b>	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problems, alternatives 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 aspects of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place decision-making elements in the hands of the public.
<b>Example tools</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fact sheet</li> <li>• Website</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Survey</li> <li>• Public comment</li> <li>• Focus group</li> <li>• Pop-up Council</li> <li>• Workshop</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Workshop</li> <li>• Online wiki</li> <li>• Working group</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reference group</li> <li>• Working group</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People's Panels</li> </ul>
<b>Role of community</b>	Listen	Contribute	Participate	Partner	Partner
<b>Commitment to the community</b>	We will keep you informed	We will listen & acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how the community feedback influenced the decision	We will work with you to ensure your concerns and aspirations are reflected in the alternatives developed	We will work with you to innovate, seek your advice and incorporate your comments to the maximum extent possible	We will attach significant weight to what is recommended.

## 4.2. Types of community engagement

Broadly speaking there are two types of community engagement that fall within the IAP2 Spectrum, participatory and deliberative. Many projects will involve both types of engagement at different stages of the process. This may be as a result of the planned engagement process or due to different stakeholders choosing to engage at different levels of public participation.

### 4.2.1. Participatory engagement

Participatory engagement is more common in the first two levels of the IAP2 spectrum, Inform and Consult. Participatory engagement is typical when Council is seeking feedback on ideas and concepts, draft documents or as an insight into a community's view on a particular subject.

Examples of participatory practices are:

- surveys
- polls
- submissions

### 4.2.2. Deliberative engagement

Deliberative engagement is more commonly used in the latter levels of the IAP2 spectrum, and identified in the *Local Government Act 2020*, however it is not defined. It is important to note there is a difference between a deliberative engagement process and an engagement process that has deliberative elements. A deliberative engagement process can take various forms but should consider these elements:

- a representative sample of the community who are going to be impacted
- clear scope and remit for the deliberation including a commitment to participants on the level of influence their recommendations or decisions hold
- provision of timely impartial information
- adequate time for deliberation by participants
- support from Council to participate (accessibility, potential co-design of process, potential reimbursement)

Deliberative engagement is a process that allows members of the impacted group or community to come to a decision after considering all information and prioritising solutions. In some circumstances, an independent facilitator may be used to assist deliver a fair and equitable process.

### 4.2.3. Submission process

At times, the only form of community participation may be through a submission as governed by Section 223 of the *Local Government Act 1989*. It is important to note that Section 223 is not repealed from the *Local Government Act 1989*. Where other legislation requires a Section 223 process Council will continue to manage the submission process in the same way as it previously had.

Section 223 of the *Local Government Act 1989* will still apply to various provisions of that Act including:

- Section 157(5) – council decision to change system of valuation
- Sections 163A and 166(4) – special rates
- Section 169(1C) – rebates and concessions
- Section 179 – Regional Library agreements
- Section 199 – concentration or diversion of drainage
- Section 200 – drainage of land
- Section 207A – a range of traffic and road related matters

## 4.3. When to engage

The *Community Engagement Policy 2021-2026* aims to support effective project outcomes. Planning for community engagement as part of the initial whole-of-project planning stage to better manage timeframes, cost and resources associated with engagement, is best practice. Good engagement takes time, preparation and resources.



As outlined in the *Local Government Act 2020*, Councils must at a minimum, apply this policy in the development of the following:

- planning and financial management
- community vision
- council plan
- financial plan
- revenue and rating planning
- asset plan
- proposal and/or amendment of a local law
- selling, leasing or exchanging land.

Specifically in relation to deliberative engagement, Council must use a deliberative engagement process as defined in section 4.2.2 for the following:

- maintenance of their Community Vision
- preparation and adoption of a Council Plan
- development and adoption of a 10 year Financial Plan
- development and adoption of a 10 year Asset Plan.

While not specifically directed by the *Local Government Act 2020*, Council may engage with the community when:

- reviewing existing strategies and proposing a change in strategic direction
- substantially changing or reviewing a service, program or project
- proposing a new policy or strategy
- proposing a change to the way a public space looks, or is used
- making rules or regulations that govern the use and enjoyment of public space
- planning major projects
- proposing urban redevelopment proposals, such as structure plans, to significantly change the existing amenity or characteristic of an area
- planning capital works projects including public buildings, centres or other infrastructure.

Opportunities for community engagement may also arise when:

- the community raises an issue with Council for a decision (or outcome) and there are likely to be competing community interests
- the proposed change is likely to generate significant community outrage (strong and mixed views)
- Council needs more information to make an informed decision
- an issue may significantly affect the community in terms of economy, lifestyle, environment or amenity of the municipality.

The specific methods for engagement are not prescribed within this policy as it is not best practice to prescribe methods without understanding the scope, intent and audience of the project. Those designing the engagement plan should take in to consideration the IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum, understand what commitment they are making to the community and then follow the process outlined in section 4.5 of this policy.

#### **4.4. When not to engage**

There may be times when engagement is not appropriate. Some examples of this include:

- when it has potential to conflict with other engagement activities being led by Council. Recommendations may include deferring engagement until a more appropriate time
- the duration of the election/caretaker period as governed by the *Local Government Act 2020* and/or Council's Election Period Policy

- when it conflicts with statutory processes such as those identified in Section 4.2.3 of this policy
- Exceptions to this may occur. This will be resolved by Strategic Communications working with the relevant Department Manager to reach an agreed approach to progress a project.

This is not an exhaustive list but provides examples of when a staff member or other person as identified in this policy will need to seek guidance from the Community Engagement Specialist. Through following the below 12-step approach as listed in section 4.5 it is expected staff members may identify other times in consultation with key stakeholders it is not appropriate to engage.

#### 4.5. How to engage

A 12-step best practice approach to stakeholder engagement has been developed to use alongside the IAP2 Spectrum. This is based on the AA1000 Stakeholder Engagement Standard by AccountAbility which is a widely applied global standard that aims to set the benchmark for good-quality engagement. Outlined below is the process for planning, implementing and reviewing community engagement activities. For larger projects all steps should be considered however for others, there may be need to focus on a few of the components.

Plan	1. Establish purpose	Identify and define why you're engaging. What is the intent?
	2. Define scope	What can the community influence? What's negotiable?
	3. Identify stakeholders	Internal and external, who needs to be involved?
	4. Develop methodology	How will Council engage and ensure the community are engaged? Methodology should ensure engagement takes into account the communication needs of our diverse community to ensure that it is accessible and inclusive of all members of the community.
	5. Set timeframes	Allow time for engagement and that there are no conflicts e.g. caretaker periods. Usually a minimum time of two weeks should be allowed for simple consultation projects.
Do	6. Organise resources	What is needed for your different engagement activities? Staff? Interpreters? Materials? Catering? An accessible location and facility?
	7. Invite Participation	Ensure all community that would want to have a say are aware they can have a say. Include information on inclusive methods available to participate i.e. Auslan interpreting is available on request for a workshop or to contact us to access information in alternative formats including in languages other than English etc.
	8. Provide information to participants	Ensure that the community are provided with information to ensure they can engage meaningfully.
	9. Conduct engagement activity	Commence the various engagement channels and tools.

Review	10. Collate and analyse community feedback	Analyse your qualitative and quantitative data. What has the community said?
	11. Report back to community	This can be an opportunity to test what you have heard and how their input has been incorporated in the decision
	12. Evaluate process	Has the engagement process been effective? Conduct a lessons learned workshop.

#### 4.6. Who do we engage with

Understanding the key stakeholders in any project is paramount to good community engagement. When Council are planning to make a decision, we need to identify those that are likely to be affected and involve them in the decision making process. It is important to understand that particular groups in our community may have barriers to engaging with us and we need to ensure we design engagement plans that includes methods that enable and encourage participation by all.

Some projects that Council will engage on impact our entire community, but we acknowledge some projects or decisions may impact some people more than others. It is important that prior to any community consultation a thorough stakeholder analysis is completed to ensure we are engaging with all of the relevant community members and considering any requirements of their communication needs i.e. the translation of information, the use of interpreters or information in alternative formats.

Council should ensure that the children of our municipality are provided with the opportunity, encouraged and empowered to participate in community engagement on matters that are impacting them. This is in line with Victoria's compulsory Child Safe Standards.

#### 4.7. Reporting

Reporting back to the community closes the feedback loop. The report should recognise and respect the contributions made by community members, the expertise and experience shared, and the time taken to participate.

Capturing and reporting feedback demonstrates the consultation activity was taken seriously, and community members' input was heard and valued. The report-back process is an important step in the community engagement process that:

- builds confidence in the process
- shows participants that their views have been accurately represented
- stimulates interest in participation in consultation activities.

Community members are interested to know how their feedback will affect the final decision. Feedback about the final decision may use the structure: What we asked... What you said... What we did...

This simple structure demonstrates:

- the clear purpose of the consultation
- that community feedback was heard and acknowledged
- how community feedback informed the final decision made by Council.

The timely and accessible provision of a report maintains community interest and momentum around a program.

Council uses a variety of report-back formats, and staff are encouraged to select a report format that is consistent with the consultation approach used in the community engagement program. A report may, for example, use the format of:

- a letter to the stakeholders involved in the community engagement program

- a draft strategy, plan or policy
- an ‘at a glance’ overview of key findings and next steps
- a video
- a Council report.

## 5. Implementation and monitoring

### 5.1. Revision

The policy will be reviewed and updated in 2022, then again in 2026, or as required following significant changes. As required under the *Local Government Act 2020* Council must adopt and maintain this policy including amendments to the policy made before the policy sunset date.

### 5.2. Accountabilities

The Head of Strategic Communications coordinates the implementation, maintenance and review of this policy, ensuring stakeholders are aware of their accountabilities.

The Strategic Communications Team is an active participant in the delivery of the community engagement culture and practice at the City of Boroondara. The Strategic Communications Team will bring expertise, influence and resources to support departments in the development and delivery of community engagement programs, as required.

All staff will be supported by the Strategic Communications Team in being accountable for this policy. For all queries or feedback regarding this policy document, please contact the responsible department below.

Position Title	Contact number	Contact department email
Head of Strategic Communications	(03) 9278 4444	<a href="mailto:ecomms@boroondara.vic.gov.au">ecomms@boroondara.vic.gov.au</a>

## 6. References

### 6.1. Community engagement is required under the following legislation:

- *Age Discrimination Act 2004*
- *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*
- *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*
- *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008*
- *Equal Opportunity Act 2010*
- *Health Act 1958*
- *Information Privacy Act 2000*
- *Local Government Act 2020*
- *Planning and Environment Act 1987*
- *A Guide for Creating a Child Safe Organisation*

## 6.2. Definitions

Community	People who live in the City of Boroondara, people and bodies who are ratepayers; and people and bodies who conduct activities in the City of Boroondara.
Engagement	<p>‘Engagement’, as used in this policy, is a practice, specifically through the development and delivery of a community engagement program.</p> <p>‘Engagement’ may also describe the broad range of interactions between people, including approaches such as one-way communication or information delivery, consultation, involvement and collaboration in decision-making, and empowered action in informal groups or formal partnerships.</p>
Stakeholder	The term 'stakeholder' in this policy represents a broader definition than a group with a special or particular interest in an issue; it is extended to include the broader community and Council staff as stakeholders.
Deliberative engagement	The <i>Local Government Act 2020</i> does not prescribe what are deliberative engagement practices. The key characteristics of deliberative engagement are considered to be: authentic engagement with the community; good representation of the community in engagement activities; clear demonstration of how all views have been considered; accessible and relevant information available to the community to ensure the decision-making process and the community’s level of influence is clear in each instance; and that participants are fully informed. Transparency is key to an effective process.
Representative sample	<p>A representative sample is a subset (smaller group) that seeks to accurately reflect characteristics of the larger population of interest.</p> <p>Engaging with a representative sample is appropriate in complex or high-stakes situations when it is not practical or possible to engage with every community member. The views of the representative sample can be relied upon to represent the views of the whole community.</p> <p>A representative sample is a subset of Boroondara community members whose demographic characteristics mirror Boroondara’s whole population. The key characteristics of relevance to this policy at a minimum include gender, age-group, suburb of residence and cultural diversity.</p>



## Engagement Framework

Consulting and talking to children	Practical suggestions	Good outcomes
<b>Establish what safety means to children</b>	<p>Ask children when they feel safe and when they feel unsafe.</p> <p>Ensure the physical environment is safe, warm and friendly towards children.</p>	<p>Development of the Child Safe Policy, Code of Conduct and complaints management process, which are informed by children's insight and responses. Being alerted to any physical danger in the environment.</p>
<b>Educate children about their rights</b>	<p>Run informal education sessions on the Convention on the Rights of the Child.</p> <p>Teach children that with every right they enjoy, they need to meet its corresponding responsibility.</p> <p>Undertake activities on 'rights' versus 'wants'.</p>	<p>Children understand their basic human rights.</p> <p>Children understand that they need to meet their responsibilities.</p> <p>Children know the difference between a 'right' and a 'want'.</p>
<b>Include children in policy development</b>	<p>Explain what the organisation is attempting to do and ask children for their ideas, opinions and suggestions.</p> <p>Run small discussion groups, and provide refreshments and activities.</p> <p>Give regular breaks.</p>	<p>A Child Safe Policy that children understand and that represents their suggestions.</p> <p>Practical suggestions that contribute to a physically safe environment.</p>
<b>Encourage children to develop their own Code of Conduct</b>	<p>Ask children what is acceptable behaviour and unacceptable behaviour. This includes behaviour of adults towards children, of children towards adults and of children towards children.</p> <p>Formulate a Code of Conduct using 'DO' and 'DO NOT' or 'WE WILL' and 'WE WILL NOT'.</p>	<p>A child-friendly Code of Conduct for an organisation, written by children for children.</p> <p>Guidelines for an organisation's staff and volunteers that cover their interactions, expected behaviour and relationships with children.</p>