



Community Engagement Policy

Purpose

Maintaining community focus remains a core value for Baw Baw Shire Council. This policy supports that commitment and provides a framework to guide Councillors, staff and consultants in achieving better decisions and successful outcomes.

Community engagement allows the community to have an active voice in contributing to Council decisions. It strengthens transparency and builds the community's trust in Council's decision-making process.

Community engagement is a "big ticket item" in the 2025–2029 Baw Baw Shire Council Plan. The Council Plan states councils' ambition to be:

"Working in partnership with the community by tapping into their expertise and experience during the planning and design of community assets, programs and services"

Scope

This policy applies to all community engagement activities led or commissioned by Council; however, Council Meeting public participation is excluded as it is governed by Governance Rules. This policy works alongside relevant legislative engagement requirements.

The Policy will be reviewed every four years or as required.

Policy Principles

The *Local Government Act (Vic) 2020* - Section 55 - requires all Victorian councils to develop and maintain a Community Engagement Policy. The policy must, amongst other things, be developed in consultation with the community and give effect to the community engagement principles listed in the Act.

Section 56 of the Act lists the principles:

- a community engagement process must have a clearly defined objective and scope;
- participants in community engagement must have access to objective, relevant and timely information to inform their participation;

- participants in community engagement must be representative of the persons and groups affected by the matter that is the subject of the community engagement;
- participants in community engagement are entitled to reasonable support to enable meaningful and informed engagement;
- participants in community engagement are informed of the ways in which the community engagement process will influence Council decision making.

In addition, Council is committed to engagement that is clear, respectful and purposeful, including consideration of the relevant role Council is undertaking. The community can expect:

- **Transparency** – clearly communicate the purpose, process and outcomes, including what is open to influence
- **Proportionality** – match the level of engagement to the level of impact, risk and community interest
- **Accessible information** – provide timely, accessible and relevant information
- **Inclusiveness** – include diverse and underrepresented voices
- **Accountability** – use community input to inform decisions where appropriate and not undertake engagement where it would create false expectations of influence
- **Continuous Improvement** – engagement practices will be reviewed regularly

Definitions

Communication is about sharing information clearly and consistently with the public, supporting transparency in Council's actions and decisions.

Community Engagement goes beyond information; it involves actively listening to community members, gathering feedback, and fostering a two-way dialogue to build trust and participation. *Community engagement* is a meaningful, respectful exchange of information and ideas. It is a planned process that provides opportunities for Council and the community to improve decision making through participation.

Advocacy focuses on promoting and supporting policies or initiatives to drive change, often by influencing public opinion and/or decision-makers to achieve specific goals.

Community engagement framework (IAP2)

The International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) has developed a robust and well used framework that provides a sound basis for considering community engagement. It reflects that community engagement can cover a spectrum from the community being informed of a decision through to the community being empowered to make a decision themselves, often within parameters set by council.

Related policies and documents

- [Governance rules](#)
- ["Gender Impact Assessment – Overview"](#)
- [Councillor and Staff Interaction Policy \(2025–2029\)](#)
- [Complaints Handling Policy](#)
- [Child Safety Policy](#)

- [Occupational Health & Safety Policy](#)
- [Public Transparency policy](#)
- Project Management Framework

Note that all Council Policies can be viewed on the Baw Baw website @ [A-Z Policies and Documents](#)

Policy detail

Engagement framework

The IAP2 engagement framework table is reproduced below.

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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Engagement examples in Local Government

Inform – *Example:* A Council distributes a brochure explaining upcoming roadworks, including timelines, impacts, and contact details – no public input is requested.

Consult – *Example:* A Local Government seeks community feedback through a survey on a proposed dog park location, then considers the responses in their final decision.

Involve – *Example:* The Council forms a community reference group to help shape a new neighbourhood traffic calming plan, ensuring ongoing dialogue and input.

Collaborate – *Example:* Council co-designs a community garden with residents, working together from concept to implementation and sharing decision-making throughout.

Empower – *Example:* A Council holds a binding community vote to determine the use of a public space (e.g. park redevelopment options) and agrees to implement the majority decision.

Council applies a tiered approach. The three categories of engagement at Baw Baw:

High Priority – Category 1

- Matters that require deliberative engagement under the LGA or high impact matters
- Level: Involve, Collaborate or Empower

Significant – Category 2

- Matters which have significant or long-term implications
- Level: Consult, Involve or Collaborate

Standard – Category 3

- Operational or ongoing matters which are of lower impact
- Level: Inform or Consult

Increased level of Community Participation					
	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Role of Council	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.
Role of the Community	Listen	Contribute	Participate	Partner	Partner or lead
How we do this	Presentations, displays and exhibits Website information On-site signs Progress reports Fact sheets Newsletters Letters, emails, text messages and phone calls Media releases, advertisements and social media	Have Your Say public comment Surveys Public meetings or forums* Focus groups Community group consultation	Workshops* Deliberative Polling	Citizen advisory committees* Participatory decision-making*	Deliberative panels (Citizen Juries)* Delegated decisions
How we categorise this	Category 1: Matters which require deliberative engagement under the Local Government Act 2020 or other matters identified by Council or similar.				
	Category 2: Matters which are of higher or long-term impact and significant interest to the community.				
	Category 3: Matters which are of lower impact or interest to the community, or where the community's ability to influence is limited.				
	*Deliverable in-person or online.				

Why we engage

- To help the community understand the projects and actions Council is undertaking
- To help Council better deliver infrastructure and services for the community
- Work in partnership with the community to inform a Council decision or advocacy position

When we engage

- The community can impact or influence a council decision
- A potential change to a service, plan, policy or asset is proposed and may have an impact on the community
- When Council needs information for the development of projects, plan or decision making
- When community experience and expertise will inform and strengthen Council's advocacy for a priority community outcome
- When community input will assist Council to develop a policy position on another agencies proposed activities
- When community input will support Council to prioritise potentially competing issues
- When sharing information will strengthen the community's ability to make decisions and take action independent of Council

When we won't engage

- Where an adopted policy, strategy, decision or recent engagement has determined a clear direction
- When a decision must be guided by technical, legal, financial, confidentiality, probity or safety requirements
- General operational decisions that have limited impact

Who we engage

Participants in community engagement should include people and groups affected by the issue being considered. Community engagement plans will identify community members and groups with a connection to a project or decision to ensure they are informed and encouraged to participate.

Attention is required to consider vulnerable or hard to reach people who may be impacted by decisions. Care is required in considering how information is presented and shared to ensure everyone has an opportunity to provide input.

Council will seek to engage individuals and groups who are

- Likely to be impacted
- Have expressed an interest in the issue
- May provide valuable insight and input
- Represent underrepresented groups and/or diverse perspectives.
- Have relevant lived experience

Support for participation

Participants in community engagement must have access to objective, relevant and timely information to inform their participation and are entitled to reasonable support to enable meaningful and informed engagement. Council will consider how people can access information and what communication channels will best support effective engagement. If in-person engagement is planned, venues and locations must be physically accessible, desirably without reliance on private vehicle travel.

How long we engage

Engagement will typically be for a minimum 21 days unless there is an urgency to make decisions. If there is a legislative requirement that differs from 21 days, then Council will at minimum satisfy the legislative requirements. Operational “inform” engagement may be scheduled for less than 21 days when that will provide a better community outcome. Longer engagement periods may be considered for high priority matters or when considering the engagement needs of particular communities.

The time available for engagement will be clearly communicated. Where practical, all input, including that submitted outside the design period will be considered, noting that summaries and statistical analyses will require a firm deadline for inclusion in reports and advice.

School holiday periods should be avoided if possible. Some stakeholder groups may also have limited availability at different times (eg workers during business hours).

What happens after engagement

Council will “close the loop” by reporting outcomes in a timely and proportionate manner, including what the community had to say and how that has informed council decisions.

- A summary of the engagement
- Key themes and feedback
- What we changed
- What we didn't change and why
- What happens next

How we engage

A template is attached as an appendix to this policy for Council to plan, document, deliver and assess community engagement in a consistent and considered manner.

It covers the following steps:

1. Define

- Purpose, scope and level of influence
- Risks, sensitivities and complexity
- Measures of success

2. Understand

- Stakeholders, affected communities/groups, existing networks
- Community demographics
- Inclusion of diverse, underrepresented and hard-to-reach populations

3. Design

- Formats (e.g., town halls, surveys, focus groups, online platforms) and tools appropriate to the community and audience
- Ensure accessibility considerations (language, timing, location, technology)
- Communication channels (e.g., social media, email, newsletters, in-person) for information sharing
- Timeframes and milestones

4. Deliver

- Implementation of engagement activities
- Maintaining trust and transparency throughout the process

5. Review

- Analyse feedback and insights and report back to community

6. Apply

- Demonstrate how the findings and feedback will be represented during any decision-making process.

7. Evaluate

- Assess effectiveness and identify opportunities for improvement based on feedback and best practice

8. Report

- Provide feedback to participants on
 - What we heard
 - What changed
 - What didn't change (and why)
 - Next steps

Approval date	TBC – mid 2026
Approval authority	Council
Effective from	Insert date
Review term	Council term
Next review date	2030
Responsible position	Manager Communications, Advocacy and Engagement
Responsible Director	Chief Executive Officer
Version	1

Appendix - Template Engagement plan

Used this template to plan your engagement with community and seek relevant approval to proceed.

Project title

Key contacts

Name	Title, branch	Responsibilities	Email	Phone

Purpose

Why are you engaging the community?

What issue are you trying to address? What decisions need to be made? What level of engagement?

Context

Background

What is the background of this project? What happened before that might be relevant?

Trends

Local, regional, national or international trends impacting the project

About the community

What you know including:

- where they live
- languages spoken
- preferred channels for information
- key cultural and religious dates

Scope

Negotiables

List everything that can be changed based on what you discover during your engagement

- How a strategy is implemented
- Ways of communicating
- How government works with community

Non-negotiables

List everything that is already decided and cannot be changed or influenced through your engagement

- Timeline – must be delivered by DATE
- Budget
- Legislative requirements

Questions

What do you want to ask the community to help with your decision-making?

Alignment with IAP2 spectrum

The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) has a public engagement spectrum. This spectrum can help you design an engagement process that is most appropriate for the decision you are trying to make.

Level	Description
Inform	Objectively share information to help your stakeholders understand your project
Consult	Get feedback from stakeholders on analysis, alternatives, decisions
Involve	Work with stakeholders to understand views, feedback, and develop solutions
Collaborate	Involve stakeholders in the decision-making process, developing alternatives, identifying solutions
Empower	Stakeholders can make and implement final decisions for the project

Stakeholder analysis

Stakeholder interest refers to how much the stakeholder will be affected by or interested in the decision you are making.

Stakeholder influence refers to how much the stakeholder can affect the decision you are making.

If a stakeholder has high interest and high influence, you will want to engage them closely throughout the decision-making process. If a stakeholder has low interest and low influence, you might want to just keep them informed throughout the process.

Stakeholder name	Internal or external	Interest level (high, medium, low)	Influence level (high, medium, low)

Engagement methods

Below are some examples of engagement methods. You can adapt these or insert your own.

Project phase	Method	Description	Stakeholders
Discovery	Online surveys	Collect initial input on community needs and priorities to inform project scope	General public
Planning	Focus groups	Small group discussions to deep-dive into specific topics and issues identified in the Discovery phase	Selected stakeholders, community leaders
Execution	Public workshops	Interactive sessions aimed at co-creating solutions and gathering diverse viewpoints	General public, community organisations
Evaluation	Post-project interviews	One-on-one interviews to evaluate the engagement process and project outcome	Project team, key stakeholders

Reporting and Feedback	Community forums	Public meetings to share the project findings, decisions made, and next steps	General public, project team
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Timeline

Activity	Start date	End date	Team or person responsible

Risks

Risk	Impact level (low, medium, high)	Mitigation strategies	Team responsible

Evaluation

Below are some example criteria. Please use your own.

Criteria	Objective	Measurement	Team/person responsible
Quality of feedback	Feedback is actionable and reflects community needs	- Community feedback - Survey responses - Diversity of participants reflects diversity of group(s) affected by decision	
Quantitative outcomes		- Number of attendees at information sessions - Number of information sessions hosted - Number of submissions/survey responses	
Qualitative outcomes		- Community/participant sentiment - Relationships formed/strengthened - Level of involvement from participant (i.e. engaged at events, not sitting silently)	

This template was sourced from the Victorian Government [Better practice guide for inclusive engagement^{\[1\]}](#).