



Community Engagement Policy

DRAFT





Endorsements and revisions

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| Responsible Director | Corporate and Community Services |
| Version | Final draft |

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to outline Council's commitment to informed, representative and supported engagement with the community of Baw Baw Shire.

We want this policy to:

- provide the basis for community to have an active voice in influencing Council decisions;
- outline to the community our genuine intention to act on their input;
- increase transparency of the decisions that impact the community;
- build the community's trust in Council's decision-making process; and
- contribute to better outcomes for the community.

Maintaining our 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 successful outcomes.

Scope

This policy applies to community engagement activities led by Council for the community in Baw Baw Shire. The policy applies to Councillors, staff, and consultants supporting Council's community engagement activities.

The policy does not apply to public participation in meetings of Council, including public submissions, questions on notice, and petitions. The specific conditions for these types of engagement are publicly available in Council's Governance Rules.

Legislative context

This Community Engagement policy has been prepared in accordance with the *Local Government Act 2020* (the Act). Under section 55 of the Act, Council must adopt and maintain a community engagement policy, which gives effect to the principles of community engagement under section 56.

The following Acts also have relevance to this policy:

- *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*
- *Equal Opportunity Act 2010*
- *Freedom of Information Act 1982*
- *Gender Equality Act 2020*
- *Local Government Act 1989*
- *Local Government Act 2020*
- *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014*

Objectives

The objectives of the policy are to:

- Define the organisational use of community engagement for Council decision making, including Council's strategy and policy development and the making of Local Laws; and
- Establish the criteria for utilising deliberative engagement practices.

This is the first Community Engagement policy prepared under the *Local Government Act 2020*. Council acknowledges this and commits to evolve the policy to meet the specific needs of the community.

Key concepts

What do we mean by 'community engagement'?

Community engagement is defined by a meaningful, respectful exchange of information and ideas. It is a planned process that provides a range of opportunities for Council and the community to enhance decision making through participation.

Council's actions are guided by the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation which is regarded as the international benchmark for community engagement. Actions may be as simple as providing essential information about Council and Government activities, through to more involved activities where the decision-making ability may be shared between Council and community. The IAP2 Spectrum informs the way we participate in relation to our goals, as discussed later in this policy.

What do we mean by 'deliberative engagement'?

Deliberative engagement is a form of community engagement that places people closer to the decision making of a democratic society, without taking away from the decision-making powers of the elected Council. It is informed, representative and supported.

Deliberative engagement occurs when a representative sample of the community is provided with the opportunity, information and time to reach a joint position or preferred solution. Time, complexity, impact, and available resources influence the methods of deliberative engagement.

How does engagement benefit the community?

A vibrant and empowered community is one that is represented in decision-making processes. Participation in meaningful engagement recognises the community as a partner and supports ownership of Baw Baw's direction and values. Good community engagement builds respectful relationships, appreciates diversity and supports both social equity and democratic governance.

How does community engagement benefit Council?

Informed, representative, and importantly for successful policy, supported engagement enables Council to make considered decisions about the needs of the community. Greater community understanding of the decision-making process also supports Council in delivering effective governance. A defined process encourages transparency and early identification of issues and a community supported to influence decisions builds trust and sustainable governance.

Definitions

Community Engagement

The meaningful, respectful exchange of information and ideas. It is a planned process that provides opportunities for Council and the community to communicate, improve services, and enhance decision making through participation.

Community

Community means groups of connected people in our municipal district. It is used to describe people and bodies who live in the shire, those who are ratepayers, people and bodies who conduct activities in the shire, and the traditional owners of land in the municipal district of Baw Baw Shire.

Deliberative engagement

Occurs when a representative sample of the community is provided with the information and time to reach a joint position or preferred solution through considered discussion.

Deliberative elements

Elements of deliberative engagement are the types of activities that may be used including representative discussion panels and co-design workshops. Time, complexity, impact, and available resources influence the deliberative elements used for engagement.

Participant

A participant is a stakeholder who is involved in a community engagement activity.

Public Participation

Council interprets the terminology of public participation and community engagement to be interchangeable.

Public Participation Spectrum (IAP2)

The Public Participation Spectrum helps Council define the public's role in any public participation or engagement process.

Stakeholders

Sections of the Baw Baw community who may be impacted by or interested in an outcome, or who have a responsibility to deliver an outcome. These may be individuals, groups, internal or external organisations, or government.

Criteria for designing community engagement

Our approach and commitment

Council is committed to understanding the needs and views of the Baw Baw community. We acknowledge that the community has an essential role in shaping both our present and our future direction. We see the community as our partner in making the Shire the vibrant, thriving place it is.

We believe that those in the community who may be affected by significant or complex decisions should have the opportunity to inform those decisions through engagement and participation. Council recognises that engagement occurs on a spectrum and uses the IAP2 public participation spectrum to inform the level and type of engagement required.

Level of engagement model

The following table represents the Baw Baw Shire Level of Engagement model and has been developed using the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation framework. The model identifies the five levels of engagement from minimum to maximum public impact:

1. **Inform**
2. **Consult**
3. **Involve**
4. **Collaborate**
5. **Empower**

Deliberative engagement occurs at **involve**, **collaborate**, and **empower** levels of the spectrum.



Criteria for designing community engagement

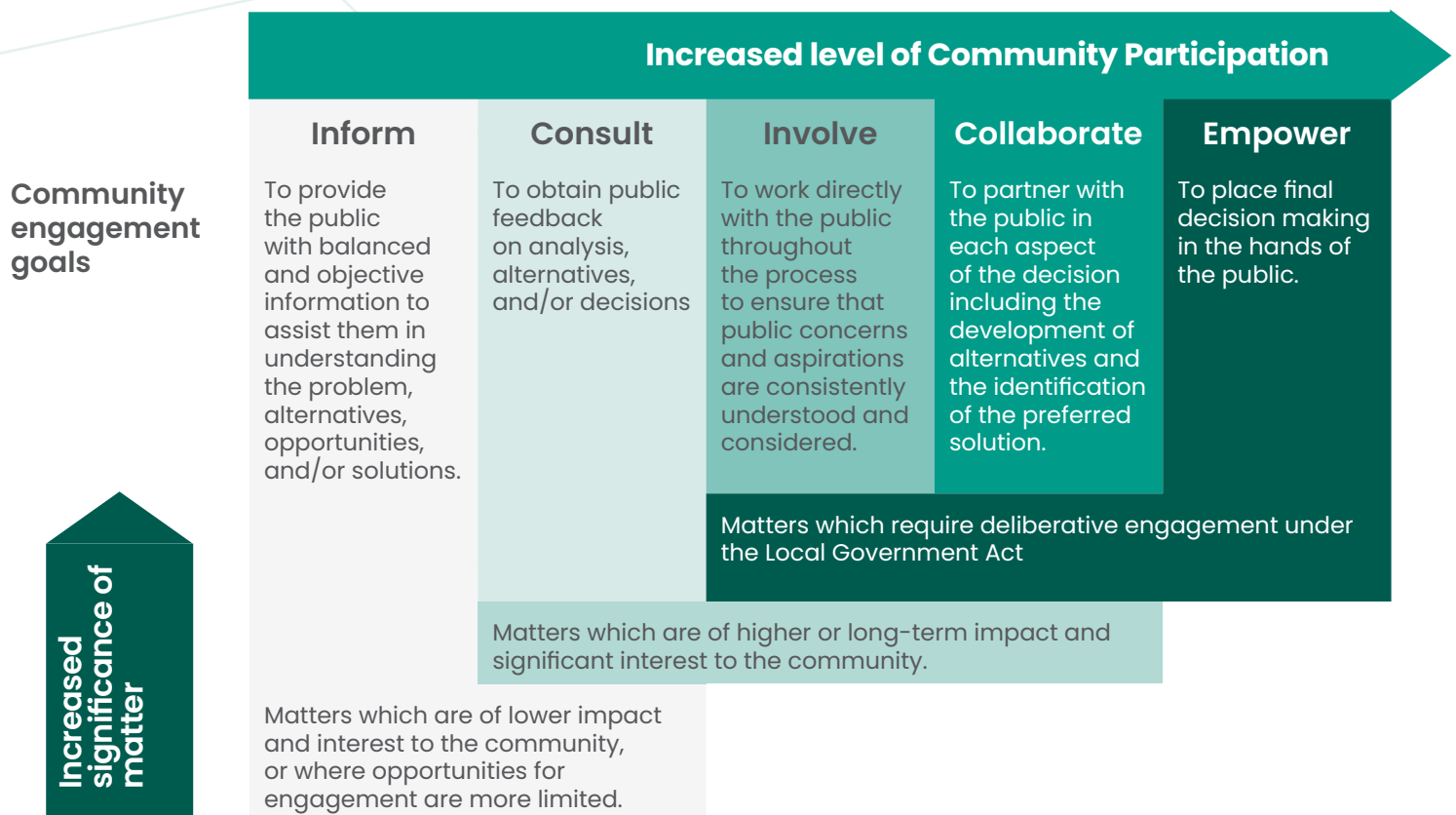
| | Increased level of Community Participation | | | | |
|--|---|--|--|---|--|
| | Inform | Consult | Involve | Collaborate | Empower |
| Our Commitment to the Community | We will keep you informed, to provide you with information to assist you with understanding the issues. | We will consult with you, and obtain your feedback to help with decision making. | We will work with you to ensure your concerns and aspirations are directly understood and considered, and reflected in the alternatives developed. | We will partner with you in the development of ideas and potential solutions, and incorporate your into our decisions to the maximum extent possible. | We will empower you to lead and implement what you decide. |
| 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 and emails Media releases, advertisements and social media | Have Your Say public comment Surveys Focus groups* Public meetings or forums* | Workshops* Deliberative polling | Citizen advisory committees* Participatory decision-making* | Citizen Juries (deliberative panels)* Delegated decisions |

*Deliverable in-person or online.

Criteria for designing community engagement

To ensure a consistent approach, Council builds on the IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum to identify areas that require deliberative engagement. Guided by the five levels of participation; Inform, Consult, Involve, Collaborate, and Empower; Council recognises that many activities may involve more than one level of engagement.

This will depend on the project stakeholders, scope, impact, and available resources. Council will also evaluate the complexity, and likely impact of a decision against the significance of the outcome when developing community engagement activities. The following table represents this evaluation.



Each level of significance is described in further detail on the next page.

Criteria for designing community engagement

Council activities and decisions can be broadly categorised as:

Matters which require deliberative engagement under the Local Government Act

We will engage at deliberative levels of community engagement using involve and collaborate as appropriate. For certain matters, Council may choose to empower where it decides that the community should have decision making authority. As a minimum, Council will use deliberative engagement in the development of:

- the Community Vision,
- Financial Plan,
- Asset Plan (10 year), and
- the Council Plan, as legislated under the Act.

Matters which are of higher or long-term impact and of significant interest to the community

We will engage at higher or long-term impact levels using the approach of consult, involve and collaborate as appropriate. This may also involve deliberative engagement elements. Matters which are of high or long-term impact and of significant interest to the community include:

- Annual Budget and Long-term Infrastructure Planning (LTIP), Municipal Public Health & Wellbeing Plan, Precinct Plans, significant strategies and policies, and the making of local laws.
- Complex or high impact projects, such as major capital projects and significant public space changes.

Matters which are of lower impact and interest to the community, or where opportunities for engagement are more limited

We will inform and consult as appropriate, where the options for engagement are limited but we still need community input, or where we may need broader community input following earlier, higher intensity engagement activities. We will use techniques to inform for matters where there is:

- Urgent decision making such as emergency management
- Decisions by external authorities that impact us
- Land sales and acquisitions
- Public submissions as set out in the Governance Rules

Each category above is an indication of the engagement level that would be applied to the examples provided. This may be tailored to achieve the best results.

Public exhibition

Where Council has engaged in a deliberative engagement process consistent with the requirements of this policy, any public exhibition of the process outcomes will take place for a minimum of 14 calendar days (unless otherwise required by Act or Regulations). Outcomes of the public exhibition process will be considered by Council at an Ordinary Council Meeting.

Council may also choose to hear submissions at a council meeting, particularly for those items which are identified as of higher or long-term impact and significant interest to the community.

Community engagement principles

This policy gives effect to five basic principles in the Act that prescribe a defined, informative, representative process that is supported to enable influence. In addition to these principles, Council commits to provide processes that are transparent, accountable, and meaningful.

Why we engage

The best decisions are informed decisions. By engaging with the community we're engaging with local needs, knowledge, and experience to make informed decisions for Baw Baw Shire. We know that supporting a meaningful exchange of information with genuine intention, builds transparency, trust, and better outcomes.

How we engage

Community engagement principle:
Participants in community engagement will be provided with objective, relevant and timely information.

To support this principle, for each engagement activity, we will:

- Let the community know upfront what Council is wanting to achieve and the purpose and scope of community engagement activities.
- Provide participants with accurate, project specific information that is accessible and easy to read.
- Be open about key issues or constraints which may influence the engagement and decision making, such as budget or legislation.
- Support participants where digital engagement is used for deliberative engagement, by providing opportunities to practice, test or problem solve before submission if required.

To ensure successful outcomes for deliberative engagement, the following steps will guide Council in the design, delivery, and evaluation of community engagement processes. These steps have been developed as part of the draft Victorian Public Engagement Framework.

1. **Define** – the purpose and scope of the activity
2. **Understand** – stakeholder interests and values to identify opportunities while considering Council resourcing strengths and weaknesses
3. **Design** – processes that fit the needs of the stakeholders and take advantage of identified opportunities
4. **Deliver** – genuine engagement with an intent to recognise outcomes of that engagement
5. **Review** – and interpret outcomes
6. **Apply** – outcomes to decision making
7. **Evaluate** – engagement success
8. **Report** – and provide feedback on the engagement process

When we engage

Community engagement principle:

Participants in community engagement will be provided with objective, relevant and timely information.

Engagement should begin in the planning stage of project or policy development and if necessary, activities should continue until the outcome has been achieved.

To support these principles, for each engagement activity, we will:

- Provide a reasonable timeframe for engagement activities, taking into account the importance of the issue to the community, and the urgency of the item being consulted on.
- Be flexible to adapt if unexpected barriers arise.
- Ensure deliberative engagement activities are provided with enough time for deliberation and discussion.
- Provide information that is accurate, easy to read, and understand. We'll use plain language and avoid jargon where possible.
- Provide timely engagement that avoids public and culturally significant holiday periods. This ensures the transparency of our intentions and supports the increased capacity for community involvement.

Who we engage

Community engagement principles:

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.

To inform decision making, Council will seek a diversity of opinions relevant to the matter and identify the most appropriate engagement activities for both the issue and the stakeholders being engaged with.

To support these principles, for each engagement activity, we will:

- Identify those who are likely to be affected by the matter, and as part of engagement planning, identify ways to engage with representative individuals and stakeholder groups as appropriate.
- Make use of existing opportunities, such as Council Advisory Committees, community and business groups, and events.
- Seek diversity of opinion and strive to identify and address potential barriers to community input. This includes community members with specific needs.
- Recognise that assistance to participate may be required and this may be in the type of engagement conducted, the resources used or the time the engagement occurs.

The provision of financial support in recognition of time, and or knowledge, may also occur for more intense, deliberative engagement activities.

Engagement evaluation and review

Community engagement principle:

Participants in community engagement are informed of the ways in which the community engagement process will influence Council decision making.

To support this principle for each engagement activity, we will:

- Provide consistency with response, handling, and publication of submissions. This will be clearly stated with each engagement process and will align with our Governance Rules, Privacy Policy, and Public Transparency Policy.
- Make clear how the community can be involved, how input will influence decision making, who will be making the final decision, and the general timeframe before a decision can be expected.
- Inform participants about any constraints which may influence the decision, and what participants can and can't influence during the the process and final decision.
- Provide information on any outcomes and decisions, the reason for the decision, and how community input has been considered. Where possible, this will be done within 15 business days of a decision being made.

For deliberative engagement in line with the eight steps on page 11 we will:

- Prepare an engagement plan, which sets out the scope, engagement methods, and communication of outcomes for all activities. The method of communicating outcomes may be influenced by the privacy wishes of the participant.

Related policies and documents

Baw Baw Shire Council's:

- Governance Rules
- Public Transparency Policy
- Information Privacy Policy
- Advisory Committee Policy
- Customer Service Charter
- Complaints Handling Policy

References

International Association for Public Participation

<https://www.iap2.org.au/>

Victoria's draft Public Engagement Framework – Department of Premier and Cabinet

<https://engage.vic.gov.au/draft-public-engagement-framework>

Deliberative Engagement for Victorian Councils – Mosaic Lab

<https://www.mosaiclab.com.au/news-all-posts/free-guide-local-councils>

Community Engagement Toolkit for rural communities – Rural Councils Victoria

<https://ruralcouncilsvictoria.org.au/community-engagement-toolkit-for-rural-communities/>



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