



Community Engagement Policy

Version 1

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1. Background

This Policy fulfils the requirement for Council to have a Community Engagement Policy under section 55 of the *Local Government Act 2020* (the Act) and gives effect to the Community Engagement Principles contained in section 56 of the Act.

2. Objectives

The objectives of this Policy are to:

- 2.1 Give effect to the Community Engagement Principles;
- 2.2 Outline the framework for Council's community engagement processes;
- 2.3 Facilitate understanding of how Council will involve the community and stakeholders in decision-making and development of the municipality.

The Policy is an integral part of how Council will meet the Overarching Governance Principles in section 9 of the Act.

3. Scope

- 3.1 This Policy applies to all Councillors and employees of Latrobe City Council, as well as all contractors acting in place of an employee of Latrobe City Council.
- 3.2 This Policy applies to all community engagement processes to be undertaken by Council, excluding matters where Victorian legislation mandates a different procedure.

4. Glossary – Definitions and Abbreviations

Term	Meaning
Communication	Communication is about providing information to build a shared understanding between Council and the community. It refers to the many ways Council keeps the community up to date with news, projects and opportunities.
Community/ municipal community	<p>'Community' is used to describe people of a municipality, or Council area/City, including individuals or groups who live, work, play, study, visit, invest in or pass through the municipality.</p> <p>The Local Government Act 2020 defines the term "municipal community" as:</p> <p>(a) people who live in the municipal district of the Council; and (b) people and bodies who are ratepayers of the Council; and (c) traditional owners of land in the municipal district of the Council; and (d) people and bodies who conduct activities in the municipal district of the Council.</p>
Community consultation	This is a form of community engagement that relates to the tools and practices used by Council to enable public involvement in decisions and actions that shape the community.
Community strengthening	Community strengthening refers to a sustained effort of building cohesive and inclusive communities. This process aims to increase the connectedness, active engagement and partnership among members of the community, community groups and organisations in order to enhance social, economic and environmental wellbeing.
Deliberative practices	<p>A fair and transparent process by which we provide the relevant representative people/group with the practical information, forums and resources they need to reach a considered conclusion and provide recommendations on a defined issue.</p> <p>This may occur in combination with other formats of research or engagement.</p>

Term	Meaning
Engagement	Getting community and/or stakeholder input or feedback to inform a Council decision. Can also be referred to as 'consultation', however engagement is the preferred term to avoid confusion with the Consult level of the IAP2 Spectrum.
Ethical	Adherence to moral principles and conduct in undertaking a process or activity.
Hardly reached stakeholders	Community members who experience barriers to participation in community engagement activities due to a range of individual, geographical and social conditions.
IAP2 and Public Participation Spectrum	"The IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum is designed to assist with the selection of the level of participation that defines the public's role in any community engagement program. The Spectrum shows that differing levels of participation are legitimate depending on the goals, timeframes, resources and levels of concern in the decision to be made. Most importantly, the Spectrum sets out the promise being made to the public at each participation level." ¹
Plan	A plan outlines a detailed future course of action for Council aimed at achieving specific goals or objectives within a specific timeframe. A plan should identify roles and responsibilities along with resources that are required.
Policy	A policy sets out Council's views with respect to a particular matter. It includes a set of principles or rules that provide a definite direction for the organisation.
Publication	For projects involving public engagement, information will be published on Council's website and be available in print or other accessible formats.

¹ International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) Australasia,
<https://www.iap2.org.au/resources/iap2-published-resources/>

Term	Meaning
Representative participation	For some matters, especially those with deliberative characteristics, participation may be designed or selected to align with the demographic features of the impacted community using data published by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. The measure, relevance and emphasis on representative participation may vary between projects.
Research	The systematic collection, collation, analysis and interpretation of data relevant to policy or practice, or to understand future trends, local needs and good practice. ²
Stakeholder	An individual, organisation or defined group of people who are interested, affected by or contribute to an outcome. Often these individuals or groups have a defined intent or 'stake' in the project or matter. A stakeholder group may have a single or shared perspective on an issue or may have different views. A delegate may represent a shared view on behalf of a group.
Subscription	During engagement individuals can subscribe to receive updates by providing email or postal addresses.

5. Principles of Management

5.1 Introduction

Latrobe City Council is committed to embracing an ongoing dialogue with our community through providing genuine, consistent, inclusive and effective community engagement processes.

Successful community engagement allows Council to benefit from the knowledge and experience of the Latrobe City community, and enables community members to influence, and see their influence on the decisions and actions that impact their daily lives and our collective future.

To reflect Latrobe City Council's community engagement values, Council is committed to contemporary and evolving approaches, including a commitment to professional development. Council's community engagement values are:

² Adapted from Local Authorities Research Intelligence Association, Creating effective research in local government, United Kingdom, 2005.

- **Respect:** consideration is shown to all members of the community. The views, concerns and experiences of community members are listened to and each person's point of view is valued;
- **Inclusiveness and accessibility:** every effort is made to provide opportunities for all members of the community to participate in both planned and unplanned community engagement activities. All members of the community are supported to actively contribute, regardless of age, gender, sexuality, income, education, cultural background, language skills or disability;
- **Integrity and honesty:** a trustworthy and honest manner is used in all levels of community engagement practices and decision-making, with processes being open and transparent. Members of the community are given a clear understanding of how their input has been considered as part of the final decision-making process.
- **Accountability and ownership:** responsibility is taken for Council's input, decisions and actions relating to community engagement activities;
- **Communication:** effective communication methods are used throughout the community engagement process when receiving and providing input, making decisions and taking action. This includes closing the loop with participants by clearly demonstrating how their input was considered in the final decision;
- **Innovation:** new ways to listen to and engage with members of the community are regularly explored, including seeking out solutions to improve discussion, decision-making and action in order to enhance the community engagement experience.

5.2 Latrobe City Council's Framework

There are three key documents and a toolkit that guide Community Engagement at Latrobe City Council.

The diagram below demonstrates how these documents relate to each other and deliver on Council's commitment to its community engagement practice.

Community Engagement Policy

Overarching document that sets the standards, principles, values and legislated environment

Community Engagement Strategy

Sets out in detail the Council's objectives in relation to community engagement and the guidelines of successful engagement

Community Engagement Toolkit

The Community Engagement Toolkit provides tools and templates to ensure a consistent and considered approach

Community Engagement Action Plan

The Community Engagement Action Plan outlines Council's key commitments and actions to continually improve its community engagement practice

Community Engagement Plan

For every community engagement activity, a plan will be developed, underpinned by the IAP2 Spectrum

5.3 Principles

Latrobe City Council's Community Engagement Policy is required to give effect to five Community Engagement Principles set out at section 56 of the Act. The statements below define our commitment to deliver each principle.

Principle	Council's Commitment
1. The community engagement process has a clearly defined objective and scope.	<p>When engagement is launched, we will publish an Engagement Plan Overview, including a description of the project or matter that is the subject of engagement. This will explain:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why the project is needed; • What the community can influence and what they can't; • What information we need from the community; • Methods in which we will gather feedback / contribution from the community; and • The timeline in which the community can provide feedback and when the matter is expected to be decided. <p>If the project or matter has multiple stages of engagement, we will define the objective and scope for each stage.</p> <p>We will allocate resourcing for engagement that is relative to the scope and complexity of the project or matter.</p>
2. Participants in community engagement will have access to objective, relevant and timely information to inform their participation.	<p>We will provide timely access to factual and transparent information on the project or matter, including:</p>

Principle	Council's Commitment
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A summary of known impacts, risks and benefits including social, natural and built environment, and financial; and Relevant background information, technical and research reports, related policies, budget estimate and funding source. <p>This information will be provided through a combination of printed, verbal, digital and audio-visual formats.</p> <p>We will provide information in accessible formats, plain language summaries and provide opportunities to ask questions and receive a response, either individually or via shared communications.</p>
3. Participants in community engagement will be representative of the persons and groups affected by the matter.	<p>We will identify members of the community that have a connection to the project or matter, and publish an assessment of the level of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Impact: what level of change will the community member experience as a result of the project/matter; and Interest: what level of interest has been expressed or is anticipated. <p>This information is used to understand the types of tools and techniques that will be most effective for engagement and communication. Community members who are identified as likely to experience a significant impact from a change or decision, may be offered a higher level of engagement and influence on the decision than others.</p>
4. Participants in community engagement are entitled to reasonable support to enable meaningful and informed engagement.	<p>We will design engagement including the methods, activities and schedule to meet the needs and requirements of identified community members. This will consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Multiple methods to participate, including written, visual, online and verbal; The time participants will require to provide an informed response; and The resourcing available for engagement relative to the scope and scale of the project. <p>For community members who may experience barriers to participation, additional resources may be considered such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information and feedback processes in alternative formats; and Support to participate, including personal care and/or support, transport and after-hours options.

Principle	Council's Commitment
5. Participants in community engagement are informed of the ways in which the community engagement process will influence Council decision-making.	<p>We will explain how and when the decision will be made, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The influence community feedback will have; and • Other information that will inform decision-making, including technical information, research, policies, legislation, Council priorities, commitments and available budget. <p>Where there are multiple phases of engagement, we will describe the above for each phase.</p> <p>Methods and tools selected will relate to the type of project and level of influence relative to the IAP2 Spectrum and to the project budget.</p> <p>Providing feedback to participants is crucial in respecting our relationship and partnership with our community. We will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide updates to subscribers at key progress points, including when the item will be discussed at a meeting of Council; and • Publish a summary of the engagement process and results within two months of the close of engagement. This will include summary of participants and process.
6. A community engagement process must be designed to promote fairness and equity	<p>Traditional engagement activities can be biased towards the participation of those who are easy to communicate with, have a pre-existing relationship with Council, and are vocal and reasonably comfortable in a public setting.</p> <p>We will design engagement programs to encourage fairness, equity and the participation of p reached groups through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Selection of methods and tools, including one-to-one and small group discussion; • The ability to participate in a private or closed forum and/or anonymously; • Monitoring the participation of hardly reached groups and adapt activities to promote increased participation if required; and • Moderation and management of public forums to enable respectful and equitable sharing of ideas.

5.4 What is Community Engagement and Why is it Important

Community engagement is about empowering, amplifying and capturing the voice and expertise of the community. It allows community members to actively contribute to Council decisions and actions by creating an inclusive environment in which community feedback is embraced, considered and acted upon.

Community engagement can be both proactive and responsive. It occurs in planned moments - such as the range of ways Council seeks and uses community input when making a decision - and also occurs in the way Council undertakes day to day services and activities, and consistently builds and maintains relationships with community members and stakeholders.

The ability for people to be involved and heard on issues that are important to them and decisions that impact them fosters greater fairness, inclusivity, ownership and transparency in decision-making, and increases community trust and confidence in the activities of Council.

Community engagement is a vital part of Council's operations, as it provides the opportunity for Council to learn about the variety of views, insights and issues in our region. It enables and ensures the responsiveness of the Council, as well as facilitating and enhancing the quality and effectiveness of major projects, infrastructure works, policy development, service planning, community-led developments and other initiatives.

5.5 Who We Engage With

Latrobe City is a diverse community with a broad range of views and interests.

While decision-making activities are of interest to all community members and stakeholders, it would not be efficient or sustainable for Latrobe City Council to engage with the entire community on every issue. Some decisions also affect certain community members or stakeholders more than others.

In implementing community engagement processes, Council considers community to include anyone affected by or with an interest in a decision, and will endeavour to ensure participation of those most affected or with the most interest. People affected will be determined by understanding the potential social, economic and geographic impacts of a project, plan or proposal, and could include individuals, members of community groups and town associations, and neighbours.

5.6 When We Will Engage

Embedding strong community engagement into Latrobe City Council's practices is a key Council priority.

The Act sets out a number of matters where community engagement is compulsory. These are:

- Community Vision;

- Council Plan;
- Financial Plan;
- Asset Plan;
- Budget (or any revised Budget);
- Adopting Local Laws;
- Governance Rules;
- Acquiring or disposing of land;
- Leasing of Council land (in some circumstances).

In addition to the matters listed above, where appropriate Latrobe City Council will engage the community under a range of other scenarios, such as:

- Other Policy, Strategy and Plan development;
- Service planning, including development, amendment or improvement of a service provided by Council;
- Area improvement, for example major projects and infrastructure, and upgrades to recreational areas, community assets and Council buildings and facilities;
- Site specific, being any changes to an area, and including matters affecting an individual property;
- Additional legislative requirements under this Act including related regulations, or as required by any other Act, for example:
 - *Road Management Act 2004*;
 - *Planning and Environment Act 2007*;
 - *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008*;
- Issues affecting the:
 - Cultural and social liveability of the community;
 - Local economy and labour market; or
 - Natural environment.

Community engagement will occur in the earlier stages of a project/initiative, providing an opportunity for the public to influence the development process. Depending on the circumstances, community engagement may be undertaken in more than one stage.

Council will conduct community engagement within timeframes that allow a practical opportunity for community members and stakeholders to participate. There are some instances where the timeframe for consultation is predetermined by legislation.

Not all decisions of Latrobe City Council will provide an opportunity for broad community consultation or active participation. In some instances, a prior decision of Council or a legislative imperative may limit or preclude further discussion or consideration of an issue. A decision may be part of Latrobe City Council's broad strategic agenda which has already been endorsed and adopted. In other instances, where there are highly complex issues, Council may legitimately seek to only gather the input of stakeholders or experts in a specific field.

Some areas where community engagement activities may not occur include:

- where a situation poses an immediate threat or risk to the health, safety or wellbeing of the community to which Council is required to respond quickly, including emergency events;
- a consultation process involving Council that is being conducted by another level of government;
- if the matter involves confidential information;
- where set out in legislation.

5.7 How We Will Engage

Council is committed to understanding the needs and views of the Latrobe City community.

The community plays an important role in shaping our future direction.

The skills and experiences of those in the community should be sought. Council aims to strengthen its partnership with the community by supporting and valuing the community's contribution.

Level of engagement model

The following table represents our Level of Engagement model that supports a consistent approach to community engagement.

The model provides:

- our role in the engagement
- our commitment to the community
- examples of the methods we will use.

All levels of engagement can be supported by methods from the previous level.

The engagement level selected will be influenced by the project's 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 activity categories below guide this evaluation.

Spectrum of Engagement

IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation

Activity category	Category 1: Matters which require deliberative engagement under the Local Government Act.				
	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.				
Levels of community participation					
Our role	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
	Provide the community with balanced and objective information to assist them to understand the problem, alternatives, opportunities, and/or solutions.	Obtain community feedback on analysis, alternatives, and/or decisions.	Work directly with the community to ensure that their concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	Partner with the community 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 community.
Our commitment	<i>We promise to keep you informed.</i>	<i>We promise to:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• keep you informed• listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations• provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	<i>We promise to:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed• provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	<i>We promise to:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• work together with you to formulate solutions• incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	<i>We promise to implement your decision.</i>
Examples of tools and techniques	Website Social media Newsletters and other mail outs Media releases Letters Flyers and posters Signage	Submissions Public comments Surveys Public meetings Polls Drop-in/ pop-up Listening posts	Workshops Stakeholder networks Focus/working groups Interviews Site visit Focus groups	Advisory committees Working group Participant led workshops Co-design Deliberative poll	Delegated committees and community asset committees Citizen juries Democratic voting Practical skills workshops Training events

5.8 Deliberative Engagement

The Act requires that the development of Council's Community Vision, Council Plan, Financial Plan and Asset Plan involve deliberative engagement practices.

Deliberative engagement is an important approach that will also be used in other non-legislated situations as it is required.

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.

Local Government Victoria has identified the key characteristics of deliberative engagement as:

- authentic engagement with the community;
- good representation of the community in engagement activities;
- clear demonstration of how all views have been considered; and
- 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.

5.9 Latrobe City Council's Approach

For every community engagement activity, a community engagement plan will be developed by Council officers in a timely, effective and innovative manner. Plans will include assessment of the target audience and develop the most suitable tools and methods of communication to encourage a high level and quality of participation that is appropriate to the matter.

Relevant approvals will be obtained, through line management and committee structures and where applicable, Council resolutions, prior to commencing activities.

To ensure effective community engagement, Council implements the following eight steps to design, deliver and complete community engagement.

1. Clearly define the purpose and scope of the community engagement
2. Understand stakeholder and community interests
3. Design an appropriate community engagement process
4. Deliver genuine and respectful engagement
5. Review and interpret the engagement data
6. Apply the outcomes of the engagement to inform the decision-making process

7. Evaluate the community engagement process for improvement
8. Close the loop on the community engagement - advise the community of the final outcome and how their feedback was considered in the final decision.

5.10 Feedback and Engagement Evaluation

The provision of feedback will be delivered to industry-best practice standard. It will recognise and respect the contributions of community members and stakeholders, and the time that they take to participate.

Reporting of outcomes and updates will always be available online through Council's Have Your Say platform, and other mediums that are requested by the community. It will also be provided directly to those who asked to be kept informed and have provided contact details.

5.11 Privacy

Transparency and openness are core components of community engagement. When a person participates at workshops or events or in forums, contributions and identity are considered public. The same applies for submissions unless anonymity is requested. Responses to surveys, questionnaires and feedback forms may be published but identities, if known, will remain anonymous.

Contact information will be kept secure and separate from any other data provided. Council will only collect what personal information it requires in order to carry out its statutory and legal responsibilities and to deliver its services. Council complies with the requirements of the *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014* in carrying out these responsibilities.

6. Accountability and Responsibility

Accountability and responsibility for this policy is outlined below.

6.1. Council

- Responsibility to ensure this Policy is consistent with Latrobe City Council Strategic Direction and other Latrobe City Council policies;
- Responsibility for the decision to approve this Policy by Council Resolution.

6.2. Chief Executive Officer

Overall responsibility for:

- compliance with this Policy;

- enforcing accountability;
- providing resources;
- performance monitoring.

6.3. General Manager

Responsibility for:

- compliance with this Policy;
- enforcing accountability;
- providing resources;
- performance monitoring.

6.4. Manager

- Develop frameworks and procedures in compliance with this Policy;
- Enforce responsibilities to achieve compliance with frameworks and procedures;
- Provide appropriate resources for the execution of the frameworks and procedures.

6.5. Employees, Contractors and Volunteers

- Participate where required in the development of frameworks and procedures in compliance with this Policy;
- Comply with frameworks and procedures developed to achieve compliance with this Policy.

7. Evaluation and Review

This Policy will be reviewed on request of Council, in the event of significant change in the Executive team, significant changes to legislation applicable to the subject matter of the policy or, in any other case, during each Council term (generally four years).

8. Definitions

Act: *Local Government Act 2020*

Council: Latrobe City Council

Community: Includes people who live, work, learn, visit or otherwise use the services and facilities in Latrobe City, as well as community organisations and interest groups.

Stakeholder: An individual or group of people with a particular interest in or who will be affected by the outcome of a decision or action under consideration.

Community Engagement: Interactions between Council, the Latrobe City community and other stakeholders with the purpose of facilitating community/stakeholder involvement and guidance in Council decision-making and actions.

9. Related Documents/Legislation

Citizen Confidentiality and Privacy Policy

Public Relations and Communications Policy

Public Transparency Policy

Social Media Policy

Latrobe City Cultural Diversity Action Plan

Latrobe City Disability Action Plan

Latrobe City Municipal Emergency Action Plan

Latrobe City Reconciliation Action Plan

Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006

Equal Opportunity Act 2010

Local Government Act 2020

Planning and Environment Act 2007

Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014

Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008

Road Management Act 2004

10. Reference Resources

Local Government Act 2020

IAP2 Quality Assurance Standards - Core Values, Practitioners code of ethics and the IAP2 Spectrum of engagement (International Association for Public Participation)

Local Government Act 2020 – Principles: Community Engagement (Local Government Victoria)

11. Appendices

Nil