Community Engagement Strategy

2015 - 2019

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Council Message

Latrobe City Council makes decisions and takes actions that impact you and your community in different ways.

If you live, work, learn or play here in Latrobe City, we want to hear what you have to say on the projects and initiatives that matter most to you.

Thank you for your interest in Council's Community Engagement Strategy. We hope that it helps you to understand why Council engages with the community and how we value and use your contribution to make decisions and take action.

Our approach to community engagement has two purposes. Firstly, we look to capture the vast knowledge, experience and aspirations of our community through effective and inclusive community engagement practices. Secondly, we want to create an environment where our daily interactions with community members are heard, captured and used to inform decision making, enhance customer services and transform our shared understanding of the relationship between Council and our community.

We believe that at the core of this approach is the ability to listen with generosity and develop systems and processes which allow the voice of our customers to be at the forefront of Council operations.

This strategy outlines our aspirations and intention to lay the foundation work needed for the next four years.

Contents

The Community Engagement 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

The Community Engagement Policy is the overarching document that sets the standards and principles of Community Engagement at Latrobe City Council.

Community Engagement Strategy
2015-2019

The Community Engagement Strategy sets out Council's objectives in relation to Community Engagement and the guidelines of successful engagement.

Community Engagement Toolkit

The Community Engagement Toolkit provides relevant tools and templates which will be utilised by staff undertaking community engagement activities to ensure a consistent and considered approach.

Community Engagement Action Plan
2015-2019

The Community Engagement Action Plan 2015-2019 outlines in detail Council's key commitments and actions to continually improve its community engagement practice over the next two years.

What is community engagement?

Community engagement is a broad term that covers the interactions between Council, Latrobe City communities (which could be towns or other locations or groups of people with a common interest or identity) and other stakeholders.

Community engagement 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.

It serves as a response to increasing community concern about low levels of trust and confidence in government and addresses the escalating expectation that all levels of government be responsive to the community, accountable for levels of service and spending.

Community engagement is also about engaging with our community to provide access to a greater range of solutions - The collective wisdom of the community can help Council to achieve the vision and aspirations of our community.

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 everyday services and activities and consistently builds and maintains relationships with community members and stakeholders.

Through effective, proactive and responsive community engagement we develop relationships, build capacity, inform decision making and take action. We understand that community engagement provides the opportunity for Council to learn about diverse views, insights and issues in our region. It also helps Council work with others to make our city better.

Community engagement means that there is a voice for all who want to be heard.

The IAP2 Community Engagement Model:

How the model works

Community engagement with Council occurs in a variety of ways, some of which are initiated by Council, some of which are initiated by the community and some of which are shared equally. Many projects or initiatives will require Council to engage in a number of different ways.

The IAP2 Community Engagement model shows the five key types of community engagement that may occur. Each sphere of community engagement is explained below.

Organisation leads and acts

In this sphere, community engagement is about enabling community members to stay informed of, and actively contribute to, the key decisions that are being made by Council on matters that interest or impact upon them. Council initiates engagement because we recognise the invaluable contribution of community feedback and the role this plays in ensuring that Council facilities, services and priorities consistently meet the needs of our diverse and evolving community.

When working in this way, Council leads the engagement process, considers feedback, makes the final decision and implements the outcome. For example, the development of the Council budget and the associated strategies, plans, policies and projects all fit in this scope. Most of the community engagement activities at Latrobe City Council fit in this sphere.

Organisation leads, community acts

In this sphere, community engagement involves Council leading the conversation with communities and stakeholders taking responsibility for action. This occurs when Council cannot achieve the outcome alone and advocates for others to act. For example, Council may encourage the community to make healthy choices at home, such as reducing smoking,

eating more nutritious foods and increasing exercise, as part of our Municipal Health and Wellbeing Plan.

Community leads, organisation acts

In this sphere, the community identifies a problem or opportunity and proposes the required action. The community cannot achieve the outcome alone and advocates for Council to act. For example, a community member identifies an opportunity to meet a community need by using an existing pool for hydrotherapy sessions. The community member develops a case for how this may work, rallies community support and approaches Council. Council agrees to trial increasing the temperature of the pool on specific days to assess how this is received by the broader community.

Council understands the importance of being in a 'constant state of listening' to our community to ensure that problems, challenges and opportunities like this are swiftly considered and addressed. To improve our capacity to do this, Council is actively working toward building and implementing systems, processes and behaviours that will enable us to become more effective in capturing and responding to everyday community feedback. You can learn more about how Council is working to achieve this in the *Community Engagement Action Plan 2015 – 2019*.

Community leads, community acts

In this sphere, the community leads the conversation and has responsibility for taking action. Leaders engage community members to build understanding, gather support and deliver the project or initiative. Council does not have a role in decision making or implementing action, but may provide support such as resources or funding where appropriate. For example, the work of many local community groups and not for profit organisations, supported by Council through community grants, in-kind sponsorship or resource support would fit here.

Shared leadership and action

In this sphere, Council and communities or stakeholders share roles in leadership, decision making, responsibility and action. This can be seen when Council partners with another agency, government body, organisation or community group to jointly provide services for our community. Recent examples include the Reactivate Latrobe and Healthy Together Latrobe projects.

What does success look like?

Traditional community engagement involves created community engagement experiences, moments in time where Council seeks to partner with and listen to the community to make decisions, or empower the community to make change.

This Strategy outlines Council's desire to ensure that community engagement opportunities are both created and embedded into daily Council interactions.

The success of community engagement is largely an assessment of performance against personal expectations. We acknowledge that every member of our community will have a different view of what successful community engagement looks like. The challenge is to be responsible for establishing expectations and then fulfilling those expectations through our actions.

To Latrobe City Council, successful community engagement results in an engaged, collaborative and informed community that:

- Actively contributes and adds value to Council's decision making

- Advocates for Council to take action on community priorities

- Is empowered to mobilise community members to make decisions and take action

- Works collaboratively with Council to make shared decisions and implement joint actions

- Is responsive to Council-led projects and initiatives

How will we achieve this vision of success?

For Council-led projects, this is achieved through a number of different factors, including:

- A proactive, positive attitude towards community engagement

- An open exchange of information between Council and the community

- An active reduction of barriers to participation and the development of accessible engagement platforms which are diverse and respectful of cultural backgrounds, language, age, literacy and interests

- Clarity in the community about the purpose and objective of any community engagement activity and the opportunity to influence the outcome

- Council officers taking ownership and implementing a well-planned, timely and meaningful community engagement process and sharing this schedule with the community to support maximum participation

- All parties being genuine, open and transparent throughout all stages of the community engagement process

- The involvement of members of the community in the process to provide their input

- Providing decision makers with balanced, objective and comprehensive information to inform their decisions
- Providing feedback to participants on how their input was considered in the decision making process
- Informing participants / community of the final decision and the reasons why that decision was made
- Council and community members accepting at times to agree to disagree

For community-led projects, this is supported by:

- Council implementing a culture that embraces a constant state of active listening to our communities needs and aspirations, supported by technologies to enable community feedback to be captured and actioned
- Council providing inclusive and accessible opportunities for community members to raise ideas, suggestions and issues
- Council responding effectively to community initiated input

These important factors will form the foundation of Council's community engagement process and achieve successful community engagement outcomes.

Community engagement values

The following values define the expectations and aspirations for Council's community engagement practice. All community engagement processes and activities are based on these values to ensure successful outcomes for the community and for Council.

Respect

Show consideration to all members of our community. Listen to the views, concerns and experiences of community members. Value each person's point of view, even if you do not agree.

Inclusiveness and accessibility

Ensure that 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

Act in a trustworthy and honest manner in all levels of our community engagement practices and Council decision-making. Be open and transparent in everything that we do. In Council-led processes, provide members of the community with a clear understanding of how their input has been considered as part of the final decision-making process.

Accountability and ownership

Take responsibility for our input, decisions and actions relating to community engagement activities.

Communication

Ensure effective communication methods are used throughout the community engagement process, when receiving and providing input, making decisions and taking action. For Council-led processes, this includes closing the loop with participants by clearly demonstrating how their input was considered in the final decision.

Innovation

Constantly look at new and innovative ways to listen to and engage with members of the community. Seek out solutions to improve discussion, decision-making and action in order to enhance the community engagement experience.

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Community engagement objectives

The following objectives have been developed to show Council's commitment to continual improvement and ensure that Council's evolving community engagement practice is as effective as possible for our community:

Improved Understanding

Strengthen mutual understanding of why and how Council will engage, including community engagement expectations and limitations, Council's capacity to deliver, Council's responsibility to make sustainable, long-term decisions and the requirements of the legislative frameworks that it operates within. Strengthen Council's understanding of community views, expectations, hopes, aspirations and service requirements and build community confidence in Council's community engagement processes.

Enabling Involvement

Actively encourage and enable community members to engage with Council. Reduce barriers to involvement, co-create engagement opportunities with the community and establish processes and systems which will, in the future, enable Council to capture feedback and citizen engagement through all Council community touch points.

Communication and Feedback

Ensure effective communication and feedback processes are consistently used to assist community members to understand, and have confidence in, the community engagement process. For Council-led engagement, this includes communicating how community input has contributed to Council's decision making process.

Decision Making

Embrace a collective and cooperative decision-making approach where community input and feedback is recognised as enhancing the quality of Council's decision making processes. Provide decision makers with the best quality information available to support effective, responsive and sustainable decisions to be made. These decisions should consider the perspectives of those who are impacted by or interested in the decision.

Continual Improvement

Continually develop and improve Council's community engagement practices and capacity through regular review and improvement mechanisms.

Community engagement process

When we engage

Council will consider undertaking planned community engagement activities in the following situations:

- To enhance a decision or action through community input

- To help identify community needs and aspirations

- When the community has raised or expressed an interest

- Where the community could be impacted by a project, initiative, service or decision

- When there is a high risk of a matter impacting the community or Council

- When required by resolution, law, policy or agreement

In Council-led projects and initiatives, community engagement does not replace the final power of the decision-makers, but is invaluable in the way it enhances Council's capacity to make well-informed, defensible and sustainable decisions on behalf of the community.

Effective community engagement enhances the overall quality of our projects and initiatives.

When others engage with us

Council has established communications channels and welcomes community contact and discussion at any time. Community members may contact Council directly to raise an idea or suggestion, or to provide feedback and input. This typically occurs in one of the following ways:

- Registering to speak at a Council meeting or Public Presentations session

- Contacting Latrobe City Council in person, via phone, letter, email, website or social media

- Contacting their local Councillor to discuss the opportunity or challenge

How we engage

Council is guided by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) which is internationally recognised as the leader in community engagement practice.

Community engagement plans will be developed for every Council-led project requiring community involvement. When planning community engagement activities, Council officers will determine the most appropriate level of participation required, depending on the nature and complexity of the project/initiative being delivered. The level may vary for different aspects or stages of the project/initiative.

The following page provides an overview of the IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum, which Council uses as a guide in the development of community engagement plans:

IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation

	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 seek your feedback on drafts and proposals.	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 work together with you to formulate solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.

It is important to recognise that the purpose of the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation is to find the most appropriate level of engagement for each situation. The spectrum shows that the level of participation can differ depending on the goals, time frames, resources and level of community concern. A project/initiative may use different aspects of the spectrum at different times and with different individuals/groups depending on the level of potential impacts on the community.

Council officers will plan their community engagement activities in a timely, effective and innovative manner, ensuring that they assess their 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 project.

Key stages of community engagement

The following outlines Council's community engagement process:

1. Plan

- Establish the purpose

- Understand the context

- Define the scope

- Establish objectives

- Identify and analyse stakeholders

- Select methods of community engagement

- Develop timeframes and deliverables

- Secure resources

2. Action

- Implement the community engagement plan and conduct activities

- Receive community input.

3. Report

- Collect and evaluate data/community input

- Suggest any necessary amendments to project/initiative based on data/input, if necessary

- Compile a report that captures the community engagement findings

4. Decide

- Provide community data/input to decision makers

- Respond to any queries from decision makers regarding community engagement methods and results

- Provide other sources of information including legislative requirements, specialists or expert reports, research studies, professional opinion, national or local guidance, facts and circumstantial or related influences

- Overall strategic planning direction, resource and budgetary constraints, and broader regional or State policies will be considered

5. Feedback

- Provide feedback to participants on the decision

- Ensure the decision and outcome is available to the entire community

- Debrief, review and learn

Exemptions and other forms of engagement

There are two specific areas where community engagement activities may not occur. These are:

1. Ministerial Exemption
    Under the Planning and Environment Act 1997, the Minister can exercise powers that withhold public notification of specific land-use planning matters.

2. Health, Safety and Wellbeing of the Community
    If a situation poses an immediate threat or risk to the health, safety or wellbeing of the community and Council is required to respond quickly, such as emergency response, it may not be possible to engage with the community prior to Council taking action.

Other exemptions may apply that do not form part of this document.

Council is also subject to following a number of other legislative and statutory requirements that may define how Council must engage on certain matters. These may include limitations on the involvement of community members in the decision-making process and may be subject to limited methods of community consultation.

The land-use planning process includes a series of legislative controls and requirements that must be followed to satisfy Council's compliance with its statutory obligations. These include:

- Planning Permits
- Strategic Planning Projects
- Planning Scheme Amendments.

Consultation and notice to affected parties is part of the planning permit application and planning scheme amendment process and may follow prescribed community engagement such as a specific time period for consultation, advertising in specified media outlets and the use of public notices.

Council has a responsibility to ensure that the extent of notice is reasonable, and that sufficient information is available with the application to enable an informed assessment of its likely impacts within the limitations of the statutory framework.

Legislation, policies and plans

Community engagement must be undertaken in line with relevant legislation, policies, plans and any other statutory requirements (unless exemptions apply). This may include, but is not limited to, the following:

- Local Government Act 1989
- Disability Discrimination Act 1992
- Emergency Management Act 1986
- Emergency Management Act 2013
- Planning and Environment Act 1987
- Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008
- Road Management Act 2004
- Latrobe 2026, Council's Strategic Community Plan

Contact us

Call us

1300 367 700 (24 hour service). Leave a message after 5:15pm and before 8:30am (after hours emergency contact available by phoning this number)

Contact your local Councillor

Telephone numbers available by contacting Latrobe City Council Call Centre on 1300 367 700

Write a letter

To the Chief Executive Officer or Mayor, Latrobe City Council, PO Box 264, Morwell, VIC 3840

Email

Latrobe@latrobe.vic.gov.au

Join us online

www.latrobe.vic.gov.au/communityengagement

Visit a Latrobe City Service Centre

Corporate Headquarters: 141 Commercial Road, Morwell

Moe: 44 Albert Street

Traralgon: 34-38 Kay Street

Churchill: 9-11 Philip Parade