

# Engagement Policy



An illustration on a blue background. On the left, a man in a yellow shirt and dark pants points upwards. In the center, a woman in a white shirt and dark pants is running towards the right, holding a yellow highlighter. On the right, a woman in a yellow top and dark pants is sitting on the ground, working on a laptop. Above them are several floating icons: a large teal speech bubble with three white dots, a green gear, a yellow leaf, a white paper airplane, and a large yellow lightbulb with a white filament. A dashed white line connects the lightbulb to the woman with the highlighter.

## Purpose of this policy

**This policy sets the standard of engagement for Council and provides guidance on the significance, complexity and anticipated impact associated with decisions about major projects, policies, strategies and service planning.**

It does this by:

- » outlining Council's commitment to engage with the community
- » improving understanding of community and stakeholder engagement within Council
- » explaining how community engagement is integrated to support decision making at Council.

# 1. Introduction and Scope



Community engagement is a planned process for Council to work with individuals and groups to encourage active involvement in matters that affect them.

Effective community engagement results in better Council decisions, improved policy, enhanced services, plus greater community satisfaction and wellbeing. It builds respectful relationships and can result in community strengthening and capacity building.

**Importantly, good community engagement ensures transparency, integrity and trust in Council processes.**

Community engagement is the responsibility of all Council service areas, teams and employees. It also applies to contractors and consultants undertaking work on behalf of Council.

This policy applies to our councillors, staff, contractors and volunteers. It also serves as a guide for external organisations delivering infrastructure and services in Stonnington.

The policy outlines the role that community members can reasonably expect to play in our planning and decision-making.

The policy does not apply to community engagement processes that are subject to prescribed processes imposed by other Victorian legislation such as land-use planning applications or other Council processes such as service requests or complaints.

## 2. Our principles and commitment

### The following principles are our commitment to the community engagement that guide our work.

The principles were informed by community feedback sought over a six month period, mostly involving online conversations (due to covid-19 restrictions impacting on face-to-face and in-person consultations) and targeted meetings with established advisory groups.

They are also based on best-practice community engagement frameworks including the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) Core Values for the Practice of Public Participation, the Victorian Auditor General's Office (VAGO) Public Participation Principles and the principles outlined in the Victorian Local Government Act 2020.

PRINCIPLE	COMMITMENT
<b>Inclusive</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>» Everyone has a right to be involved in decisions that affect where and how they live.</li><li>» We value diverse ideas and perspectives.</li><li>» We will consider the needs and perspectives of all groups that may want to be involved in the process.</li></ul>
<b>Accessible</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>» We will provide the community with objective, relevant, easy to understand and timely information to inform their participation.</li><li>» We will allow sufficient time for review of information and participation in engagement activities.</li><li>» We will use a mix of online, print and face-to-face methods and ensure our communication and spaces are culturally safe and accessible for all.</li></ul>
<b>Representative</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>» We will identify the people, communities and stakeholders who are affected by and interested in the topic of engagement.</li><li>» Participants in community engagement activities will be representative of the persons and groups affected by the matter.</li></ul>
<b>Transparent</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>» Our community engagement process will clearly explain which elements the community can influence, to what level and how we will use our community's input.</li><li>» Our community engagement process will have a clearly defined objective and scope.</li><li>» We will report back to the community, explaining what we asked, what we heard, and what we did.</li></ul>
<b>Respect</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>» We value and respect our community's time, engaging closely when their influence is high and scaling back when it is more limited.</li><li>» Everyone should feel supported and comfortable to have their say in council decision making.</li></ul>
<b>Community Advocate</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>» We will advocate on behalf of the Stonnington community where the work of external agencies (including other tiers of government) impacts our community.</li></ul>



### 3. Who we engage

**We are committed to ensuring all interested and impacted members of our community are given the opportunity to participate in our community engagement processes.**

As part of our commitment, we will identify stakeholders, people and communities that may be affected by a decision and to also encourage contributions from our wider community.

We also recognise some Council decisions impact the entire municipality, such as when we develop the Council Plan and Financial Budget.

## 4. Levels of community engagement



**The City of Stonnington uses the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) Spectrum of Engagement to guide our planning. The IAP2 Spectrum is a useful, widely recognised tool that identifies five levels of participation. For each level there is a corresponding goal, commitment and role for Council and the community in the process.**

Council will use different levels of engagement, having regard to the significance, complexity and anticipated level of impact of what is being proposed, and the stakeholders we need to target. There may often be more than one level of engagement used across a project, depending on the stage, scope, timeline and stakeholders involved, as well as the influence and impact identified.

	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
<b>Public participation goal</b>	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the 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 concerns and aspirations are understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of a preferred solution.	To place the final decision making in the hands of the public.
<b>Promise to the public</b>	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.
<b>Type of engagement undertaken</b>	Communicate	Seek feedback	Deliberative engagement	Deliberative engagement	Deliberative engagement

	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
<b>When we use this form of engagement</b>	<p>At particular points in a lifecycle of any matter (e.g. the early stages, key points or conclusion)</p> <p>To meet a legislative requirement or meet safety requirements/standards</p>	<p>When seeking ideas/input to inform development of a concept, seeking feedback on a draft concept/ document or checking back in with our community that we have adequately captured and interpreted their ideas/concerns</p>	<p>To meet legislative requirements under the <i>Local Government Act 2020</i></p> <p>When seeking deeper input from the community in finding solutions to challenging issues or where specific sectors of the community may be more deeply impacted by a decision than others (e.g. complex local issues or strategies that impact particular communities of interest)</p>	<p>To meet legislative requirements under the <i>Local Government Act 2020</i></p> <p>When a complex problem requires deeper understanding of the challenges and a more informed community input is sought to work collaboratively towards a solution.</p>	<p>When Council is willing to accept and implement the recommendations made to them</p>
<b>Examples of form</b>	<p>Factsheets</p> <p>Drop-in sessions/ information sessions</p> <p>Web pages</p> <p>Newsletters</p> <p>Technology (e.g. virtual)</p> <p>Participation by the public at Council meetings</p>	<p>Participation by the public at Council meetings</p> <p>Focus groups</p> <p>Technology (e.g. virtual)</p> <p>Temporary installations/ pop-ups/ activations</p>	<p>Advisory groups</p> <p>Focus groups</p> <p>Workshops</p> <p>Technology (e.g. virtual)</p> <p>Temporary installations/ pop-ups/ activations</p>	<p>Co-design workshops</p> <p>Community panels</p> <p>Engaging through action (e.g. action learning / placemaking approach)</p> <p>Technology (e.g. virtual)</p> <p>Temporary installations/ pop-ups/ activations</p>	<p>Citizen's juries</p> <p>Council election</p>

# 5. Deliberative and consultative engagement

**Community engagement may include multiple levels of public participation, at different stages of the process and because different stakeholders will choose to engage at different levels. The type or form of engagement undertaken can be broadly described as either deliberative or consultative. Many of Council's community engagement projects are likely to include both types of engagement.**

Other factors such as timeframes for delivery, and cost/budget will also be considered when selecting engagement techniques.

## Deliberative engagement

Deliberative engagement is a process used to involve, collaborate and empower the community to reach an outcome or decision for complex issues. The process typically occurs over a period of time and brings together diverse voices to work through and consider matters in a supported environment. It is an inclusive and transparent process in which participants are provided with:

- » a clear purpose from the outset of what will be achieved and why
- » relevant evidence and background information to analyse
- » sufficient time to explore, assess and discuss options, and
- » practical support to enable participation in the process.

Deliberative engagement requires locals, experts, Councillors and employees to be engaged in informed discussion. It should enable a diverse range of people in our community to be highly

involved, including those most impacted by the decision. The key features of a deliberative process are to come to a decision after considering all information and prioritising and weighing solutions. By its very name, it requires a level of engagement that is measured, considered and has the involvement of others.

The City of Stonnington will undertake deliberative engagement for the development of our:

- » Community Vision (10 years)
- » Council Plan (4 years)
- » Financial Plan (10 years), and
- » projects and policies where deliberative engagement is determined to be the most effective process to reach an outcome or make a decision.

Deliberative engagement can be scaled to a project depending on the community impact, interest and complexity. This will be determined during the engagement planning process. Some projects may require a skilled facilitator.

Examples of deliberative practices are:

- » working with advisory groups
- » online proposals and ideas are discussed by a panel of community members
- » participants are asked to consider and prioritise ideas
- » a representative group participates in a series of sessions of information exchange in order to reach consensus, and
- » People's Panel / Citizen's Jury.



## Consultative engagement

Consultative engagement takes place at the first two levels of influence on the IAP2 spectrum, 'Inform' and 'Consult'. Consultative engagement typically occurs when feedback is invited on ideas, alternatives or draft documents.

Examples of consultative practices are:

- » Surveys
- » Polls, ideas gathering
- » Submissions

Participation at this level can be very broad, including by stakeholders who choose to track the project but offer no direct input.

As a guide, the minimum type of community engagement is set out below.

<b>Community Vision</b>	Deliberative engagement
<b>Council Plan</b>	Deliberative engagement
<b>Financial Plan</b>	Deliberative engagement
<b>Asset Plan</b>	Consultative engagement
<b>Budget</b>	Consultative engagement
<b>Making of a Local Law</b>	Consultative engagement
<b>Acquiring or selling land</b>	Consultative engagement
<b>Other statutory and non-statutory plans, strategies or policies, service planning and capital works projects</b>	Level to be selected depending on the complexity of the matter

This list is not exhaustive. There are many other methods and tools we can use. For example, to encourage participation from people with disability, we can make sure that our online survey is compatible with screen readers, our workshop venues are accessible to mobility aids, and that participants are aware we can arrange support staff (e.g. Auslan and language interpreters). Where projects impact children and young people we work with our early years and youth service providers and school communities, we will adhere to child safe standards and use age appropriate methods.

## Submissions

Victorian Government legislation sometimes defines that the only form of community participation available to the public is by official submission. Where this is the case, Council will continue to consult and engage as modelled on section 223 of the *Local Government Act 2020*.

## Communication

When Council makes a decision, it is important to communicate the decision and the reasons behind it with our community. We are committed to providing clear, relevant, timely and balanced information to people impacted or interested in a decision. Understanding the problem, the opportunities, the decision to be made and how the community can influence this through the engagement process ensures our community can engage in a meaningful way.

## 6. Responsibilities

**Community engagement is a shared responsibility.**

There are roles for both Council and the community in initiating, leading, participating in and delivering engagement activities.

ROLE	RESPONSIBILITIES
<b>Community, business, government and other</b>	Stakeholders support community engagement processes and Council decision-making by seeking information, respectfully participating in engagement activities, putting forward ideas and promoting consultation opportunities to other stakeholders
<b>Mayor, Deputy Mayor and Councillors</b>	Champion the commitment and principles of engagement through leadership, modelling best-practice and decision making
<b>CEO and Executive Team</b>	Champion a culture that fosters best practice engagement and model the principles through leadership, process and implementation of this policy.
<b>Management Team</b>	Manage teams and projects to ensure community engagement is undertaken consistent with this policy and that staff are appropriately resourced, trained and supported
<b>Chief of Staff</b>	Monitor implementation of this policy and conduct periodic reviews to drive continuous improvement across the Community Engagement Framework.
<b>Engagement Team</b>	Oversee the Community Engagement Framework to build organisational capacity and practice through provision of advice, training and mentoring, resources and tools.
<b>Council employees</b>	Ensure their community engagement planning and delivery is consistent with this policy and as appropriate to their role and function, including building and maintaining relationships with community

Responsibilities for implementing this policy are shared as follows:

<b>Councillors</b>	Ensure that matters under consideration are informed by the planned level of community engagement.  Balance the range of stakeholder views and concerns on an issue when making a decision.
<b>Executive Leadership Team</b>	Consult with Councillors to establish the engagement process to be used.  Champion better practice community engagement through policy, process and leadership.  Monitor implementation and compliance with this policy.
<b>Managers</b>	Manage areas of responsibility to ensure community engagement is consistent with this policy.
<b>Employees</b>	Undertake to make community engagement activities consistent with this policy.

## 7. Reporting and evaluation

**Reporting and updates will be available online through our Connect Stonnington engagement platform, as well as provided directly to those who asked to be informed and have provided contact details.**

We will improve our engagement practices through ongoing evaluation and learning, as well as continually extending our reach and strengthening our relationships with the community.



## 8. Our legislative requirements



**Elements of our community engagement work are guided by Victorian Government legislation which sets specific engagement requirements for some Council activities.**

These statutory requirements usually relate to long term strategic council planning and budgeting, amendments to the planning scheme, development of public health and wellbeing plans, local law making, land acquisition and sales, electoral reviews and some road changes.

The *Local Government Act 2020* outlines a set of overarching principles and requirements to guide the engagement approach of councils. Other relevant legislation includes:

- » Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006
- » Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005
- » Disability Act 2006
- » Equal Opportunity Act 2010
- » Gender Equality Act 2020
- » Local Government Act 1989
- » Multicultural Victoria Act 2011
- » Planning and Environment Act 1987
- » Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014
- » Public Administration Act 2004
- » Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008
- » Road Management Act 2004
- » Subordinate Legislation Act 1994

## 9. Definitions

For the purposes of this policy, Council adopts the following definitions:

<b>Community</b>	<p>Refers to the people who have a stake and interest in the City of Stonnington and includes people who:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Live, work, study or conduct business or are involved in local community groups or organisations in the municipality</li> <li>» Visit, use or enjoy the services, facilities and public places located within the municipality</li> </ul>
<b>Community engagement</b>	<p>Community engagement is a planned process with the specific purpose of working with individuals and groups to encourage active involvement in decisions that affect them or are of interest to them.</p>
<b>Panel</b>	<p>May be used to deliver a range of engagement types from world cafés, in person and/or online advisory groups through to complex deliberative processes.</p> <p><b>Larger panels</b> (50 – 60 participants) can provide a representative sample of the population (to acceptable industry standards) of Stonnington and can be appropriate for whole of Stonnington decisions with wide reaching impact.</p> <p><b>Smaller panels</b> (15 – 30 participants) can provide representative samples for niche decisions impacting particular groups of the Stonnington community but still require appropriate support, time and information.</p>
<b>Consultation</b>	<p>The activity of seeking input on a matter.</p>
<b>Deliberation</b>	<p>Usually convened for more complex, long term and high impact issues, where perspectives are likely to differ and/or where the issue is high impact on sections of the community. Can take different forms but best practice always involves:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» a representative sample of the population or group who are impacted (see Panel)</li> <li>» a clear scope and remit that often asks for an agreed compromise of interests and outcomes, agreed priorities or</li> <li>» consensus on a vision and direction</li> <li>» provision of timely, objective and independently sourced/verified information</li> <li>» sufficient time (often half day sessions spread across several weeks or months)</li> <li>» support to participate (including independent facilitation, reimbursement for time and sometimes co-design of the process)</li> <li>» a commitment to participants on the level of influence their recommendation or decision holds (usually high).</li> </ul>
<b>Process</b>	<p>A relationship between key steps, activities, tasks, policies and/or resources.</p>
<b>Public participation</b>	<p>A term used by IAP2 meaning the involvement of those affected (interested or impacted) by a decision in the decision-making process. We use the term interchangeably with Community Engagement, Stakeholder Engagement or Consultation.</p>
<b>Stakeholder</b>	<p>An individual or group with a strong interest in the decisions of Council and are directly impacted by their outcomes.</p>

## 10. Useful links

### Connect Stonnington

**[connectstonnington.vic.gov.au](https://connectstonnington.vic.gov.au)**

Connect Stonnington is the City of Stonnington's online engagement platform where the community can have their say on proposed activities and future plans. The platform enables people to contribute their opinions, join conversations, receive updates on projects, and find out how their feedback has influenced decisions.

### Council meetings

The City of Stonnington's Council comprises nine elected Councillors, three representing each of the city's three wards. Council is responsible for making decisions on behalf of the community.

Council meetings take place at 7pm on the first and third Monday of the month, at the Malvern Town Hall on the corner of High Street and Glenferrie Road, Malvern.

Agendas and minutes are available at **[stonnington.vic.gov.au/about/about-council/council-meetings](https://stonnington.vic.gov.au/about/about-council/council-meetings)**

Council meetings can be watched live via Live Streaming  
**[webcast.stonnington.vic.gov.au](https://webcast.stonnington.vic.gov.au)**





City of  
**STONNINGTON**