

Community Engagement Policy



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1 Document Control

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RESPONSIBLE GENERAL MANAGER	General Manager Corporate Services
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The City of Kingston recognises the traditional custodians of the land and waterways on which we live, work and play. We extend our respect to all Elders past, present and emerging and to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who call Kingston home.

2 Purpose

The Community Engagement Policy outlines Kingston City Council's (Council) commitment to provide the community with genuine opportunities to contribute to and inform projects, strategies, services and decisions that affect them. The intent of this policy is to provide clarity about how Council will fulfil its commitment to engaging with the community.

3 Scope

This Policy applies across all of Council.

The Policy is supported by a 'Community Engagement Kit' that provides guidance and procedures for undertaking community engagement.

4 Context

Today, community engagement is an accepted component of any significant project; with stakeholders, the community and customers expecting they will have an opportunity to influence government decisions that affect them.

Council adopted its Community Engagement Policy in 2019 after a period of public consultation. This updated draft policy reflects the changes and expectations outlined for all Victorian Councils in the new *Local Government Act 2020* (the Act).

As part of the new Act Councils must develop, adopt, and maintain a Community Engagement Policy (s 55) in consultation with the community to give effect to the community engagement principles (s 56). The community engagement principles in the new Act are:

- a community engagement process must have a clearly defined objective and scope;
- participants in community engagement must have access to objective, relevant and timely information to inform their participation;
- participants in community engagement must be representative of the persons and groups affected by the matter that is the subject of the community engagement;
- participants in community engagement are entitled to reasonable support to enable meaningful and informed engagement;
- participants in community engagement are informed of the ways in which the community engagement process will influence Council decision making.

5 Public Engagement Best Practice

In 2015 the office of the Victorian Auditor General (VAGO) developed a '*Better Practice Guide for Public Participation in Government Decision-Making*' that advocates for the importance of public participation in government decision-making and provides a high-level framework to use when deciding how best to involve the public in government decision-making and implementation.

The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) is the leading professional organisation advancing the practice of public participation globally. IAP2 has a series of tools which support the delivery of engagement, including:

- Core Values: informing best practice engagement and defining expectations of the process.
- Public Participation Spectrum: defining the role of the public in engagement processes.
- Code of Ethics for Public Participation Practitioners: a guide for ethics in public engagement.
- Quality Assurance Standard: describes the important elements of public engagement processes.

At the start of 2020, the Victorian Government released a draft Public Engagement Framework for community consultation (this draft was initially due to be finalised and published in April this year, however efforts have been diverted to support the government in response to COVID-19 so it is yet to be finalised). The draft engagement framework provides principles, how-to guidelines and measures for engagement evaluation and has been used in the refinement of this policy.

All the above have been incorporated into the thinking and design of this updated draft Community Engagement Policy

6 Commitment to community engagement

As detailed in the 2017-2021 Council Plan, Council is committed to engaging communities in a meaningful way.

Kingston is a diverse, inclusive community home to people of different ages, abilities, cultural backgrounds, sexualities and genders. Council is committed to engaging with a broad range of perspectives when undertaking community consultation and, where appropriate, will seek to engage with groups that are often underrepresented in community engagement such as (but not limited to) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, people, people with a disability, carers, youth, elderly, and multicultural communities.

Council is committed to principles to drive and inform the way it develops and implements community engagement activity. The principles outlined below are adapted from those outlined in the VAGO better practice guide.

Openness

- Embedding in decision-making processes an openness to understanding and incorporating the views of those affected by decisions.
- Providing access to relevant information about the decision in a manner that participants can understand, so that their contributions may be fully informed.

Accountability

- Being clear about the scope and objectives of the public participation exercise.
- Being clear about the contribution participants will be asked to make and the responsibilities associated with this.
- Providing appropriate time and resources to ensure that those affected can participate in a meaningful way.
- Demonstrating that results and outcomes are consistent with the commitment made at the outset of the process.

Transparency and integrity

- Ensuring that those affected understand the scope of the pending decision, the decision-making process and any constraints on this process.
- Addressing public and stakeholder concerns in an honest and forthright way and communicating results back to the public in a way they understand.

Responsive

- Responding to the engagement and input of the public in a timely and constructive manner.
- Identifying and promoting public participation better practice in government decision-making.

Inclusiveness

- Making every reasonable effort to include the stakeholder groups and members of the public affected by the pending decision.
- Making reasonable adjustments where necessary to remove barriers to participation and ensure an inclusive approach.
- Providing appropriate time and resources to ensure that those affected can participate in a meaningful way.
- Being aware and taking account of the needs of diverse communities to be able to participate in a meaningful way.

Awareness

- Being aware and taking account of legislation that should shape the approach to public participation

7 What is community engagement?

IAP2 defines public participation as the involvement of those affected by a decision in the decision-making process. In this policy we use the term 'community engagement' to describe those situations.

8 Approach to community engagement

When will Council engage the community

The question of when Council will consult is a critical one. Each time there is a project or policy to be developed or a decision to be made there is an opportunity for a community engagement process. The new Act also sets a list of some key strategies and documents Councils must engage with the community. Below sets out when Council will engage its community:

- development or review of the Community Vision*
- preparation and adoption of the Council Plan*
- development, adoption, and review of the Financial Plan*
- development, adoption, and review of the Asset Plan*
- electoral structure review
- governance rules
- proposing and making a local law
- budget or Revised budget
- compulsory acquisition of land
- selling, exchange or lease of land
- substantial changes or review of a Council service or program
- new, or changes of, adopted Council policies and/or strategies
- capital works projects including public buildings, centres and other infrastructure
- Councillor Notices of Motion should have regard to community engagement principles and requirements outlined in this policy.

*In the new Act, these items include a requirement for deliberative engagement practices.

How will Council engage the community?

There is no one-size fits-all approach to how community engagement should occur.

Instead, the engagement approach should reflect the scale and purpose of the decision or project. As noted in the VAGO better practice guide, it is not expected that the depth of analysis and documentation for community engagement on the \$50,000 installation of a local traffic management solution will be the same as the engagement plan required on \$1 billion new public infrastructure project.

Community engagement occurs in various forms with increasing levels of involvement as demonstrated by the IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum. This Spectrum is designed to assist with the selection of the level of participation that defines the public's role in any community engagement program; it also sets out the promise being made to the public, by Council, at each participation level.

The Spectrum shows that all levels of participation are legitimate depending on the goals, time frames, resources and level of concern in the decision to be made. The below also sets out some example engagement techniques at each level.

	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Public participation goal	To provide balanced and objective information to make our community aware of something that has happened or will happen.	To listen to our community's feedback on options or a potential decision and take their input into account.	To seek input to identify issues, concerns and aspirations to inform decision making and show how that input has informed the decision.	To work with our community to develop a detailed understanding of all the issues and opportunities and identify agreed solutions at every step of the process.	To build the capacity of our community to identify solutions and/or lead change.
Promise to the Public	We will keep you informed	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns, 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 decision to the maximum extent possible	We will implement what you decide
Example techniques	Fact sheets Newsletters Websites Open houses	Public comment Focus Groups Surveys Public meetings	Workshops Deliberative polling	Citizen advisory committees Consensus building Participatory decision-making	Citizen juries Ballots Delegated decision Representative panels

Regardless of the level of community engagement that occurs, Council's approach to community engagement will seek to:

1. DEFINE the purpose of the engagement.
2. UNDERSTAND stakeholder and community interests, values and opportunities for engagement.
3. DESIGN an appropriate engagement process.
4. DELIVER genuine and respectful engagement.
5. REVIEW and interpret the engagement information and data.
6. APPLY the outcomes of the engagement to inform the decision-making process.
7. EVALUATE the success of the engagement and share lessons learnt.
8. REPORT feedback and 'close the loop' on the public engagement.

9 Tools and methods

To help guide Council on the level of engagement appropriate for a project, the IAP2 'Working out your spectrum level' worksheet (Appendix 1) will be used to guide this decision, as will local knowledge, community sentiment already understood and precedence of the engagement level for like activities.

Different types of engagement suit different decisions according to the level of impact, and level of influence the community will have. Every project or decision will vary according to its context, who it affects and how it impacts them as well as what can be influenced or is achievable. We assess each project accordingly.

Deliberative Engagement

There are certain strategies and documents where the Act requires Councils to undertake a deliberative process; and while the Act has specified the community engagement principles, and that certain strategic planning processes and documents must be developed in accordance with deliberative engagement processes, it does not stipulate the methods or format required by council.

This means Councils can choose the most appropriate form of deliberation to suit the situation. It is worth noting however that Kingston Council considers "deliberative" to mean long and careful consideration, and when considering the IAP2 spectrum, deliberative engagement sits at the 'Collaborate' and 'Empower' end of the spectrum.

Below is an example of the types of projects that would sit at each level of the IAP2 spectrum.

Examples of how different types of engagement may align with influence

Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
If a decision has already been subject to engagement or there is a safety issue we will inform you rather than consult, for example drainage repairs.				
	Sometimes options are limited for practical reasons for example work must be carried out, but we will ask the community how and when it should happen.			
	Decisions carrying a lower impact, for example minor park upgrades, still require community input but less time and resource intensive methods.			
		High impact and complex projects for example, major infrastructure upgrades, or precinct master planning or require extra levels of interaction and often happen over several stages.		
		<p>The Local Government Act requires deliberative engagement practices for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Visions • Council plans • Financial plans and Asset Management Plans <p>On long term and significant impact projects like these we will use methods to partner with the community.</p>		

10 Exemptions

Community engagement will not occur in circumstances which relate to operational matters, confidential or commercial in confidence information, or when Council must make emergency or safety related decisions.

Community engagement can take place at any time of the year (excluding where possible the Christmas – January holiday period) and is dependent on Council’s program of work.

11 Human Rights Charter

This policy has been reviewed against and complies with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006.

The development and adoption of a Community Engagement Policy seeks to adhere to the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* which requires consideration of relevant human rights in making decisions and makes actions that are incompatible with human rights illegal. In particular:

- the right of every person in Victoria to participate in the conduct of public affairs
- the right to freedom of expression, including the freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds

12 Related Documents and Resources

- Your Kingston Your Say website www.yourkingstonyoursay.com.au

This online platform allows Council to interact with its community and seek their feedback via a combination of forums, polls, surveys, maps and other tools to host and encourage conversations and interaction.

- Council also uses a range of tools and templates, including a comprehensive Community Engagement Kit, that guide it in how to approach and implement community engagement.

13 Legislation / External Document

- The *Local Government Act 2020* requires councils to have a community engagement policy
- The *Public Administration Act 2004* requires the use of community views to improve outcomes
- The *Equal Opportunity Act 2010* under which, providers of services
 - have a duty to take reasonable and proportionate steps to eliminate discrimination as far as possible
 - must not discriminate when they deliver services
 - must make reasonable adjustments for people with disabilities so that they can participate or access a service, including when providing information.

14 Internal Document

- Kingston City Council, Community Engagement Kit
- the 2017-2021 Council Plan sets out a range of actions and details how Council will strive to deliver these actions including through 'Engaging our Community in decision-making'.

15 Definitions

Community	Means individuals and groups of people, stakeholders, interest groups and citizen groups. A community may be a geographic location (community of place), a community of similar interest (community of practice) or a community of affiliation or identity (such as industry or sporting club).
Community engagement	Means a planned process that aims to work with customers, stakeholders and/or communities to shape decisions and actions in relation to a problem, opportunity or outcome (IAP2 2015). Community engagement may also be referred to as public participation, consultation and stakeholder engagement.
Council	Means Kingston City Council, being a body corporate constituted as a municipal Council under the <i>Local Government Act 2020</i>
Councillor	Individuals holding the office of a member of Kingston City Council
Council Officer	Means the Chief Executive Officer and employees of Council appointed by the Chief Executive Officer.
Customer/s	Means an individual, business or organisation that uses Council services.
Decision	Decisions can take many forms, and, in this policy, it is used to include activities such as projects, service design/delivery, and policy development means a conclusion or resolution reached after consideration.
Public	Those stakeholders who are not typically part of the decision-making entity or entities.
Public Participation	A process that involves the public in problem-solving or decision-making and that uses public input to make better decisions.
Project	Means a planned undertaking that builds, enhances and/or maintains Council assets or enhances Council services in order to achieve a desired outcome, within a defined scope
Stakeholder/s	Any individual, group of individuals, organisation or politics entity with an interest or stake in the outcome of a decision.
IAP2 Australasia	The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) is an international federation of member affiliates which seek to promote and improve the practice of public participation
Inform	A level of community engagement in the IAP2 Spectrum for Public Participation in which an organisation provides the community with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions
Consult	A level of community engagement in the IAP2 Spectrum for Public Participation in which an organisation seeks community feedback on alternatives, drafts or proposals.
Involve	A level of community engagement in the IAP2 Spectrum for Public Participation in which an organisation works with the community to ensure that their concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed.
Collaborate	A level of community engagement in the IAP2 Spectrum for Public Participation in which an organisation partners with the community through the whole process of making a decision.
Empower	A level of community engagement in the IAP2 Spectrum for Public Participation in which an organisation shares some or all of its authority to make decisions with the community

APPENDIX 1

Working Out Your Spectrum Level (adapted from IAP2, 2006)

Complete the Public Expectations Worksheet to help determine what level of Public Participation you should be performing.

Tick the appropriate boxes for questions 1 to 5. Then, follow the instructions in the left column.

Assessment questions	Very low	Low	Moderate	High	Very high
1. What is the probable level of difficulty in addressing the problem / opportunity?					
2. What is the potential for public outrage related to the project?					
3. How important are the potential impacts to the public?					
4. How much do major stakeholders care about the problem / opportunity to be addressed and the decision to be made?					
5. What degree of participation does the public appear to want?					
Count number of ticks in each column					
Multiply number of ticks by the weight	x1	x2	x3	x4	x5
Enter column score					
Add total of all five column scores					
Divide total score by the number of questions	/5				
Average score					

Score Indicates:

1 - 2	Very low - Low	
2 - 3	Low - Moderate	Recommendation: at least Consult
3 - 4	Moderate - High	Recommendation: probably Involve
4 - 5	High – Very high	Recommendation: minimum Involve, consider opportunities for Collaborate or Empower