

Community Engagement Policy



Contents

1	Document Control	1
2	Purpose.....	2
3	Scope	2
4	Corporate Framework	2
5	Context	3
6	Public Engagement Best Practice.....	3
7	Commitment to community engagement	4
8	What is community engagement?.....	5
9	Approach to community engagement	5
10	Tools and methods.....	8
11	Exemptions	9
12	Human Rights Charter	9
13	Gender Impact Assessments	9
14	Related Documents and Resources	10
15	Legislation / External Document	10
16	Internal Document.....	10
17	Definitions	10
	APPENDIX 1	11

1 Document Control

The electronic version of this document is the controlled version. Printed copies are considered uncontrolled. Before using a printed copy, verify that it is the current version.

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POLICY OWNER	Manager, Communications and Community Relations
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The City of Kingston proudly acknowledges the Bunurong People of the Kulin Nation as the Traditional Owners and Custodians of this land, and we pay our respect to their Elders, past and present and emerging.

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.

Council recognises that genuine community engagement is an essential foundation of an active and involved community. The Policy sets the vision for a consistent, coordinated, and equitable approach to community engagement. It also provides clarity around when and how we will engage with the community.

3 Scope

This Policy applies across all of Council.

Council's approach to community engagement is consistent with the Local Government Act 2020.

This Policy applies to the planning, design, implementation, and evaluation of community engagement activities as directed by Council, recommended by staff, or legislated by the Act. The Policy also outlines the role that community members can reasonably expect to play in our planning and decision-making processes.

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

4 Corporate Framework

Community Vision

In early 2021, Council empowered a 45-member Community Panel to develop the overarching community vision for the City of Kingston. This vision is supported by eight principles, two of which guide our city's approach to community engagement:

- Keep the community informed, empowered and engaged
- Kingston is a respectful, inclusive and diverse community

Council Plan 2021-2025

The Council Plan 2021-25 outlines the way Council seeks to achieve goals for Kingston over the four-year Council term. The Council Plan aligns with the principles identified in Kingston's Community Vision and makes a commitment to "listen deeply to our community and engage them in meaningful decision making."

5 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's Community Engagement Policy reflects the expectations (and aims to exceed them) outlined for all Victorian Councils in the new *Local Government Act 2020* (the Act).

As part of the 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 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.

6 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:

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

In 2021, the Victorian Government released a Public Engagement Framework for community consultation and adoption. The Engagement Framework provides principles, how-to guidelines and measures for engagement evaluation and has been used in the refinement of this policy.

All of the above have been incorporated into the Community Engagement Policy.

7 Commitment to community engagement

As detailed in the 2021-2025 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.

Ongoing Deliberative Engagement: Community Representative Panel

In December 2022, Kingston Council adopted an updated Community Representative Panel Terms of Reference, which outlines our approach, and commitment to ongoing deliberative engagement.

Kingston's 45-member representative Collaborative Engagement Group will learn about the key issues facing Council, discuss them with one another, and then make recommendations about what should happen to help guide Kingston's decision making.

VAGO Better Practice Guide

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

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

Accountability

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

Transparency and integrity

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

Responsive

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

Inclusiveness

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

Awareness

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

8 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.

9 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 Act requires deliberative engagement be conducted on the following key strategies and documents :

- 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.

There are also some other legislatively required engagement including:

- Required advertising period for planning permits
- Strategic Planning in Planning Scheme Amendments
- Speed limit changes on Council-managed roads
- Introducing or moving bus stops
- Some property purchasing and leasing arrangements

Council will also consider proactively seeking community input on a range of projects including:

- capital works projects including public buildings, centres and other infrastructure
- governance rules
- proposing and making a local law
- budget or Revised budget
- substantial changes or review of a Council service or program
- new, or changes of, adopted Council policies and/or strategies
- Councillor Notices of Motion should have regard to community engagement principles and requirements outlined in this policy.

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
Goal	To provide balanced and objective information to make our community aware of something that has happened or will happen.	To seek and consider Community feedback on alternatives, proposals and/ or decisions we need to make.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure concerns and aspirations are understood, considered and incorporated where possible.	To partner with our community to identify alternatives, designing solutions and co-designing a jointly agreed outcome.	To build the capacity of our community to identify solutions and/or lead change.
Our commitment	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 an innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decision to the maximum extent possible	We will implement what you decide
The role of the community	Listen	Contribute	Participate	Partner	Partner or lead
Engagement type	Inform	Consultative	Deliberative	Deliberative	Deliberative
Engagement tools / techniques	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fact sheets • Newsletters • Websites • Open houses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public comment • Focus Groups • Surveys • Public meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshops • Deliberative polling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Citizen advisory committees • Consensus building • Participatory decision-making 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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.

10 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, 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
<p>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.</p>				
	<p>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.</p>			
	<p>Decisions carrying a lower impact, for example minor park upgrades, still require community input but less time and resource intensive methods.</p>			
		<p>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>		
			<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>	

11 Exemptions

Community engagement is considered on a case by case basis and may 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 and is dependent upon Council’s program of work. If we need to run a consultation over the Christmas-January period, we will seek to, where possible, extend consultations to provide an adequate opportunity for the community to provide feedback.

12 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:

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

13 Gender Impact Assessments

Under the Gender Equality Act 2020, a Gender Impact Assessment (GIA) must be conducted on any new or renewed policy, program, service, strategy or infrastructure project that has a direct and significant impact on the public.

The GIA undertaken for the Community Engagement Policy highlights the need for consideration to be made about making resources and access to consultations as accessible, transparent and safe as possible, to create more opportunities for community members of all ages and backgrounds can provide us with their feedback and trust the process – this may include making translations available for CALD communities and providing opportunities for community members to provide us with feedback in person, during daylight hours. Where possible, we should also consider highlighting how a consultation can provide benefits to health and create opportunities for social connection as a part of our engagement processes.

14 Related Documents and Resources

- a. 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.

- b. 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.

15 Legislation / External Document

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

16 Internal Document

- a. Kingston City Council, Community Engagement Kit
- b. 2021-2025 Council Plan

17 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 of Influence 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: likely Involve
4 - 5	High – Very high	Recommendation: minimum Involve, consider opportunities for Collaborate or Empower