

Community Engagement Policy 2025 - 2029

April 2025

CONTENTS

Acknowledgement of Country	2
What do we mean by 'community engagement'?	2
What guides our engagement	3
When, Who and How we will engage	5
Transparent and accountable engagement	6
Legislative environment	7
References and Definitions	8



Acknowledgement of Country

Cardinia Shire Council (Council) recognises and values the Bunurong and Wurundjeri tribes as the original inhabitants of the land that makes up Cardinia Shire.

Council's name is derived from the Kulin nation word 'Kar-din-yarr', meaning 'look to the rising sun' or 'close to the sunrise'. Council's logo, which includes a motif of the rising sun, reflects this meaning.

Council is committed to developing and strengthening relationships through reconciliation. Council supports the reconciliation process, which promotes mutual respect and understanding of the Aboriginal peoples and of all ethnic groups and their history and culture in our community.

What do we mean by Community Engagement?

Community engagement provides an opportunity for the community to shape the plans and decisions that affect their current and future needs. It helps inform Council's strategic direction, planning and transparent decision making. It provides Council with a better understanding of community priorities and sentiments on important issues. The policy also requires staff to take the needs of our diverse population and geographic make up into account to make sure a range of voices are heard.

Formal community engagement processes, as referred to in the Policy, seek community input to inform decisions.

These processes are only one way our community can have a say on matters that are important to them and get involved in the work of Council. We are committed to building strong community relationships and welcome community participation. Other ways the community can become involved with Council include:

- registering on Council's Creating Cardinia platform to find out about community engagement opportunities
- sharing opportunities to get involved within local networks
- signing up for regular e-newsletters to keep informed about Council projects and news
- attending council meetings and making submissions.

What is the purpose of this policy?

This policy is our commitment to the community on the principles and values that guide our community engagement. It applies to our councillors, staff, contractors and volunteers. As elected representatives, who engage with and are directly accountable to the community, councillors will play a key role. The policy outlines the role that community members can reasonably expect to play in our planning and decision-making. It provides guidance, structure, and accountability to Council's community engagement practices.

Council must adopt and maintain a community engagement policy under section 56 of the Local Government Act 2020 (the Act). This policy gives effect to the delivery of Council’s community engagement in line with the principles of the Act.

Our promise to the community

This policy provides the core values underpinning our approach to community engagement. The policy is implemented in the day-to-day practice informed by a strategy and staff guidelines. These documents will be continually shaped by the ongoing feedback we receive from the community during engagement activities.

What guides our engagement?

The Victorian Local Government Act 2020 outlines a set of five overarching principles that are central to our engagement practice. They broadly outline the need for community engagement to be transparent, accountable, meaningfully informed and representative.

The principles in this document guide each of our community engagement projects. They are based on best-practice community engagement frameworks including the International Association for Public Participation Australasia (IAP2A) 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.

Guiding Principles in Section 56 of the Local Government Act, 2020.	VAGO Public Participation Principles	IAP2A Core Values
A community engagement process must have a clearly defined objective and scope.	Accountability	Public participation promotes sustainable decisions by recognising and communicating the needs and interests of all participants, including decision makers.
Participants must have access to objective, relevant and timely information to inform their participation.	Awareness Openness	Public participation includes the promise that the public’s contribution will influence the decision.
Participants must be representative of the persons and groups affected by the matter that is the subject of the community engagement.	Responsiveness	Public participation seeks out and facilitates the involvement of those potentially affected by or interested in a decision.
Participants are entitled to reasonable support to enable meaningful and informed engagement.	Inclusiveness	Public participation provides participants with the information they need to participate in a meaningful way.
Participants are informed of the ways in which the process will influence Council decision making.	Transparency Integrity	Public participation communicates to participants how their input affected the decision.

International Association for Public Participation Australasia (IAP2) Spectrum of Public Participation

Council uses the International Association for Public Participation Australasia (IAP2) [Spectrum of Public Participation](#) (Inform, Consult, Involve, Collaborate or Empower) as the core model for its community engagement activities.

Council recognises that community engagement can occur at any or all the levels contained in the spectrum. Council will determine the most appropriate level of engagement required as outlined in this policy and having regards to resourcing available.

Deliberative Engagement

Deliberative engagement is a process that brings together a diverse group of community members, closely reflecting the community makeup. This group collaborates by considering a range of perspectives and relevant information over time, exploring options, and making decisions together. It's an opportunity for everyone to have a voice, contribute to the conversation, and be part of shaping the future in a meaningful way.

Council will undertake a deliberative engagement process to inform the following strategic documents:

- Community Vision
- Council Plan
- Financial Plan
- Asset Plan.

When community engagement is required

To ensure Council uses a consistent approach, the following circumstances will determine when community engagement should occur.

When the proposed change:

- will significantly affect the community
- is likely to generate community concern
- requires additional information for Council to make a decision
- is subject to legislative requirements that set out specific community engagement processes.

The community engagement policy must be capable of being applied to:

- the making of Councils local laws
- the Council's budget and policy development
- the acquisition, sale, exchange or lease of land.

Council will not undertake community engagement in the following circumstances:

- an emergency or situation which impacts public safety, where an immediate resolution is required
- situations which are strictly confidential in nature
- when there is a ministerial exemption
- day-to-day operational decisions which have minimal to no impact on the community.

Who we will engage with

Council will identify who it will engage taking the following into account:

- who is directly or indirectly impacted by the subject matter
- who has a vested interest or concern (stakeholder)

- who would provide valuable insight and input

Council must take steps to consider engagement methods that are accessible, inclusive, and culturally safe for key groups including but not limited to:

- First Nations communities
- people with a disability
- multicultural/faith communities
- newly arrived communities, refugees, or asylum seekers
- young people
- people who identify as LGBTIQ+
- older adults
- families and children.

Engagement practices must consider people who experience:

- social, economic, digital disadvantage
- geographic isolation.

How Council will engage

The process must consider appropriate engagement methods to meet the diverse needs of the community. Consideration must be given to:

- effective targeted promotion to those affected by the project
- in person community engagement opportunities (pop ups, workshops, information sessions, events)
- online engagement methods
- accessible locations for engagement activities
- times and dates of engagement activities
- alternative formats ie bilingual or Auslan interpreters, audio, easy read, hard copies, large print etc.



“Workshops are one way to see things for a different perspective”.

When Council will engage

- Community engagement timeframes must allow sufficient opportunity for the community to participate. 4 weeks is recommended as best practice and a minimum of 3 weeks must be allowed to enable participation unless there is a genuine reason to reduce this timeframe.
- Community engagement must not occur over public holidays or during the Christmas period unless the engagement period starts and ends outside of these times providing the community an opportunity to meaningfully participate in the engagement.



“The community should be able to engage directly and help with how they like to see a survey or other method applied”.

Transparent and accountable engagement

The following three elements are also what make our engagement meaningful, transparent and accountable. We will achieve this transparency and accountability through:

- Empowering stakeholders with relevant, objective and timely plain English information and resources to allow informed participation.
- Explaining which elements the community can practically influence, to what level and how we will use our community's input.
- Reporting back to the community, explaining what we asked, what we heard, and what we did and/or the next steps that can be expected in the process

Monitoring, evaluation and review

All community engagement activities must be evaluated to understand the level of success of the engagement activities. Evaluation will support continuous improvement in future engagement practices.

Development and adoption of the policy

This Community Engagement Policy is planned for Council adoption in 2025, superseding the Community Engagement Policy 2021-2024

This policy was directly informed by:

- Online and face-to-face engagement with our community
- Consultation with community advisory groups
- Best practice and statutory requirements
- Staff feedback on draft engagement guidelines.

Definitions

Community	The Local Government Act, 2020 defines community as: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• people who live in the municipal district of the Council• ratepayers of the Council• Traditional Owners of the land in the municipal district of the Council• people and bodes who conduct activities in the municipal district of the Council.
Community engagement	Community engagement is the process Council undergoes using a variety of mediums to exchange information with the community with the aim of gathering data and ideas to make decisions or take action.
Engagement Plan (EP)	The Engagement Plan documents the process of community engagement and its outcomes to meet the requirements of this policy and the Local Government Act, 2020.

IAP2 (International Association for Public Participation Australasia)	IAP2A is an international member association which seeks to promote and improve the practice of public participation or community and stakeholder engagement, incorporating individuals, governments, institutions and other entities that affect the public interest.
Stakeholder	This definition is broader than a group with an interest in an issue: it is extended to include the broader community and Council staff. The definition also applies an organisation that deliver services in the area and is affected by a Council decision.
VAGO (Victorian Auditor General's Office)	VAGO regularly undertakes audits of functions of Council, including community engagement activities. It provides a set of guiding principles for public participation.
Deliberative Engagement	Deliberative engagement is the process of bringing together a group of individuals who are as closely representative population of the community as practically possible. This group considers relevant facts from multiple points of view over a period of time, identifying options, and coming to a group decision.

Legislation and Related Documents

- Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014
- Information Privacy Act 2000
- Local Government Act 2020
- Local Government Act 1989
- Planning and Environment Act, 1987
- Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008
- Road Management Act 2004
- Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006
- Equal Opportunities Act 2010
- Disability Discrimination Act, 1992
- Multicultural Act, 2011
- Public Administration Act 2004
- Child Safey Act 2015
- The Commission for Children and Young People Child Safe Standards
- Child Wellbeing and Safety Act, 2005
- Gender Equality Act, 2020

Cardinia Shire Council's Key Plans and Policies

- Council Vision 2040
- Council Plan 2021-25
- Community Engagement Strategy and Action Plan
- Public Transparency Policy
- Child Safe Policy
- Liveability Plan
- Draft Reconciliation Action Plan
- Cultural Diversity Plan
- Access and Inclusion Plan.