

## **11 PROPOSED UPDATE TO THE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT POLICY**

FILE REFERENCE INT1940523

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### **RECOMMENDATION**

That Council adopts the updated Community Engagement Policy.

### **Attachments**

1	Community Engagement Policy - January 2019 Draft	4 Pages
2	Community Engagement Handbook	21 Pages
3	Engagement Plan Template	4 Pages
4	VAGO Community Engagement Audit 2017	56 Pages

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The current community engagement policy was endorsed by SLT in July 2016 and due for review in 2019.

In 2017, a Victorian Auditor General Office (VAGO) review of Cardinia Shire Council's community engagement practices was undertaken with recommendations being made to improve the process. Since this time the 2018-2022 Council Plan has also come into effect. The updates to the policy and handbook address the VAGO recommendations and align the policy with the current Council Plan.

### **BACKGROUND**

The VAGO audit which occurred in 2017 provided a range of recommendations to Cardinia Shire Council to improve the community engagement process. These included the addition of further engagement resources, templates and checklists to assist in the development and delivery of community engagement activities. This has prompted some additions and language changes within the policy; however the majority of the changes are already included in the community engagement handbook and engagement plan template.

The main changes to Council's community engagement policy are;

- Update to reflect current Council Plan, aligning with Our Community and Our Governance areas.
- Update to meet VAGO recommendation of including objectives that articulate what the policy aims to achieve.
- Update to meet VAGO recommendation of adding responsibilities, clearly stating who is required to undertake community engagement activities and when.
- Inclusion of a reference to the resources, templates and tools available through the community engagement handbook.
- Update to meet VAGO recommendation of including definitions of terms.

These updates will bring Cardinia Shire Council's community engagement policy in line with some of the best practice policies which were used as a benchmark in the VAGO review.

## **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

This policy aligns with the Liveability Plan in relation to social equity. Engagement is highlighted as an important component of the planning, implementation and evaluation of the Liveability Plan.

This policy would replace the current community engagement policy which was adopted in June 2016.

## **RELEVANCE TO COUNCIL PLAN**

### **Our Community**

We will monitor and research emerging community trends to help plan for the needs of residents. We will provide a range of opportunities that encourage participation in Council policy and strategy development.

We will strengthen Council's community engagement through the development, implementation and promotion of effective practices.

### **Our Governance**

We will develop a policy which details how Council will inform and engage consistently with the community on important matters. We will enhance the community's confidence in Council's community engagement.

## **CONSULTATION/COMMUNICATION**

The update to this policy is based on the results of the VAGO review of Council's community engagement practices in 2017.

The accompanying handbook and engagement plan template are living documents that are regularly reviewed and updated based on industry standards, ideas and feedback from staff and community. Additional resources and tools are added as required or when they become available.

The updated policy and handbook will be communicated to the wider organisation via internal communication channels.

## **FINANCIAL AND RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

The adoption of the policy in conjunction with the accompanying engagement handbook is intended to ensure a more consistent approach to community engagement across council. This may have budget implications in relation to increased staff time and finances being allocated to community engagement activities.

## **CONCLUSION**

The proposed policy update takes into account the recommendations from the 2017 VAGO audit and brings it in line with the current Council Plan. The update provides Councillors, senior management, staff, volunteers and contractors/consultants with clarity and guidance in relation to the community engagement process. This will assist in the delivery of a more consistent approach to community engagement activities across Council.



## Community Engagement Policy

HPRM number	INT1610627		
Policy owner	Community Strengthening		
Adopted by	SLT (Internal)		
Adoption date	13/02/2019	Scheduled review date:	13/02/2020
Publication	CardiNet and website		
Revision/version number	1.03		

## 1 Policy alignment

Community engagement plays a vital role in much of the work undertaken by Cardinia Shire Council and as such this policy aligns with the 2018 - 2022 *Council Plan* under the areas of;

### Our Community

We will monitor and research emerging community trends to help plan for the needs of residents. We will provide a range of opportunities that encourage participation in council policy and strategy development.

We will strengthen Council's community engagement through the development, implementation and promotion of effective practices.

### Our Governance

We will develop a policy which details how Council will inform and engage consistently with the community on important matters. We will enhance the community's confidence in Council's community engagement.

## 2 Purpose and objectives

The Community Engagement Policy has been developed for the purpose of meeting the following objectives;

- Articulate and guide Council's commitment and approach to high quality, consistent and genuine community engagement.
- Provide a commitment to inclusive, transparent and accessible community engagement activities within the community
- Provide a framework to build the capacity of the community to contribute to effective and responsive decision making

## 3 Scope

This policy applies to all areas of Council operations including those undertaken by Councillors, senior management, staff, volunteers and contractors/consultants acting as representatives of Council.

## **4 Policy description**

### **4.1 Background**

Community engagement is a planned process that involves the contribution and input of the community in decision making. It is intended to support and inform rather than replace the decision making or statutory functions of Council.

Community engagement involves a variety of methods and communication techniques suited to the individual or group involved. These can range from informal discussions, to formal community meetings, focus groups, workshops, online feedback and idea generation and other creative approaches. In some circumstances, Council will also support community members advocating on issues themselves.

Engagement is also about establishing relationships which facilitate meaningful dialogue and outcomes in communities such as improved services, facilities, policy and infrastructure. Council recognises that Councillors, staff and volunteers engage with the community continually and often informally. The community engagement policy aims to recognise and support this everyday engagement and ensure that it is enhanced by providing a clear set of engagement processes.

While it is not practical to engage with the community on every issue, Council resolves to ensure that the community is as well informed as they can be on major issues, plans and projects. An informed community ensures they have the necessary information to form an opinion and provide input through a community engagement process. This direct input from residents enhances Council's decision-making processes making it more relevant and transparent for the community.

### **4.2 Importance of community engagement**

Traditionally, local government has relied on community representation through the election of its Councillors to ensure that community issues and priorities are reflected in Council activities. This remains fundamental; however Council recognises that broader community engagement, undertaken effectively, benefits business practice, planning and service delivery. Increasingly, community members expect to have direct involvement in identifying Council priorities and being part of Council's decision making process. Providing a clear community engagement framework assists to implement effective and meaningful engagement activities.

Genuine community engagement provides transparency and accountability by ensuring that Council is addressing the identified priorities of the community. Community engagement ensures that community members are informed of Council operations and are able to provide input in a balanced and appropriate way, leading to collaboration and shared decision making.

### **4.3 Responsibilities**

All council staff, volunteers and contractors/consultants are required to undertake a community engagement process including consultation with the Community Engagement Facilitator when;

- A change will significantly affect the way services are provided
- There is a proposed introduction or change which has the potential to significantly affect the community. This could include a policy, strategy, program, project or issue
- A proposed change or action is likely to generate community concern
- Additional information is required by Council to make an informed decision
- Council are required to better understand community issues and sentiment

The Community Engagement handbook is made available to all Councillors, senior management, staff, volunteers and contractors/consultants acting as representatives of Council. The handbook provides in-depth guidance on how to undertake community engagement activities including templates, resources, tools and further information on when, how and who to engage.

#### **4.4 International Association for Public Participation Australasia (IAP2)**

Council commits to aligning community engagement with the widely recognised International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) core values that underpin the practice of community engagement.

Council makes a commitment that public participation will;

- Provide opportunities for the public to have a say in decisions about actions that could affect their lives
- Include a promise that the public's contribution will be taken into consideration and influence the final decision
- Promote sustainable decisions by recognising and communicating the needs and interests of all participants, including decision makers
- Seek out and facilitate the involvement of those potentially affected by, or interested in, a decision
- Will seek input from community in designing how they can participate in the decision making process
- Provide participants with the information they need to participate in a meaningful way
- Communicate to participants how their input was considered and affected or influenced the final decision.

#### **4.5 Principles and values**

Council commits to undertaking community engagement in a manner that is consistent with IAP2 core values and our organisational values; teamwork, respect, accountability, communication and customer focus.

All community engagement activities undertaken by Cardinia Shire Council are guided by three main community development principles;

##### **Social inclusion**

Providing community members with resources, opportunities and capabilities to meaningfully participate in community life in relation to areas that affect the communities' development.

Ensuring community members have ability to;

- Learn (e.g. participate in education and training);
- Work (e.g. unpaid or voluntary work);
- Engage (e.g. connect with others, use local services and participate in local, cultural, civic and recreational activities); and
- Have a voice (influence decisions, direction setting and planning that affects them)

This is underpinned by the premise that every individual has an active role to play.

##### **Capacity building**

Supporting residents, communities and organisations to identify needs and develop local solutions including, distribution of resources, advocacy, empowerment, awareness raising and education.

Working with the existing strengths, abilities and skills of residents, communities and organisations to increase involvement, decision-making and ownership of issues.

##### **Equity/social justice.**

Ensuring all resources and opportunities available to the community are available in a fair and equitable manner according to need.

All residents and communities should be able to access Council services (where applicable), resources and information without discrimination.

Council recognises the importance of the feedback loop within community engagement and as such commits to incorporating this into community engagement plans to ensure that the community are provided with relevant and timely feedback on how their contribution has been used to inform decisions.

## 4.6 Legislative requirements

Community engagement is mandated under the following legislation:

- Local Government Act 1989
- Planning and Environment Act 1987
- Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008
- Road Management Act 2004

Where community engagement is mandated Council will adhere to the requirements as set out in the relevant act but where possible commits to going above and beyond the minimum standard to achieve best practice.

## 5 Evaluation and review

Through the adoption of this policy, Council commits to undertaking regular and consistent evaluation and review of community engagement activities and processes through:

- The ongoing implementation of the evaluation methodology and associated engagement planning, evaluation and reporting.
- Continual monitoring of community engagement plans submitted for approval.

## 6 Related documents

Type of document	Title and/or HPRM reference
Commonwealth/Victorian legislation	Local Government Act 1989 Planning and Environment Act 1987 Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities 2006 Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008 Road Management Act 2004
Report	INT194953 VAGO Community Engagement Audit 2016
Policies	INT163158 Community Strengthening community development principles
Guidelines	INT1373716 Community engagement handbook

## 7 Definitions

### Community Engagement

Is a process whereby council proactively seeks out information from the community including their values, concerns, ideas and aspirations. Where possible council will also include the community in the development of solutions and work together with them on the delivery of identified initiatives. This establishes an ongoing partnership to ensure that community members continue to shape council's decision making and implementation process.

### International Association for Public Participation Australasia (IAP2)

IAP2 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.

# Community engagement handbook

Guiding Cardinia Shire Council's approach to community engagement

January 2019



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# 1 What is Community Engagement and why is it important?

## 1.1 Community engagement

Community Engagement is a process where Council use a variety of mediums to exchange information with the community with the aim of gathering data and ideas to make decisions or take action to solve problems. There are some important components of Council's community engagement process these are;

- It is a planned process – This ensures a well-defined purpose for the engagement and a clear roadmap for the rollout.
- Community and Stakeholder focussed – The process takes into consideration who will be affected by the final decision/action and how the community can best provide input.
- Inclusive – The methods of engagement are tailored to the identified target cohorts as required to maximise participation, access and inclusion.
- Genuine process – where the information and ideas collected will help shape or influence the final decision or action.
- Closing the loop – contributors and the wider community are informed of or are able to access the final result of the engagement process and how they influenced the final action or decision taken by council.

## 1.2 Importance of engagement

Looking at traditional communications and marketing tools of information provision, there is little opportunity for the community to contribute to decision making process of council. Community Engagement allows the community to have a meaningful, open discussion with Council and contribute, feedback, information and ideas that will assist in shaping the decisions and actions undertaken.

Engagement processes undertaken effectively benefit council and the community. Benefits include;

### **Benefits to council:**

- An informed decision making process, providing a better understanding of community sentiments, needs, values and ideas.
- Builds a meaningful relationship with the community based on trust and mutual benefit.
- Helps Council to prioritise issues, resources, services and projects to meet community expectations and gain efficiencies.
- Allows Council to better explain proposed changes and actions to the community and assist them to understand the complexities of issues via open dialogue.
- Build a positive and proactive image of council in the community.
- Improved satisfaction levels with Council and it's transparent decision making process.

### **Benefits to the Community:**

- Decisions made by council are more reflective of community needs, interests, values and ideas.
- Community members feel more involved in the decision making process of council, reducing feelings of apathy, disengagement and disenchantment with Council process.
- Increased feelings of belonging to the community, and overall social connectedness.
- Increased sense of pride and ownership of solutions to community issues identified.
- Better understanding of council process, resource limitations and other challenges.

### 1.3 Community Engagement challenges

There will always be challenges when undertaking a Community engagement process. Through the development of your engagement plan you will identify potential Risks and ways that you can mitigate them. Some of the more common risks you may encounter include;

- Ensuring the engagement participants are representative of the wider community
- Engaging harder to reach segments of the community (Refer to section 12 of this handbook for tips)
- Due to resourcing, budgets or other external factors, the final decision made is not in line with the majority of community feedback
- Participants of the engagement activities have unrealistic expectations of the level of influence they will have, potentially leading to disillusionment in the overall process.
- Particular groups may rally support and numbers in relation to an issue or decision to be made, providing a skewed data pool that is non-reflective of the wider community.
- The final decision to be made after a community engagement process is delayed significantly or the information collected is not factored into the final decision making process of council.

## 2 Community engagement policy and objectives

The community engagement policy articulates and guides Council's commitment and approach to high quality, consistent and genuine community engagement.

Council believes that inclusive, transparent and accessible community engagement will build the capacity and resilience of the community and contribute to effective and responsive decision making. Refer to record number [INT1871685](#) for a copy of the policy.

The Community Engagement Policy has been developed for the purpose of meeting the following objectives;

- Articulate and guide Council's commitment and approach to high quality, consistent and genuine community engagement.
- Provide a commitment to inclusive, transparent and accessible community engagement activities within the community
- Provide a framework to build the capacity of the community to contribute to effective and responsive decision making

## 3 Handbook purpose

This handbook has been developed to support those who undertake community engagement in meeting their obligations as outlined within the Community Engagement Policy.

The handbook aims to step staff through the process of developing, implementing and evaluating community engagement activities, utilising templates which support a more consistent approach to community engagement across Council.

## 4 Terminology and definitions

To ensure there is a consistent understanding of the terminology utilised in this handbook definitions can be found as Appendix 1. Please refer to this if you are unsure of the definition of a term utilised, or if you would like to check your thinking is consistent with the context of the handbook.

## 5 Community engagement frameworks

A range of frameworks are available and can be used to inform community engagement practice. Cardinia Shire Council holds preference for the *IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation* and the *Community Engagement Model*.

### **IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation**

The spectrum depicts 5 levels of increasing influence that the public can have on an outcome or decision. Council recognises that community engagement occurs at any or all of the levels contained

in the spectrum. Each of the levels of engagement within the spectrum is appropriate in particular situations to achieve particular outcomes and careful consideration of the level and method of engagement will be made at the discretion of Council. This will depend on the issue or policy being considered, the objectives of the engagement, timeframes, resources and levels of concern regarding the decision to be made.

IAP2 Levels →	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
<b>Community contribution</b>	Listen	Contribute	Participate	Partner	Decide
<b>Community engagement goal</b>	To provide balanced and objective information to assist understanding of a topic, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain community feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work with the community throughout the process to ensure that concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the community 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
<b>Promise to the community</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 community 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

## 6 When to engage

Council undertakes community engagement on a regular basis; both formally and informally. To ensure that Council engages consistently and to avoid any confusion around expectations, the following circumstances have been identified as triggers for when community engagement should occur these are listed below.

**When there is a proposed introduction or change which has the potential to significantly affect the community. This could include a policy, strategy, program, project or issue**

Where a change will significantly affect the way services are provided

When a proposed change or action is likely to generate community concern

When additional information is required by Council to make a decision

When Council are required to better understand community issues.

When it is a legislative requirement

In addition, Council may elect to schedule a set number of general engagement activities throughout the year, that are not project specific, as a way of gathering community feedback that can be of use to the whole organisation.

Please view the Community Engagement flowchart in HPRM ([INT195770](#)) to assist you to make a decision around if an Engagement Plan is required or not.

### When community engagement may not be required to occur

The following are some of the acceptable circumstances for community engagement not occurring:

<b>An emergency or situation which impacts public safety, where an immediate resolution is required</b>
Situations which are confidential in nature
When there is a ministerial exemption
Day to day decisions which have minimal impact on the community.

Given that community engagement should be considered at the planning stages of any project, limited time is not generally considered a justifiable reason for not engaging.

You can also view the Community Engagement flowchart in HPRM ([INT195770](#)) to assist you to make a decision around if an Engagement Plan is required or not.

## 7 Identifying who to engage

Once you have identified that engagement is required and where on the IAP2 spectrum your engagement will sit, the next step to identify who you will engage. The main factors that will assist you in deciding on the target audience/s are;

- Who is directly impacted
- Who has a vested interest
- Who would provide valuable insight
- Who is the initiative aimed at

From these points you should be able to identify specific groups, residents or cohorts that would be beneficial to have engaged in the process. These groups will form the 'Target Audiences' for your engagement activities alongside opening up opportunities for the broader community to contribute if they wish to do so.

### 7.1 Who to engage checklist

The who to engage checklist can assist you to identify which target cohorts of the community you should be consulting with in regards to your initiative. Please refer to the Who to Engage Checklist in HPRM [INT194457](#)

### 7.2 Stakeholder Mapping

After you have considered the various target cohorts you are focussing on as part of the consultation it is also useful to undertake a stakeholder mapping process. A stakeholder in this context is defined by a person or group of persons that have a connection to the issue or proposal. By thinking about the variety of stakeholders in the community and the level of interest and influence each of them possesses can assist you to identify where to focus your engagement activities to get the best results with your available time and resources. The table below can be used as a basic stakeholder mapping tool. By indenting each stakeholders level of interest in your topic and their level of overall influence in relation to creating change will assist you in identifying where significant focus should be directed.

<p><b>SECONDARY STAKEHOLDERS</b>  <b>High Influence</b>  <b>Low Interest</b></p> <p>Monitor closely and engage if possible</p>	<p><b>PRIMARY STAKEHOLDERS</b>  <b>High Influence</b>  <b>High Interest</b></p> <p>Engage with closely</p>
<p><b>TERTIARY STAKEHOLDERS</b>  <b>Low Influence</b>  <b>Low Interest</b></p> <p>Minimal focus / provide information</p>	<p><b>PRIMARY/SECONDARY STAKEHOLDERS</b>  <b>Low Influence</b>  <b>High Interest</b></p> <p>Offer Engagement / participation opportunities</p>

## 8 Choosing suitable engagement methods

Knowing why you are engaging and who you are engaging now allows you to look at *how* you will engage. The type of engagement method to be utilised for your project needs to be chosen by taking into the consideration the needs of the target audience. There is no 'One size fits all' approach to engagement. Some factors to consider include;

- Age and interests

The type of consultation tailored towards an adult audience will more than likely not be as effective for a group of secondary school students or primary school students. Providing a range of engagement mediums and feedback opportunities to cater for a wide variety of age groups and interests can greatly assist in gaining participation from a broader cross section of the community.

- Literacy levels

Consider the varying levels of literacy in the community including those of whom English is not their first language. Feedback mechanisms such as survey and polls cannot be the sole information collection avenue, the offer of face to face meetings, drop-ins and/or workshops allows the community to provide verbal feedback and participate in activities to generate deeper discussion around a topic. If required interpreters can be utilised to ensure CALD community members can participate equally and effectively.

- Availability

The times and days your target audience are available to be consulted is another important consideration. For school aged children and young people accessing them in school hours may be the easiest way to gain their feedback. Working adults will generally not be available to attend consultations during the work day and after hours or weekend sessions may be offered. Retired senior citizens however may find daytime meetings more convenient. Appropriately timed sessions can greatly assist in gaining participation from your target groups.

- Location

Along with considering times of availability, delivering activities in the right location for your target audience/s greatly improves engagement levels. The more accessible and convenient the location is for the community to access the more likely they are to attend. For localised consultations one central venue may be enough, for other shire wide projects multiple locations and times may be required to ensure equal access by all of the community.

Please refer to Sections 11 and 12 of this handbook, *Engagement Resources and Tools* and *Engaging hard to reach groups*, for further guidance on delivering engagement activities.

## 9 Community engagement planning

Community engagement planning is vital and should start early. Having a community engagement plan ensures that there is a clear purpose for engaging and ensures that Council is able to identify who needs to be engaged and how, what information needs to be presented, what questions asked and how the information will be collected, used and fed back.

### Process for developing a community engagement plan

If you are undertaking an activity which falls within the criteria of 'when to engage' you may be required to develop a community engagement plan. Following these steps will assist in your planning. If a community engagement plan is deemed necessary,

#### Step 1

Contact the Community Engagement Facilitator with the basic details of your project and engagement ideas/requirements if you know them. The Community Engagement Facilitator will then determine whether a community engagement plan is required or whether a communications plan would suffice.

#### Step 2

If it is established that a community engagement plan is required, the Community Engagement Facilitator will send through the planning and evaluation template and notify the Communications unit.

#### Step 3

Complete the template as best you can, using the community engagement handbook as a guide. If assistance is required to complete the template, make a time to meet with the Community Engagement Facilitator.

#### Step 4

Save completed templates in the relevant project folder in HPRM and send the record number to the Community Engagement Facilitator. Feedback will be provided on the plan and if necessary, the Community Engagement Facilitator will make a time to meet and discuss the plan.

#### Step 5

Once feedback has been received, the plan will go to the Communications unit who will schedule a meeting with you to develop a communication plan and identify how the engagement activities will be promoted/communicated to the community.

#### Step 6

Finally, the community engagement plan must be approved by your manager who will also determine the reporting requirements to SLT and Council.

#### Step 7

Once community engagement has been completed, complete the evaluation section of the engagement plan and the reporting template. Discuss with the Community Planner the process for uploading results to the Community Engagement section on CardiStats so that this can be shared more broadly across the organisation.

A range of resources, tools and example plans have been provided in folder number [15-95-36](#) (community engagement resource folder) to support you to plan, implement and evaluate your engagement activities.



## 10 Completing the community engagement templates

The following section will provide guidance on completing the community engagement planning templates. Please consider all of the suggested points when completing the templates.

### 10.1 Community engagement plan

#### 10.1.1 Project title and engagement period

- Provide the name of your project. Make it clear so that anyone picking up the engagement plan understands what it is about.
- When will the official engagement period begin and end?

#### 10.1.2 Project overview

- To provide some context to the engagement, provide a brief overview of the project/issue which the community engagement is occurring for.
- Include basic details that a community member might want to know about the project/issue. This might include who, what, when, where, why, how, costs, timelines, etc.
- If there are any historical or political issues to be aware of, add them in here.
- What are the benefits to the community?

#### 10.1.3 Engagement overview and purpose

##### Engagement overview;

- Provide an overview of the engagement component of the project.
- Why are you undertaking community engagement?
- At what stage of the project is the engagement occurring?
- Has any other engagement occurred for this project in the past?

##### Aim;

- State the overall Aim or the engagement, what do you hope to achieve out of the engagement process?

##### Engagement activity table;

(This will inform your evaluation after the engagement process)

- List the engagement activities to be undertaken.
- Develop key indicators and/or outcomes for each activity that state what you are wanting to achieve.
- Set target numbers if relevant for the activity, these can be aspirational to have a goal to aim towards. This can include numbers of particular cohorts. (eg. 50 seniors, 50 young people and 25 local business')

#### 10.1.4 Key messages

- What do you want the community to know about the project/issue and engagement opportunity?
- What are the key messages you want conveyed?
- Remember you want your audiences to understand and act upon your key messages.

#### 10.1.5 Political Issues

- Are there any political issues are you aware of that need to be considered or addressed? These can be addressed in the risk management section.

#### 10.1.6 Negotiables/non-negotiables

- What aspects of the project/issue can stakeholders provide input into? Be clear and honest about this as it will set the parameters for the engagement and ensure that the community are clear about what they can and cannot influence.
- Be conscious of what Council can and cannot influence.



### **10.1.7 Stakeholders/target audiences**

#### **Segments of the community;**

- Assess which segments of the community you are intending to target in the overall engagement process and tick the relevant segment boxes. You can add any other specific segments not included in the list.

#### **External stakeholders;**

- Next look at which specific individuals, groups and/or organisations need to know about the project and have the opportunity to provide input? This needs to include those who would be directly and indirectly impacted as well as those who may have an interest.
- Who would Council benefit hearing from? Are there experts or organisations who can provide valuable input?
- Which hard to reach groups need to be engaged? Read guidance on how to engage with hard to reach groups. (Refer to section 7 of this handbook)
- Are there any potential issues or history with any of these key stakeholders? How will these be addressed?

Remember that it is not always about the numbers of people reached, it is about reaching the right people – a community engagement process is pointless if you are engaging those who aren't impacted or interested. If you are unsure of your stakeholders it can be useful to undertake a stakeholder analysis.

### **10.1.8 Internal Stakeholders / collaborators**

- Who are the internal stakeholders that you will need to consult with in relation to your project?
- Who could you partner with to assist in the consultation and provide support?
- Would other business units benefit from this consultation process, can you link across like portfolios to avoid consulting about the same or similar theme?

### **10.1.9 Existing data and concurrent engagement opportunities**

- What other information are you drawing on to inform your project? This could include research, statistics or the results of other engagement activities undertaken by Council. This will ensure that you are not collecting information that we already have.
- Are there other engagement activities or events occurring concurrently that this engagement could be tied in with? This will help to ease the consultation fatigue the community often face and help to better coordinate activities across Council.

### **10.1.10 Funding information/budget**

- Is there funding to undertake this engagement?
- Is this engagement externally funded? If so, do these funding sources need to be acknowledged in any communications?
- Is there an approved promotional/marketing budget for your community engagement and communication requirements?

### **10.1.11 Risk considerations**

It is important to note that during the engagement process various risks may arise, and it is equally important to document any potential or identified risks prior to engaging. AS/NZS ISO 31000:2009, Risk management defines risk as 'the chance of something happening that will have an impact on objectives'.

Risks can include financial, operational, environmental, legal, strategic, privacy/data as well as risks to reputation.

The key questions to consider when completing the risk table are:

#### **Identified risk;**

- What can go wrong?
- What problems or issues may arise prior to or during the engagement process?

**Risk Mitigation strategy;**

- What can I do to prevent the risk/issue?
- What do I do if the identified issue occurs?

**Stakeholders involved;**

- Which parties are involved in this risk directly or as part of the mitigation measure? This could be community members / groups, organisations, internal business units or individuals.

**Responsibility;**

- Who holds the responsibility to undertake the risk mitigation strategy for the risk identified?

## **10.2 Engagement action plan and communication tools**

Each engagement activity will have its own action plan section. Some of these may be grouped together. For instance if you are delivering an online survey and an online ideas forum these could be placed together under 'Online Engagement activities' as many of the tasks will be the same. Similarly if you are undertaking a range of consultations in the community these could be bought together under the title of 'Face to Face consultations' without the need to step out each one individually.

### **10.2.1 Community engagement activity**

- Enter the name of the Community Engagement activity

### **10.2.2 Dates**

- Enter the start and finishing date for the specific engagement activity
- If exact dates are unknown, provide estimated dates

### **10.2.3 Stakeholders/target audience**

- These should be selected from the stakeholders identified in the previous section of the handbook.
- It is likely that you will have different activities and communications for different stakeholders.

### **10.2.4 Activity description and format**

- Describe the engagement activity and the method that you will be using to collect and distribute information.
- If relevant, provide a breakdown of how the activity will be delivered (eg. the individual activities to be delivered as part of a community workshop and their timings)
- Provide a list of promotional avenues for this activity, this will assist in completing the communication plan.
- List any activities or events being run by others that you plan to tap into, this may include local events and/or meetings.
- Note: Consider which activities you will use to engage hard to reach groups.

### **10.2.5 Feedback mechanisms**

- How will the overall results of the engagement process be fed back to those who have participated and made available to the broader community?
- Will you collect details of participants so that you can provide direct feedback? If so, how?
- Remember, some methods of reporting back will be unsuitable for some of the hard to reach groups e.g. a written summary will not be suitable for non-English speakers.

### 10.2.6 Engagement activity table

#### Engagement Activity key tasks / milestones;

- Break your engagement activity down into step-by-step tasks.
- This might include things like contacting community groups, booking venues, arranging catering, etc.

#### Due date;

- When does the engagement activity need to be completed?
- Are the timelines realistic and clear? Do they allow for any contingencies?

#### Responsible person/s;

- Who is responsible for completing the task by the due date?

#### Communications / Marketing tools;

- What methods will you use for the activity to promote activities and/or communicate to the target audience/s?

Please keep in mind the advance notice required to implement some common communications mediums.

- Article in connect – 2 months notice
- Write a speech – three weeks' notice required
- Produce posters – five business days' notice required for approval of design, three weeks' notice required for printing.
- Produce a media release – two weeks' notice required
- Organise a media photo opportunity – two weeks' notice required
- Publish a web page update – five business days' notice required
- Publish new web page content – five business days' notice required
- Draft/post a Facebook post – five business days' notice required

#### Distribution method / promotional channels;

- Use this section to list where, how and to who the different types promotion will be distributed.
- If this is printed promotional material where will they be placed around the community and who will be sent copies?
- If this is social media promotion will there be paid advertisements?

## 10.3 Evaluation

The only way of establishing if the community engagement process was successful is to plan for, and undertake an evaluation process. Evaluation in community engagement is a continuous quality improvement measure; determining what has and hasn't worked assists individuals and organisations to refine skills and share their learnings so that mistakes can be mitigated and successes replicated.

All too often evaluation is ignored or begun too late therefore setting up clear objectives, outcomes and targets for a project at the planning stage means the 'success' of an engagement process can be measured and improvements can be identified and implemented for the future.

### 10.3.1 Engagement Evaluation table

#### Key indicators / outcomes;

Here you will be referring back to the engagement activities and outcomes / targets set-out in the engagement plan for each activity.

- Were the intended key indicators /outcome met and achieved?
- If a target number was set, was it met?
- Were there any additional positive outcomes that were not originally expected?

#### Barriers, negatives;

- Were there any barriers that you came up against during the engagement activities that affected meeting your objectives/targets?
- Were you able to put anything in place to assist in removing identified barriers to the process? Did they work?
- Were there any unforeseen negative outcomes that arose through the consultation process?
- Were you able to put anything in place to minimise or remove these negatives?

**Number engaged;**

- Document how many individuals contributed to the engagement activity.

**Feedback from participants;**

- In this section you will provide details of any feedback you received about the consultation process. This may be in the form of;
  - Verbal feedback you have documented
  - Information from feedback forms or comments box from workshop participants at the end of a session
  - Any feedback received from community via email or mail
- If there is data from an evaluation, include the main findings in this section and provide a reference number or link to the full data in HPRM.

**Suggested improvements;**

- What would help you or others who are looking to undertake a similar process?
- Was the selected target audience/s correct? Did you reach the right people?
- Did you collect the right information, could the data have been more informative?
- Was there enough communication / promotion to get people involved in the process?
- Would different engagement activities been better suited to this engagement?
- Could the activities have been facilitated differently to achieve a better outcome?
- Did you have the right partners / stakeholders on board the process?
- Were there any missed opportunities for partnerships?
- Were the participants satisfied with the community engagement process? How do you know?
- Did people engage well with the methods? How did you know?

**Report link;**

- Provide links to any report, consultation data, outcomes or recommendations that have been informed by the engagement process

## **10.4 Engagement reporting**

It is important to capture the results of the community engagement process. There are various benefits to this - it can be used as the basis for reporting back to the community, SLT and Council, it can be used by others within the organisation who are interested in or who are seeking to gather similar information and the process can also be used for an individual's personal and professional development.

Once the engagement report has been completed send to the community planner who will upload on CardiStats. If any of the content within the report is confidential, speak to the community planner to establish how this might be best handled.

### **10.4.1 Overview of project**

- This information can be taken directly from the community engagement plan.

### **10.4.2 Overview of engagement process**

- This information can be taken directly from the community engagement plan. This includes the purpose, objectives, key messages, negotiables/non-negotiables and stakeholders.

**10.4.3 Engagement methods**

- Describe the process you followed to deliver and collect information. This is about what you actually did.
- If you delivered the engagement exactly as planned, much of this will be able to be drawn from the community engagement plan however if there were any changes report on how the engagement was delivered and if relevant discuss why changes were made.

**10.4.4 Communication methods**

- How did you communicate the engagement activities to the community?
- What tools were utilised?

**10.4.5 Evaluation methods**

- What evaluation questions were chosen?
- What tools were used to collect data?

**10.4.6 Engagement and evaluation results**

- What was the raw information that was collected through the methods? This includes number of people who participated, the stakeholders who participated (internal and external) and the issues that were identified/raised.
- What did the evaluation reveal? What were the key learnings?
- Were there any unintended outcomes that resulted from the engagement?
- Which engagement and communication methods worked and which didn't?

**10.4.7 Key findings and recommendations**

- What conclusions can be drawn from the results?
- Are there any key themes or areas that can be identified?
- What are the take home points?
- Were there any learnings from the process that are worthwhile sharing with others? What worked and what didn't?
- What recommendations are being made?

**10.4.8 Conclusion**

- Provide a summary of the engagement process
- How will the engagement results be used?
- How will the information be fed back to the community?

## 11 Engagement resources and tools

There are a range of different ways you can illicit responses and gain information from individuals. Some common collection methods include; surveys, polls, written submission (mail and email), meetings and workshops.

A combination of all methods is best to gain feedback from a cross section of the community. Below are some tips around developing and delivering engagement activities and consultations.

### 11.1.1 Surveys and polls

Using a survey or poll can be an easy way to collect information for defined questions. Surveys and polls can be delivered online and/or printed and used at face to face engagements for those that are not comfortable using technology.

Refer to the Survey and poll Guidelines in HPRM for things to consider when developing a survey or poll. [INT1871689](#)

### 11.1.2 Online Forums

Delivering an online forum gives the community to have a wider scope in providing feedback or asking questions.

Online forum tools offer options for two forum types;

**Ideas forum:** This forum provides an opportunity for community members to post an idea in relation to the question you have posed, for example;

“Tell us where you think we should build new playgrounds in Cardinia Shire”

Community members are able to post ideas around the subject, with other community members having the option to support the idea. The number of supporters can give a gauge of the relevance of the idea for the community.

**Questions forum:**

A question forum provides the community with an opportunity to ask questions about an issue / project.

For example;

“Ask a question about the council budget”

Community are able to pose a question to council that will be responded to by the nominated responder (this can be a range of people), based on the purpose of the forum. Other users can also support the question, which can give a gauge of the relevance of the question for the broader community.

Refer to Online Forum Guidelines in HPRM for things to consider when developing an Online Forum. [INT1871690](#)

### 11.1.3 Written submissions

It is always required to provide an avenue for community members to send their feedback in by writing. In some cases this is a statutory requirement and in others it provides an avenue for community members that would like to submit a more detailed response or those that are not technologically savvy. Written submissions can be received by mail, email or can be dropped off at customer the customer service desk.

Refer to Written Submission Guidelines in HPRM for things for further guidance on written submissions. [INT191825](#)

### 11.1.4 Community meetings and drop-in sessions

Community meetings and drop in sessions are a great way to bring together community members to provide them with information about your project, allow the community to ask questions and receive feedback. Feedback can be received by utilising mechanisms

such as the physical and online surveys and polls and/or online forums. This type of consultation is best when you are looking for a 'support' or 'do not support' or you are looking to gauge community sentiment on a project.

Refer to Community meetings and drop-in sessions guidelines for things to consider.

[INT1871688](#)

### **11.1.5 Facilitated workshops**

Workshops differ from traditional community meetings and drop in sessions, there is still information delivery, time for questions and feedback however the key focus of a workshop is to gain ideas to further information and ideas from participants to assist in decision making and the development of a project. Where possible workshops should be interactive and engage participants in a process of generating ideas and sharing knowledge.

Refer to Facilitated Workshop Guidelines for things to consider when delivering workshops. [INT19788](#).

Also refer to community engagement Session Plan folder in HPRM to gain ideas from previous facilitated workshops and the Community Engagement Resource Folder [15-95-36](#) for ideas on how to engage participants.

### **11.1.6 Other / Creative approaches**

There are many other ways you can receive feedback and ideas from the community outside of the ones listed above. Creative approaches can include using photos, art, stories and videos be utilised to create an interesting and engaging consultation. Many of these can be completed online via social media and community consultation platforms, along with face to face / physical delivery.

Refer to the Community Engagement Resource Folder [15-95-36](#) for some inspiration on create approaches.

## **12 Engaging hard to reach groups**

### **12.1 Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) Communities**

English is most likely an additional\* language therefore consideration of this in engagement is important.

#### **12.1.1 Engagement considerations**

- Liaise with Council's Diversity Officer
- Where possible, consult with existing/established CALD and interfaith networks, CALD groups and key community leaders
- Provide interpreters and translators – Council use onsite and telephone interpreters through TIS National phone 131 450. Contact Customer Service for access to the code.
- Videos and visual aids can be useful when conveying information
- The CALD community are not one homogenous group – it is important to be sensitive to differing cultural and religious backgrounds
- Varying norms will be followed when communicating with government agencies

\*Most people from CALD backgrounds can speak up to five languages

### **12.2 People with disabilities**

People with a range of disabilities will require different forms of assistance to enable participation.



### **12.2.1 Engagement considerations**

- Allow more time for communication
- Keep information short and simple
- Encourage carers to attend
- Venues must be accessible to all
- Provide opportunities for participation
- Written material in plain large print (minimum point size 14 Arial preferred) on plain paper
- Consideration of communication aides to enable participation e.g. Alphabet and Communication Boards
- Verbal information and, or, verbal translation preferable for people with language / learning difficulties
- Written information recommended for people with a hearing impairment
- Use international access and disability symbols in advertising and promotional material
- Consider gaining assistance from specialist disability agencies and services
- Possible use of translators and interpreters

### **12.3 Children (aged under 12 years)**

Children would not generally attend usual consultation forums or partake in structured consultations including online surveys and formal meetings. The way they engage with content can be very different to other cohorts and there a variety of ways you can ensure the children and council get the most out of engagement activities.

#### **Why engage with 0-12 year olds?**

- *UN convention on the rights of the child* article 12 states that children have the right to give their opinion and for it to be taken seriously
- Consultation provides an opportunity to understand issues that are important to children and to hear it from their perspective & in their language
- Ensures Council is inclusive of children
- Develops relationship between Council and its youngest citizens, fostering communication, trust and rapport
- It is necessary that children are engaged in Council plans. Please contact the Healthy Children's Facilitator for advice & support

#### **12.3.1 Engagement considerations**

- Liaise with Council's Healthy Children's Facilitator for advice on activities and connections to local education providers and other groups.
- The use of existing/established primary school committees, kindergarten groups and children's programs delivered in the community and/or by council can assist in gaining easier access to groups of children to consult with. How will you ensure a diverse group of children are consulted?
- Speak directly to kindergartens, primary schools, clubs and sporting facilities and try to organise times to meet with children at these venues. Distribute promotional material to these groups if information needs to go home to parents.
- Preferably you would consult with children as part of their usual routine at clubs, or education facilities for example to make it easier for them to contribute.
- If you are meeting outside of the children's usual routines and venues, transport will need to be available to facilitate access for parents and children.



- Think about the timing and duration of the session, what time of day will the consultation run?
- Keep the use written material and writing to a minimum as many of the children you will be engaging with will have limited literacy skills.
- Use clear language when communicating ideas and asking questions of children, do not use jargon or complicated terminology.
- Use less structured consultation methods such as visual based activities and activities that promote movement to hold attention and focus.
- Facilitators are an important consideration to ensure a successful consultation. Do they have the required skills and qualifications?
- Facilitators will all require a current 'Working with Children' check as part of the Child Safe Standards, this check must be worn by the person during the session.
- Does the facilitator have an existing rapport with the children? Does a workshop need to be held for the facilitators to ensure they are familiar with principles & strategies for consulting children?
- Consider the use of art and creativity/play in activities to collect data and information from children
- Adapt the activities to suit the different cohorts of children, you would likely not deliver the same activities to a group of kindergarten children that you would to Grade 6 students.
- Provide recognition and appreciation of children involvement in the process (small prizes, certificates, vouchers etc)
- Follow up: how will the information be used and what follow up & feedback will be provided to children?
- Consent considerations: is parental consent required? What's the procedure for disclosures that may occur during the engagement activities?
- Ask children that have participated what they thought about the activities and process to help improve further engagement / consultations with children in the future.

**Note:** If you are delivering engagement activities with children within an existing group or education provider consent can be managed by them or may already be in place. If you are looking to deliver a face to face consultation such as a workshop or forum with children outside of these avenues a consent form will need to be completed. The consent form must collect information on allergies and other medical conditions along with emergency contact details. Please consult with the Healthy Children's Facilitator for further advice on this.

## **12.4 Young people (aged 12-25 years)**

Young people do not generally attend usual consultation forums or partake in structured consultation approaches. Adapting your approach to be more interactive can assist you in getting young people more interested in being involved.

### **12.4.1 Engagement considerations**

- Liaise with Council's Youth Services team
- Where possible, use existing/established youth committees, groups and programs delivered by Council's Youth Services
- Use written material that is bright, catchy and which features aspects that will attract the age group or interest group you are engaging
- Use clear language with no jargon, acronyms or complicated terminology
- Do not assume written material will be read, for clear messages use verbal communication
- Distribute promotional material through social media, schools, clubs and sporting facilities
- Use a less structured consultation approach with hands-on and active elements

- Consider the use of art and creativity when communicating and receiving feedback
- Facilitators are an important consideration to ensure a successful consultation. Do they have the required skills and qualifications?
- Consider utilising support workers and young people as co-facilitators in the consultation process
- Facilitators working with any person under 18 will all require a current 'Working with Children' check as part of the Child Safe Standards, this check must be worn by the person during the session.
- Does a workshop need to be held for the facilitators to ensure they are familiar with principles & strategies for consulting with young people?
- Remember not all young people attend school, where else can you reach young people?
- Venue should be relaxed and informal and easy to get to
- Transport will need to be available
- Provide recognition and appreciation of young people's involvement (food, certificate, movie vouchers etc)
- Ask young people that have participated what they thought about the activities and process to help improve further engagement / consultations with young people in the future.

**Note:** All young people under the age of 14 will need a consent from parents to complete written surveys. If a face to face consultation such as a workshop or forum is being delivered all young people under 18 will require parental consent to participate. The consent form must collect information on allergies and other medical conditions along with emergency contact details. If the consultation is being delivered within an existing group or education setting this consent can be managed by them or may already be in place. Consult with the Youth Services Team for more guidance on this.

## **12.5 Older persons**

Older people regularly engage with council and experience shows that they engage in a variety of ways but may be limited by physical and cognitive function. Keep in mind that the older person may also be from a CALD background or have a disability so the engagement considerations above would also apply.

### **12.5.1 Engagement considerations**

- Ensure that written material is in plain large print (minimum point size 14) on plain paper
- Keep written and verbal information short, simple and clear
- Consideration should be given to utilising support services and direct care workers for assistance e.g. home help may be able to invite people to participate in surveys and interviews
- Access existing support and social groups where older people regularly meet
- Allow adequate time for communication
- Utilise hearing loops and portable microphones where available
- Ensure transport and respite/carer needs are catered for to receive maximum attendance
- Ensure the venue is accessible and appropriate for people with mobility aids and who have difficulty with movement.
- Provide engagement opportunities for those who are housebound e.g. online, hard copy surveys that can be posted in

## **12.6 Sole parent families and carers**

Sole parent families and carers may not be able to get to onsite consultation opportunities but if they do they will most likely have children with them.

### **12.6.1 Engagement considerations**

- Consider providing information through schools, parents groups, playgroups, childcare centres and kindergartens
- Provide information parents can take away to read when they are less busy/distracted
- Provide a venue that is child/family friendly and openly support children attending
- Provide child care and/or activities to keep the children occupied
- Attend an existing meeting, group or place that families and carers frequent
- Hold engagement opportunities at night for working parents to attend or provide a number of sessions at various times through the day
- Allow for additional time and flexibility
- Provide online engagement opportunities

## 13 Appendix 1: Terminology and definitions

### **Community Engagement**

Is a process whereby council proactively seeks out information from the community including their values, concerns, ideas and aspirations. Where possible council will also include the community in the development of solutions and work together with them on the delivery of identified initiatives. This establishes an ongoing partnership to ensure that community members continue to shape council's decision making and implementation process.

### **International Association for Public Participation Australasia (IAP2)**

IAP2 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.

### **Community Engagement Framework**

Sets out a principals and a conceptual structure which underpin community engagement activities. A community engagement framework could be developed from the ground up or pre-existing frameworks can be chosen that suit the needs of an organisation. Cardinia Shire Council has chosen utilise the IAP2 participation framework as the underpinning principal to base community engagement activities upon, which is widely accepted as best practice.

### **Engagement Methods**

The activities, resources and tools used to include the community in a discussion to receive feedback, information and ideas about the topic at hand.

### **Participation**

Within Community Engagement process this is defined by people being involved in providing information, advice and ideas through contributing to a consultation via any of the engagement methods being utilised. Where possible it is desirable to include community members further in the development of solutions and the delivery of initiatives.

### **Influence**

The community members ability to shape or impact a decision made by council.

### **Culturally and Linguistically Diverse**

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) defines the CALD population by country of birth, language spoken at home, English proficiency and some other characteristics including year of arrival in Australia, parents' country of birth and religious affiliation



# Cardinia

## Community engagement plan for:

Plan developed by: [Author]

Engagement period: Start: Select start date End: Select end date

Please refer to the [Community Engagement Handbook](#) for assistance in completing this template and undertaking Community Engagement activities [INT1871686](#)

APPROVED BY: ENTER TEAM LEADER / MANAGER NAME	DATE: ENTER DATE
---	------------------

### Project overview

(Overview of larger project the engagement is informing / part of)

### Engagement overview and purpose

(Synopsis of why community engagement is being undertaken, who will be involved and methods to be used)

**Aim:** (Overall aim of engagement process)

Engagement Activities	Key Indicators/Outcomes	Target
(Method being utilised)	(how will you measure success / or know you achieved what you set out to do)	(optional target for survey numbers / participants)

### Key messages

What do you want the community to know about the project/issue and engagement opportunity?

### Negotiables/non-negotiables

What aspects of the project/issue can stakeholders provide input into? Be clear and honest about this as it will set the parameters for the engagement and ensure that the community are clear about what they can and cannot influence.

Negotiables	Non-negotiables

## Stakeholders/target audience

What segments of the community will you specifically target; (please tick all relevant)

Under 12  12-25  25-50  Families  Seniors  CALD  Indigenous  Disability   
Indigenous  LGBTIQ

Refer to the 'Who to engage' checklist in HPRM for assistance in identifying target groups  
[INT194457](#)

Other external stakeholders or groups: (please list);

## Internal stakeholders/collaborators

Identify your internal stakeholders:

## Feedback mechanism(s)

(How will you feedback the results / decision made to the community)

## Existing data and concurrent engagement opportunities

(Have similar consultations been delivered previously, or other data you can draw upon to support the engagement. Are there consultations / events / services being delivered you can utilise as a platform for your engagement)

## Funding information/budget

Click to add details of funding required/available for the engagement

Click to add details of funding available for promotion/marketing?

Click to add details of any external funding sources that need to be acknowledged?

## Political Issues

(Are there any political issues that surround this project or might be sparked by the engagement process?)

Complete the table to provide details of identified or potential risks and how these will be mitigated.

Identified risk	Stakeholders involved	Risk mitigation strategy	Responsibility

# Engagement and communications action plan

**1. Community engagement activity:**

**From:** Click to select date. **To:** Click to select date.(leave blank if one day)

**Stakeholders/target audience:** Click to enter stakeholders/target audience for this activity

IAP2 participation level: **INFORM**  **CONSULT**  **INVOLVE**  **COLLABORATE**  **EMPOWER**

Refer to the IAP2 Spectrum chart for more details on participation levels [INC18110003](#)

**Activity description and format:**

**Evaluation:**

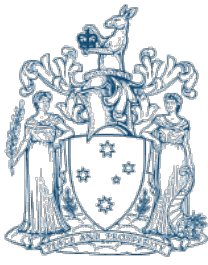
**Feedback Mechanism/s:**

Key Tasks / Milestones	Due date	Responsible person/s
Communication/marketing tool(s)	Distribution method	

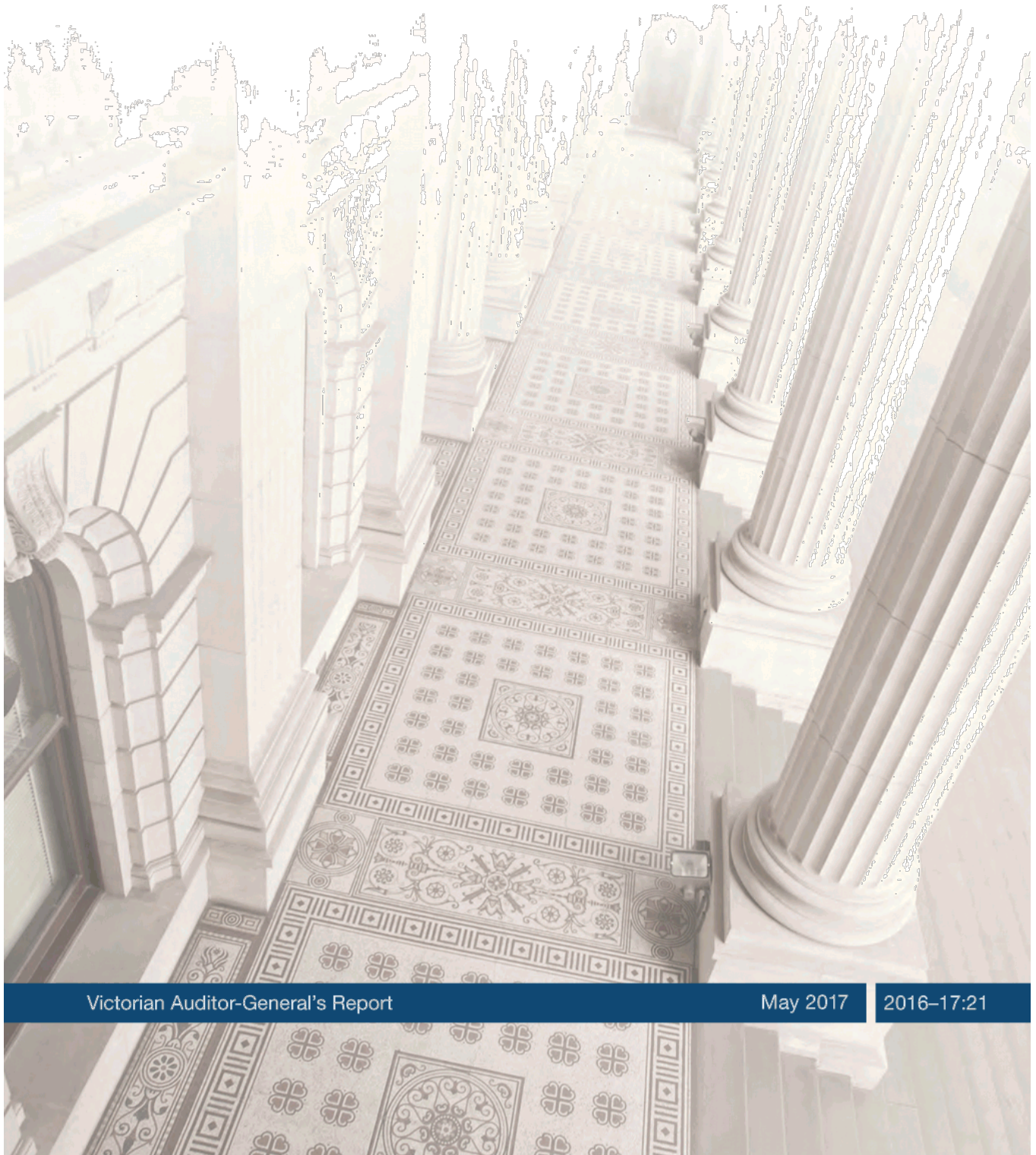
## Evaluation

Key indicators / Outcomes [Did you achieve expected objective, outcomes and targets, were there any other unintended positive outcomes]	Did you experience any barriers / negatives, before or during the engagement process? [Also include if there were any ways you overcame these]	Number Engaged
Activity 1:		
Activity 2:		
Activity 3:		
Activity 4:		
Was there any feedback collected or evaluation undertaken about the engagement / consultation process? YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/> If yes please provide summary of feedback below;		
<b>Suggested improvements that could be made to individual engagement activities and/or the overall engagement process and delivery?</b> [What would others undertaking a similar engagement activity next time, this may include communication promotion, facilitation, target group selection, partnerships etc...]		
Please provide links to any report / outcomes, consultation data or recommendation the engagement informed	<i>{Please Insert Title and TRIM link }</i>	





## Public Participation and Community Engagement: Local Government Sector



Victorian Auditor-General's Report

May 2017

2016-17:21



VICTORIA

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Victorian  
Auditor-General

# Public Participation and Community Engagement: Local Government Sector

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The Hon Bruce Atkinson MLC  
President  
Legislative Council  
Parliament House  
Melbourne

The Hon Colin Brooks MP  
Speaker  
Legislative Assembly  
Parliament House  
Melbourne

Dear Presiding Officers

Under the provisions of section 16AB of the *Audit Act 1994*, I transmit my report  
*Public Participation and Community Engagement: Local Government Sector*.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Andrew Greaves', is written over a faint, stylized map of Victoria, Australia, which is the same background as the VAGO logo.

Andrew Greaves  
*Auditor-General*

10 May 2017



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## Audit overview

The local government sector is a significant part of the Victorian economy—the state's 79 local councils employ over 50 000 people, spend around \$7 billion on service delivery and \$2 billion on infrastructure annually, and manage over \$70 billion in public assets.

Victoria's councils are supported by Local Government Victoria (LGV)—part of the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning. LGV works cooperatively with councils to ensure Victorians benefit from responsive and accountable local government. In partnership with councils, LGV works to improve business and governance practices to maximise community value and accountability, and oversees the administration of the relevant legislation.

Councils make decisions about a diverse range of community needs, such as recreational facilities, planning and waste disposal. To cater for these needs, transparent and well-managed public participation can help to better inform local government policies and their translation into effective strategies, programs and projects.

The real-life experiences of community stakeholders can make a valuable contribution to decision-making, and an open and deliberative process can enhance stakeholders' perceptions of the credibility of a decision. Conversely, inadequate public participation can alienate sections of the community and undermine trust, and is more likely to result in poorly informed decisions.

In this audit, we examined the effectiveness of community engagement and participation at the local government level. We looked at public participation at six councils, including a mix of metropolitan, rural and regional councils, as well as LGV's role in supporting councils' public participation activities. We assessed public participation as part of the budget process, as an element in the development of council plans, and as an investment decision for each council.

Councils' approach to public participation should reflect the scale, purpose and level of public interest in the council decision or project. Regardless of the size of the project, we would expect to see documented evidence that councils have understood and appropriately taken into account better practice principles when designing and implementing their public participation activities.

*Audit overview*

We used the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) model of public participation in our assessments. IAP2 specifies five levels of public engagement:

- **Inform and Consult**—these first two levels typically occur when a council has already made a decision and wants to either communicate that decision to the community, or seek opinions on the decision.
- **Involve and Collaborate**—the third and fourth levels involve a two-way flow of information, when a council shares information within and across stakeholder groups during the decision-making process.
- **Empower**—the fifth level is when the council and the community jointly make decisions.

## Conclusion

The councils we audited typically have strong public participation frameworks that provide them with the tools they need to undertake better practice consultation. However, councils do not routinely apply these tools in all of their public participation activities. Councils do not have adequate processes for documenting and evaluating these activities, which compromises the value of councils' public participation practices.

LGV demonstrates better practice in its own public participation activities. However, it does not provide enough support and guidance to help councils address the relatively low levels of satisfaction that communities express about their public participation. In its role of working with councils to improve practices and maximise community value, LGV could do more to identify specific weaknesses in public participation and promote better practice across councils.

## Findings

### Policies, frameworks and staff resources

Councils have a range of public participation policies, frameworks and guides for their staff, which set out expectations for public participation and contain guidance on the various elements of public participation. These guides and associated resources articulate councils' commitment to high-quality, consistent and genuine community engagement.

Five of the six audited councils have a public participation policy or framework that is informed by the internationally recognised IAP2 model of public participation. Despite this, there is considerable variation in the quality and implementation of councils' public participation policies, and some do not provide enough practical guidance for their staff to effectively conduct public participation activities.

By comparing the audited councils' public participation policies, we identified 12 common elements of better practice. Half of the audited councils need to review their public participation policies and include more better practice components. In particular, the policies of three councils did not have the fundamental elements of when, how and who to engage.

Five of the six councils have a public participation staff guide, handbook or templates. We identified 15 common elements of better practice by comparing audited councils' guides and resources. The quality of these resources varied significantly across the councils. For example, one council had limited website resources available to staff, while another council had a comprehensive staff handbook divided into four key areas—the council's approach to public participation, planning to engage, engaging with stakeholders and methods of engaging.

Only one project from an audited council had a comprehensive community engagement plan. A second council had a plan but had missed the essential element of evaluation. These plans included better practice elements, such as having a fully informed description of the planned objectives and scope of public participation, and identifying the stakeholders, the resources and skills needed, the time frame required, and the evaluation criteria.

Despite having public participation policies and resources in place, four councils did not have a community engagement plan for the projects we examined. This means they were unable to demonstrate the effectiveness and efficiency of their public participation exercises. These councils would benefit from developing a comprehensive engagement plan, including a step-by-step guide to effective public participation based on better practice principles, to help them conduct more effective public participation activities.

## Evaluation

The audited councils typically evaluate public participation using quantitative measures such as the number, type and outcomes of public participation events, the number of participants, and social media statistics. They did not generally evaluate projects using qualitative information collected through interviews, focus groups or open-ended survey questions.

Useful qualitative information includes:

- whether the public participation activities used the most suitable and effective techniques
- whether the public participation activities were conducted effectively
- whether the engagement was cost-effective and timely
- what impact the engagement had on decision-making
- whether people from all participant groups felt that they were listened to.

Incorporating these qualitative responses would provide councils with more complete information to use as a basis for effectively evaluating their public participation activity.

## Audit overview

## Budgets and council plans

All of the audited councils fulfilled their statutory obligations for public participation in their council budgets and council plans, although we found that three councils had already made their decisions before conducting the public participation activities, and they simply wanted to communicate that decision to the public, or seek opinions on the decision.

This practice is at the lowest end of the IAP2 spectrum—Inform. This approach increases the risk that the community will perceive that they have not been able to have a say in the budget preparation process.

In contrast, we found better practice examples at three councils that engaged their communities meaningfully in the budget decision-making process. One council sought the community's views on the projects to be selected for funding, another allowed the community to identify budget priorities, and a third used a live social media event to facilitate discussion on the budget. While the live event received positive comments from participants, the other two councils did not evaluate the success of their activities.

These public participation activities are at the Consult end of the IAP2 spectrum, which means that they aim to obtain feedback on analysis, alternatives and decisions.

## Community plans

A community plan describes the community's long-term vision and aspirations, and is a way of directly involving the community in the council planning process. Two audited councils undertook major community consultation processes to develop long-term community plans.

In both cases, the councils worked with the public to ensure that community concerns and aspirations were understood and considered. They demonstrated a genuine commitment to work with the public to exchange information, and to seek advice and ideas from the community. They used a variety of communication strategies, with the aim of maximising participation across different groups within the community. These included postcards, websites, social media, events and stalls, written submissions, workshops and focus groups. Importantly, they used stakeholder feedback to shape the community plan.

These large-scale participation activities fall into the Involve and Collaborate stages of the participation spectrum. They ensure the purpose of the communication is clear, and that the council works with the community to formulate decisions.

## Public participation in other council activities

The audited councils provided evidence of public participation in a wide range of community projects and at different points on the participation spectrum. They used a variety of methods and activities to engage the community, depending on the project and group involved, including surveys, focus groups, social media, submissions, community events, community liaison groups and community workshops. One council provided an example of participation at the fifth level of the participation spectrum, Empower, where the community played a key role in implementing a local initiative.

None of the councils we audited had evaluated their projects to measure the outcomes of the public participation exercise against the objectives, nor had they documented any lessons and recommendations for improvement. By not monitoring and evaluating these activities, councils have no evidence to demonstrate their effectiveness.

## Sector leadership

In 2016, LGV provided leadership for public participation by developing a discussion paper on its review of the *Local Government Act 1989*. LGV considered input from six technical groups and nine community workshops, and received 328 submissions. The resulting directions paper *Act for the Future* proposes a much stronger role for public participation in local government, in line with IAP2 better practice. It proposes ways to build stronger public engagement in shaping councils' directions and developing council plans. It also outlines ways for councils to ensure that they are transparent and accountable, and to ensure they have a rigorous approach for responding to community complaints.

LGV uses an annual community satisfaction survey to collect information on councils' public participation performance. The survey has found that community satisfaction with councils' community consultation and engagement was satisfactory in 2015–16, with an overall score of 55 out of 100, but could be improved by councils consulting and engaging directly with the community on key local issues. LGV reports summarised findings back to the sector, but it does not analyse in depth the public participation and engagement activities. Conducting a more thorough analysis of the data would help LGV to develop resources and initiatives that support councils to improve their practices.

LGV demonstrated its own public participation processes in the development of the Victorian Aboriginal Local Government Action Plan, the Local Government Model Financial Report and the Geelong citizens' jury. These projects employed a range of better practice elements for consultation including surveys, establishment of a user group, focus groups, formal submissions and workshops. However, LGV did not evaluate the outcomes of these initiatives, and we are therefore unable to determine whether these methods were successful.

Audit overview

## Recommendations

We recommend that all councils:

1. assess their public participation policies and associated resources against the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) model, update them as necessary, and promote their use throughout the council (see Section 2.2)
2. build monitoring, reporting and evaluation activities into their public participation activities (see Section 2.2)
3. develop and document comprehensive public participation plans and their outcomes (see Section 2.7).

We recommend that the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning:

4. analyse public participation data and promulgate better practice public participation case studies, guidance and training (see Section 3.4).

## Responses to recommendations

We have consulted with Local Government Victoria (within the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning), the City of Ballarat, Cardinia Shire Council, Maribyrnong City Council, Maroondah City Council, Mitchell Shire Council and Murrindindi Shire Council, and we considered their views when reaching our audit conclusions. As required by section 16(3) of the *Audit Act 1994*, we gave a draft copy of this report to those agencies and asked for their submissions and comments. We also provided a copy to the Department of Premier and Cabinet.

The following is a summary of those responses. The full responses are included in Appendix A.

The Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning supported our recommendations and provided an action plan for how it will implement the recommendation made to it. The City of Ballarat, Cardinia Shire Council, Mitchell Shire Council and Murrindindi Shire Council also supported our recommendations. Maribyrnong City Council responded that different councils are at different stages of implementing their policies and framework.



# 1 Audit context

Victoria's local government sector, comprising 79 councils, has a significant impact on the lives of all Victorians. Councils are established by the *Local Government Act 1989* (the Act), which specifies councils' powers, duties and functions.

Councils are area-based, representative governments with a legislative and electoral mandate to manage local issues and plan for their communities' needs. Councils manage community infrastructure and assets worth more than \$70 billion, such as local roads, bridges, recreational and leisure facilities, and footpaths. They provide more than 100 types of services for people who live in, work in and visit the local area, including waste management, animal management and health and community services.

Public participation—the involvement of those affected by a decision in the decision-making process—is increasingly recognised as an essential part of government at all levels, including local government. Public participation encompasses a range of public involvement, from simply informing people about what government is doing to delegating decisions to the public.

Incorporating public input into local government decision-making can provide insights into possible problems and risks during project planning, and ensures that community concerns are taken into account. This results in decisions that are more likely to be widely accepted and deliver good results.

## 1.1 Guidance and better practice principles

VAGO released its better practice guide *Public Participation in Government Decision-making* in January 2015. The guide is based on the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) model of public participation.

Our guide summarises recognised better practices for public participation and activities to inform government decisions. It also provides a clear, high-level structure and criteria for managing public participation exercises.

IAP2's public participation spectrum includes five levels of public engagement, outlined in Figure 1A. The first two are described as 'Participation' and the next two as 'Engagement'. There is a significant difference in decision-making authority between the spectrum's fifth level of public participation, Empower, and the other levels—at this level, decisions are made jointly by the government and the community.

Audit context

Each level of participation has merit, depending on the aim of the public participation activity. If the goal is to keep the public informed or to listen to and acknowledge the public's concerns, then the first two levels of participation would be suitable. If the goal is to work with the public to exchange information, ideas and concerns, or to seek advice and innovations, then an Involve, Collaborate or Empower level of participation would be more suitable.

**Figure 1A**  
The five levels of public participation

	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
<b>LEVELS</b>					
<b>OBJECTIVE</b>	To provide balanced and objective information to support understanding by the public.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work with the public to ensure concerns and aspirations are understood and considered.	To engage with the public on each aspect of the decision, including the development of alternatives and a preferred solution.	To create governance structures to delegate decision-making and/or work directly with the public.
<b>COMMITMENT</b>	To keep the public informed.	To listen to and acknowledge the public's concerns.	To work with the public to exchange information, ideas and concerns.	To seek advice and innovations from and amongst various public parties.	To work with the public to implement agreed-upon decisions.
<b>DESCRIPTION</b>	<p><b>Participation</b></p> <p>The first two public participation levels—Inform and Consult—typically occur when a decision has already been made, and government wants to either communicate that decision to the public, or seek opinions on the decision.</p>		<p><b>Engagement</b></p> <p>The third and fourth public participation levels—Involve and Collaborate—have two way information flows, and include sharing information within and across stakeholder communities during the decision-making process.</p> <p>When undertaking Engagement, decision makers commit to using stakeholder feedback to inform the decision and shape the outcome.</p> <p>Activity that occurs at the Collaboration level is also sometimes referred to as partnering.</p>		<p><b>Empowerment</b></p> <p>The fifth public participation level—Empower—is also often referred to as co production, where decisions are made jointly between government and the community.</p> <p>This is typically when decision-making authority has been delegated to a group including members from both the government and the community/industry.</p>

Source: VAGO, *Public Participation in Government Decision-making*, January 2015, adapted from IAP2.



## 1.2 Legislative requirements

The Act requires community participation in the development of councils' plans and budgets, and in councils' application for an exemption to the rate cap.

### 1.2.1 Council plans and budgets

A council must prepare and approve a council plan within six months after each general election or by the next 30 June, whichever is later. A council plan must include:

- the strategic objectives of the council
- strategies for achieving the objectives for at least the next four years
- strategic indicators for monitoring the achievement of the council's objectives
- a strategic resources plan
- any other matters prescribed by the Local Government Regulations.

A council must also prepare a budget for each financial year setting out:

- the standard financial statements in the prescribed format and containing the information required by the Local Government Regulations
- a description of the activities and initiatives to be funded in the budget
- a statement describing how the activities and initiatives will help the council achieve the strategic objectives specified in its plan
- key strategic activities that the council will undertake during the financial year, and performance targets and measures for each key strategic activity
- any other details required by the regulations.

Under the Act, community members have a right to make a submission on the proposed council plan and the proposed budget. To enable this, the Act requires each council to publish a public notice and make a copy of the proposed council plan and budget available for inspection at the council office and any district offices for 28 days after the public notice is published. The proposed council plan and budget must also be published on the council's website.

These obligations establish the minimum public participation requirements for councils.

### 1.2.2 Council rates

In Victoria, council rates can comprise up to three components:

- a municipal charge—not more than 20 per cent of a council's total rates revenue
- a waste management charge
- a rate in the dollar based on a residence's property value.

In 2015, the Victorian Government introduced rate capping legislation—the Fair Go Rates System (FGRS). Under this system, the Minister for Local Government sets an annual rate cap, which controls increases in rates during that financial year. Councils can seek approval from the Essential Services Commission (ESC) to increase their rates above the cap.

## Audit context

A council applying to the ESC for an exemption to the rate cap must first engage the local community. One of the criteria for an exemption is how the council has taken into account the views of ratepayers and the community in proposing the higher rate increase. This criterion emphasises the importance of public participation, particularly the need to meaningfully consider community feedback.

### 1.2.3 Review of the *Local Government Act 1989*

The Act is currently under review. The proposed amendments aim to improve the transparency, responsiveness and collaborative capacity of councils, and to reinforce participatory democracy as a guiding principle of council practice.

Local Government Victoria's (LGV) directions paper *Act for the Future: Directions for a new Local Government Act* outlines the proposed public participation requirements in the revised Act, shown in Figure 1B.

**Figure 1B**  
**Proposed directions for community participation**  
**in the revised Local Government Act**

- Include deliberative community engagement as a principle in the Act and include in the role of a councillor the requirement to participate in deliberative community engagement, leaving the method to be determined by each council.
- Require a council to prepare a community consultation and engagement policy early in its term to inform the four-year council plan and 10-year community plan.
- Require a council to conduct a deliberative community engagement process to prepare its council plan and to demonstrate how the plan reflects the outcomes of the community engagement process.
- Include in regulations that an engagement strategy must ensure:
  - the community informs the engagement process
  - the community is given adequate information to participate
  - the scope/remit of the consultation and areas subject to influence are clear
  - those engaged are representative of the council's demographic profile.
- Require a council to complete its council plan by 31 December in the second year of its term, recognising the time required to conduct a deliberative community engagement process.
- Require the mayor to report to the community each year about how the council plan has implemented the community's priorities as directed through the deliberative community engagement process.

Source: VAGO, based on Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, *Act for the Future: Directions for a new Local Government Act*, 2016, page 61.

The proposed directions are more specific than those in the current Act, and reflect the growing importance of public participation in government decision-making.

## 1.3 Local Government Victoria

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LGV is part of the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning and works cooperatively with Victoria's 79 local councils to ensure Victorians benefit from responsive and accountable local government. In partnership with the local government sector, LGV works to improve business and governance practices to maximise community value and accountability, and oversees the administration of the relevant legislation.

Although LGV has a general role in working with councils to improve the way they operate, it does not have a specific role in directing or overseeing councils' public participation activities, and has not conducted any public participation projects or initiatives.

## 1.4 Why this audit is important

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Public participation and engagement by local councils is of significant interest to the community and of great importance, particularly as inadequate consultation can lead to poor decisions by councils.

Transparent and well-managed public participation can help to better inform local government policies and their application through effective strategies, programs and projects.

This audit outlines areas for local government to improve its performance in managing public participation and community engagement.

## 1.5 What this audit examined and how

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In this audit, we examined the effectiveness of community engagement and participation at the local government level.

We examined councils' public participation processes for significant activities, such as developing the council budget and council plan, and making major investment decisions. We benchmarked these processes against better practice principles, in line with IAP2.

Alongside LGV, we selected six councils to audit:

- two metropolitan councils—Maroondah City Council and Maribyrnong City Council
- one interface council (one of the nine municipalities that form a ring around metropolitan Melbourne)—Cardinia Shire Council
- one regional city council—City of Ballarat
- one large shire council—Mitchell Shire Council
- one small shire council—Murrindindi Shire Council.

We conducted this audit in accordance with section 15 of the *Audit Act 1994* and Australian Auditing and Assurance Standards. The cost of this audit was \$490 000.

*Audit context*

## 1.6 Report structure

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The remainder of this report is structured as follows:

- Part 2 looks at public participation in council activities
  - Part 3 looks at LGV's role in public participation.
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## 2 Public participation in council activities

Public participation is a critical part of government decision-making at all levels. Community engagement helps councils to develop effective strategies, programs and projects. Councils that fail to adequately engage the public risk alienating the community and creating adverse impacts through poorly informed and implemented decisions.

Better practice elements of public participation include developing clear objectives, properly understanding the problem, objectively assessing the options, applying a rigorous management approach, and evaluating and learning from the process.

The six councils we audited—the City of Ballarat, Cardinia Shire Council, Maribymong City Council, Maroondah City Council, Mitchell Shire Council and Murrindindi Shire Council—use a variety of methods and activities to engage the community, depending on the project and group involved. These include surveys, focus groups, social media, submissions, community events, community working groups and community workshops. These activities span the five levels of public participation described in the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) model of public participation.

### 2.1 Conclusion

Although the councils we audited typically have a public participation framework aligned with the IAP2 model, the way they apply it to their activities lacks maturity. Councils can improve their public participation by better documenting their public participation activities, and by monitoring and evaluating their implementation and outcomes.

### 2.2 Policies, frameworks and guides

Councils have a range of public participation policies, frameworks and guides for staff that set out expectations for public participation and provide guidance on the various elements of public participation. These guides and associated resources articulate councils' commitment to high-quality, consistent and genuine community engagement.

As outlined in Figure 2A, all six audited councils have a public participation policy or framework, and five were informed by the internationally recognised IAP2 model of public participation.

Maribymong's public participation policy is not based on any particular model and has fewer better practice elements than the other councils' policies. Maribymong will review its policy during 2017, providing the council with an opportunity to update its approach to align with the IAP2 model.

## Public participation in council activities

**Figure 2A**  
Audited councils' public participation policies and frameworks

	Ballarat	Cardinia	Maribyrnong	Maroondah	Mitchell	Murrindindi
Public participation policy or framework	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Policy informed by IAP2	✓	✓	✘	✓	✓	✓
Handbook or guide	✓	✓	✓	✓	✘	✓

Note: ✓ = element is present, ✘ = element is not present.

Source: VAGO.

### Content and quality of policies and frameworks

The content and quality of councils' policies and frameworks vary considerably.

By comparing the audited councils' public participation policies, we identified 12 common elements of better practice—see Appendix B for descriptions of each element.

The public participation policies at the six councils we audited included between five and 12 of the better practice elements we identified, as shown in Figure 2B. There is scope for three of the six councils—Ballarat, Cardinia and Maribyrnong—to review their public participation policies and include further better practice elements. Common elements missing from councils' public participation policies include details of when, how and who to engage, an outline of roles and responsibilities, and the resources needed to conduct the activities successfully.

**Figure 2B**  
Better practice elements in audited councils' public participation policies and frameworks

Element	Ballarat	Cardinia	Maribyrnong	Maroondah	Mitchell	Murrindindi
Purpose	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Scope	✘	✓	✓	✓	✘	✓
Objectives	✓	✘	✓	✓	✘	✘
Definitions	✘	✘	✓	✓	✓	✓
Responsibilities	✘	✘	✓	✓	✓	✘
IAP2 model	✓	✓	✘	✓	✓	✓
Principles and values	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
When to engage	✘	✘	✘	✓	✓	✓
How to engage	✘	✘	✘	✓	✓	✓
Who to engage	✘	✘	✘	✓	✓	✘
Monitoring, evaluation and review	✓	✓	✘	✓	✓	✓
Engagement resources	✓	✘	✘	✓	✓	✘

Note: ✓ = element is present, ✘ = element is not present.

Note: Ballarat City Council and Mitchell Shire Council do not have community engagement policy documents. This assessment is based on their community engagement framework documents.

Source: VAGO.



## 2.2.1 Monitoring, evaluation and review

Monitoring, evaluation and review are essential elements of public participation activities. If councils fail to evaluate their public participation, they have no clear understanding about whether they have successfully engaged the community and achieved the objectives of the public participation activity. They also miss an opportunity to learn from their experiences and address any weaknesses in future public participation.

Five of the six councils we audited included the essential elements of monitoring, evaluation and review in their public participation policies. However, we found that even though these councils had these essential elements in their policies, they did not have sufficient guidance on how to apply them. The council projects we examined lacked both sufficient documentation on the public participation activity, and evaluation data. As a result, these councils were not able to measure the value of their public participation activities.

The aim of effective evaluation is to determine whether the engagement process achieved its objectives. Figure 2C lists some sample questions for councils to consider when evaluating their public participation activities.

**Figure 2C**  
**Sample questions for evaluating public participation activities**

Category	Evaluation questions
Purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Were the purpose, scope and limitations of the process clear to all participants?</li> </ul>
Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Were the most suitable and effective techniques used?</li> <li>What worked well?</li> <li>Were there any variations from the processes that were initially planned? If so, what were they and why were they made?</li> <li>What changes could be made to improve the community engagement process next time? Consider all aspects from planning to communications to implementation.</li> <li>What were the barriers and enablers?</li> <li>Was the engagement cost-effective and timely?</li> <li>Was the budget adequate?</li> </ul>
Participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Did the community feel they were part of the process?</li> <li>Did both council and the community feel it was a positive experience?</li> <li>Did people from all participant groups feel that they were listened to and their views adequately recorded?</li> <li>Was feedback provided to all participants?</li> <li>Which stakeholders participated? Were the appropriate stakeholders engaged? If not, what were the reasons why?</li> <li>Who was reached? How many people?</li> <li>Were the participants satisfied with the community engagement process?</li> <li>Did people engage well with the methods? How was this assessed?</li> <li>Did the community get all of the information necessary to provide meaningful input?</li> </ul>

Public participation in council activities

**Figure 2C**  
**Sample questions for evaluating public participation activities – continued**

Category	Evaluation questions
Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Did the community engagement activities meet the objectives?</li> <li>• Was the result useful?</li> <li>• Were there any unintended outcomes?</li> <li>• What impact did the engagement results have on decision-making?</li> <li>• What lessons have been learnt?</li> </ul>

Source: VAGO.

Monitoring and evaluation activities at the audited councils are mostly based on quantitative measures such as the number and type of public participation events, the number of participants and social media statistics.

Few projects are evaluated by analysing qualitative information gathered through interviews, focus groups or open-ended survey questions. The risk in not using qualitative information is that only partial information is collected and it is more difficult to evaluate the quality of the public participation.

## 2.2.2 Resources for public participation

Staff guides and handbooks detail when and how staff should carry out the council's public participation activities. They encourage consistent practice and set the expected standards.

Five of the six councils we looked at have a staff guide or handbook for public participation to help staff implement their council's public participation policies, although the breadth and depth of these resources vary significantly. We identified 15 typical better practice elements by comparing councils' staff guides and handbooks. Of the 15 elements, Maroondah's handbook had 15, Murrindindi's had 12, Ballarat's had 10, Maribymong's had nine and Cardinia's had eight, as shown in Figure 2D.

Ballarat, Cardinia, Murrindindi and Maroondah each have handbooks covering a range of topics, including detailed guidance on developing a community engagement plan. These resources are practical, step-by-step guides for public participation that, if used well, will help staff conduct better practice public participation activities.

Maribymong had a set of documents on its intranet but these had not been drawn together as a comprehensive staff guide, and key components—such as developing a community engagement plan and evaluating public participation activities—were missing.

Cardinia's, Murrindindi's and Maroondah's handbooks each provide guidance on evaluating public participation. In line with better practice, these councils identify the need to plan evaluation upfront in the planning phase of public participation. Their handbooks outline an evaluation plan that covers the essential elements of project evaluation.



**Figure 2D**  
**Typical content of public participation staff guides**

Content	Ballarat	Cardinia	Maribyrnong	Maroondah	Murrindindi
Community engagement checklist	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓
Community engagement framework	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓
Community engagement planning	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓
Community engagement templates	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Engagement and communications plan	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗
Engagement reporting	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗
Engagement tools and techniques	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓
Engaging hard-to-reach groups	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Evaluation plan	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓
How to engage	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓
IAP2 model	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓
Stakeholder mapping	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓
Who to engage	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓
Why we engage	✓	✗	✗	✓	✗
When to engage	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓

Note: ✓ = element is present, ✗ = element is not present.

Note: Mitchell Shire Council did not have a staff guide.

Source: VAGO.

## 2.3 Council budget

Section 127 of the *Local Government Act 1989* (the Act) requires councils to prepare a budget each financial year. Councils' budgets must detail the services and initiatives to be funded in the budget and outline how they will contribute to councils' strategic objectives.

We found that the community consultation conducted as part of developing councils' budgets was generally more of a compliance exercise than an opportunity for the community to meaningfully engage with the budget.

### 2.3.1 Statutory obligations

Section 129 of the Act states that, as soon as is practicable after a council has prepared a budget, it must notify the public by advertising in a newspaper and on its website. This recognises the importance of the budget in directing the council's activities.

*Public participation in council activities*

The six councils we examined fulfilled their legislative obligations for public participation in the council budget. These obligations are to:

- put the budget on public exhibition in council offices, public libraries and other council facilities, and on the council website, for 28 days
- call for submissions through a public notice in local newspapers, council newsletters and other publications—members of the public have a right to make a submission under section 223 of the Act on any item contained in the proposed budget
- allow community members to address the council at a meeting, before approving the annual budget.

These requirements set out the conditions for minimum compliance, and do not incorporate better practice principles for public participation. Consequently, even when councils have complied with the requirements of the Act, they may not necessarily have engaged meaningfully with the public.

Our examinations of the six audited councils' proposed and final budgets showed little evidence that councils' budgets have been changed based on public feedback. Only one council demonstrated some minor budget changes as a direct response to submissions received.

The tight statutory time frames for the process allow very little time for councils to meaningfully consider feedback and incorporate change into the budget before the end-of-financial-year deadline. Consultation on the budget typically falls into the Inform end of the IAP2 participation spectrum. This means that a decision has already been made and councils want to either communicate that decision to the public, or seek opinions on the decision.

### 2.3.2 Better practice examples

We found three examples of councils engaging meaningfully with the community during the budget process. These examples illustrate opportunities that other councils might consider when preparing their budget.

#### Ballarat City Council

In 2015–16, Ballarat went beyond the mandated process and time frame and adopted a unique approach to public participation in the budget process. The council selected 16 projects worth \$15 million and put them to the community for consultation. The available budget was \$4.5 million, so the community was asked to select which projects were of greatest importance.

Councillors received the data collected from the community before they made their final decisions. Of the 16 projects, 11 were funded, including four out of seven projects the community had identified as top priorities. The council received around 700 responses—half from a paper survey and half from an online survey. This was a positive example of a council demonstrating meaningful public participation and considering feedback in the budget process.

### Cardinia Shire Council

Cardinia went beyond the basic public exhibition of its 2016–17 budget by running the 'Big Budget Brainstorm'. The council asked residents to nominate the most important priorities for the council and what the council's focus should be when preparing the budget.

During consultation, an online forum generated 223 ideas, 3 860 votes and 140 comments, and four community forums attracted over 50 residents. The council and the community discussed the top 10 ideas with the most votes at a 'response event', hosted in the council chambers, and the council was able to fund some of these projects from the existing budget.

### Maribyrnong City Council

Maribyrnong used an innovative way to consult on the proposed 2016–17 council budget. The council's aim was to engage meaningfully with residents, as the municipality was undergoing significant and rapid change. The council ran a live Facebook question-and-answer session that took place between community members and the council's directors and chief executive officer. This was a new way for the public to raise concerns, ask for clarification and communicate with the council on one of its most important documents.

The live Facebook event reached a sizeable audience—about 4 500 Facebook users—and enabled meaningful interaction between community members and key council decision-makers. The online consultation had 17 participants and generated 40 questions and comments. There were also 13 written submissions presented to a special council meeting, compared to two written submissions the previous year.

This event enabled entirely new groups of participants to be involved, including those unable to attend weekday or weekend forums, households with young children, individuals with access and mobility issues and disabilities, and those who feel intimidated by public speaking or daunted by the level of expertise that might be expected of a participant. This is a good example of how to consult with a wider portion of the council's community.

## 2.3.3 Rate capping

Councils use the rates paid by ratepayers to fund local infrastructure and services. Victoria has a rate capping system that restricts how much councils can increase their rates in a financial year. Councils must apply to the Essential Services Commission (ESC) if they want an exemption from the rate cap.

Councils must demonstrate to ESC that they have used a strategic, planned approach to consulting ratepayers and the community, and have taken their views into account. Councils also need to show that community members and ratepayers understand that the higher cap represents good value for money, that trade-offs have been considered and that the decision to apply for a higher cap fits into the council's long-term planning. ESC's key principles for engagement are shown in Figure 2E.

## Public participation in council activities

**Figure 2E**  
**Key engagement principles for councils**  
**wishing to apply for a rate cap exemption**

Principle	Description
Principle 1	The engagement program must contain clear, accessible and comprehensive information and follow a timely process to engender feedback from the community.
Principle 2	The engagement program should be ongoing and tailored to community needs.
Principle 3	The engagement program should prioritise matters of significance and impact.
Principle 4	The engagement program should lead to communities becoming more informed about council decision-making.

Source: VAGO, based on Essential Services Commission, *Fair Go Rates System: Community Engagement—reference material*, [www.esc.vic.gov.au](http://www.esc.vic.gov.au).

Two of the audited councils—Ballarat and Murrindindi—applied for an exemption to the rate cap in 2016–17.

Ballarat was unsuccessful in its application. ESC was not satisfied that Ballarat demonstrated how it took into account the views of its ratepayers and the community in forming its application for a higher cap. Ballarat did not clearly show that the community had been presented with clear options such as increased short-term borrowings, or trade-offs between rate increases and service levels. ESC was concerned that the proposed higher cap and supporting capital works plan diverged from what had been previously presented to the community.

Murrindindi was successful in gaining a partial exemption. It received an exemption for funding the infrastructure renewal reserve but not for maintaining current service levels. ESC found that Murrindindi demonstrated sufficient public participation for the infrastructure component and insufficient public participation for the service component. Participation included a range of community consultation meetings over a five-year period, including discussion of six options.

During its planning for its 2016–17 council budget, Mitchell consulted with the community to test whether it would accept a low, moderate or higher rate increase, in order to maintain and increase services. The council targeted different groups in the community through a variety of communication methods designed to reach as many community members as possible—including newspaper advertisements and articles, posters, postcards, Facebook, Twitter, community newsletters, the council website, surveys, radio segments, community events, interviews, forums and internal communication. As a result of the consultation, the council did not seek an exemption to the rate cap due to a lack of support within the community.

## 2.4 Council plans

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The council plan is a council's key medium-term strategic plan. It should reflect the vision and aspirations of the community and capture the character and identity of the municipality. The current council plans cover the period 2013–2017. Although the council plan is supposed to reflect the community's vision and aspirations, the six councils we examined do not proactively consult with their communities.

Under section 125 of the Act members of the public have the right to make a submission on the council plan. In a process similar to one used for the council budget, the council must publish a public notice and make copies of the plan available for inspection for at least 28 days after the publication of the notice. These minimum consultation requirements recognise the importance of public participation in councils' planning processes.

All of the audited councils met their minimum compliance requirements under the Act to allow feedback on their annual review of the council plan. However, there was typically little or no feedback on the council plan, other than in the first year when it was being developed, and none of the councils sought to improve feedback by conducting extra consultation activities.

The consultation that councils conducted on council plans were compliance exercises rather than opportunities for meaningful participation. These activities represent the Inform end of the participation spectrum. This is a missed opportunity for councils to properly review the council plan and ensure that it reflects their community's needs and aspirations.

## 2.5 Community plans

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Although not a legislative requirement, the council plan can also be informed by long-term plans such as a community plan. A community plan describes the community's long-term vision and aspirations and is a way of directly involving the community before the preparation of the council plan begins.

Two councils had conducted major community consultation activities to develop a visionary community plan.

In 2013, Ballarat conducted a large-scale community conversation initiative, Ballarat Imagine, outlined in Figure 2F. The council employed a diverse range of community engagement options to involve and motivate all residents. This initiative was supported by a strong media and communications campaign, and community submissions on the council's website and social media. The campaign resulted in 1 000 conversations with the Ballarat community, more than 6 500 completed responses and 98 residents volunteering to join the community reference group. Ballarat Imagine informed the new council plan for 2013–2017, the 2013–14 budget and the Ballarat strategy.

## Public participation in council activities

**Figure 2F**  
**Case study: Ballarat Imagine**

The City of Ballarat began developing 'Today Tomorrow Together: the Ballarat Strategy' by conducting Ballarat's largest ever community conversation, Ballarat Imagine. It began in late February 2013 and asked the community to respond to three main questions:

- The things I love about Ballarat are ...
- The things I imagine for Ballarat are ...
- The things to retain in Ballarat are ...

The council released a discussion paper to help community groups, businesses and government agencies have their say on the issues affecting Ballarat's future.

A key factor in the initiative's success was the many ways community members could respond, including:

- by mailing back a postcard that was distributed through events, community groups, shops, cafes and council facilities
- by mailing back a card that was attached to *My Ballarat*, a publication sent to every home and many businesses in Ballarat
- through the council website
- through Twitter and Facebook
- by talking to councillors and council officers at events and stalls across Ballarat
- by filling in the full-page form in the *Courier Mail* and sending a photo
- by writing on the chalkboards placed at events and council facilities
- through schools, which had their students draw or write about their ideas for Ballarat's future
- by making a written submission on the discussion paper, which was posted to hundreds of community groups, businesses and government agencies
- by organising a meeting with council staff.

Importantly, the council demonstrated how the results of Ballarat Imagine informed its vision and planning for the future. The strategy will guide much of the council's work over the next decade. For example, it will:

- guide the future growth of the city by answering questions like 'which areas will grow and which will not'
- guide infrastructure and service delivery to make sure it is coordinated with growth
- help the council to respond to the important social, economic and environmental challenges Ballarat will face up to 2040.

Source: VAGO.



Maroondah similarly worked with the community to develop the Maroondah 2040 Community Vision, outlined in Figure 2G.

**Figure 2G**  
**Case study: Maroondah 2040 Community Vision**

In 2013–2014, Maroondah City Council worked with the community to develop the Maroondah 2040 Community Vision, a shared long-term vision for the municipality. The council conducted an extensive program of community engagement to ensure that community voices guided the formulation of strategic directions to help shape Maroondah. This enabled thousands of locals to have their say on the future of Maroondah. As a first step, a Maroondah 2040 engagement team took to the streets, community centres, libraries and shopping centres with a survey and video camera asking the community what they loved and what they wanted to change about Maroondah. This was followed by stakeholder workshops, a children's artwork program, focus groups, online discussion forums, an Imagine Maroondah community day and a presence at the Maroondah Festival.

Source: VAGO.

These large-scale participation activities represent the Involve and Collaborate end of the participation spectrum and are considered better practice. In both cases, the councils worked with the public to ensure they understood concerns and aspirations. Ballarat and Maroondah showed a genuine commitment to working with the public to exchange information, and to seek advice and ideas from the community. They used many different communication strategies with the aim of maximising participation across different community groups. Importantly, they used the stakeholder feedback to inform their decisions and shape the outcome.

Maroondah evaluated the process and outcomes of its Maroondah 2040 Community Vision project. Key lessons learnt are outlined in Figure 2H. Notably, the evaluation found that council employees could benefit from additional guidance for planning and implementing community engagement, perhaps in the form of a guide or handbook. The council has since developed a handbook for community participation.

**Figure 2H**  
**Lessons learnt: Maroondah 2040 Community Vision**

- Allocating more time or funding to the research phase would have enabled a deeper exploration of themes and topics. Some of the desired information could not be obtained due to pressures of either time or resources.
- Delivery of the community engagement survey during the middle of winter resulted in a lower number of completed surveys than expected. Face-to-face data collection was well received by the community, but the inclement weather reduced the engagement team's ability to reach a large number of people.
- Many comments were received from community members who were impressed with the council 'hitting the streets' to engage.
- Certain engagement techniques are better for different circumstances.
- More focus is needed on engaging hard-to-reach groups in the community.
- Council employees could benefit from additional guidance on planning and implementing community engagement, perhaps in the form of a guide or handbook.

Source: VAGO.

Public participation in council activities

## 2.6 Other council activities

Councils provided evidence of public participation in a wide range of community projects and activities. The case studies that follow illustrate public participation mainly at the Involve and Collaborate levels of public participation—levels three and four of the IAP2 spectrum.

Public participation at these levels is characterised by the two-way flow of information and includes sharing information within and between stakeholder communities during the decision-making process. When undertaking engagement activities, decision-makers commit to using stakeholder feedback to inform the decision and shape the outcome.

The final case study, Figure 2N, illustrates the Empower level of the spectrum, which involves creating governance structures to delegate decision-making or work directly with the community.

Maribyrnong provided an example of public participation that involved a hard-to-reach group—children and young people—outlined in Figure 2I. The purpose was to design a new playground.

**Figure 2I**

**Case study: Skinner Reserve, Maribyrnong City Council**

During 2016, Maribyrnong City Council identified and involved a broad range of stakeholders in the development of a new \$750 000 playground. The project included engagement with the public on each aspect of the decision, including the development of alternatives and a preferred solution. The community influenced the draft concept plan and the final design, through an online survey, submissions, barbecue and listening sessions, and activities with children and young people.

The council's online consultation platform 'Your city, your voice' was one of several tools used in the community consultation. The council encouraged people to visit the online consultation platform through social media, including Twitter, Facebook and a newsletter. Overall, the site received 299 site visits and 64 survey responses. The council distributed a project flyer to 1 500 households, and more than 100 pre-school and school-aged children provided visual responses.

Source: VAGO.

Murrindindi also successfully engaged a hard-to-reach group—non-resident property holders—in a public participation activity to establish a new waste management system, outlined in Figure 2J.

**Figure 2J**

**Case study: Taylor Bay waste management, Murrindindi Shire Council**

In 2015, Murrindindi Shire Council undertook consultation on the Taylor Bay waste management system. The objective of the public participation was to develop an adequate waste collection service, to stop illegal dumping of hard rubbish and to introduce a recycling service for Taylor Bay. The council established a community reference group, including non-resident property holders, to make recommendations for a new facility. The council accepted the recommendations.

Source: VAGO.



Cardinia adopted multiple methods as part of its feasibility study for new arts and culture facilities, detailed in Figure 2K.

**Figure 2K**  
**Case study: Arts and culture facilities feasibility study,**  
**Cardinia Shire Council**

The 2013–14 Cardinia Shire Council budget included funding to determine the vision and needs of the shire's arts and cultural community, the feasibility of providing arts and cultural facilities, and recommendations on future facilities.

Consultants gathered information via research, benchmarking and extensive community consultation. This included two community engagement forums attended by more than 65 people, a survey that received 247 responses, discussions with the council's arts and cultural reference group and councillors, and interviews with community members and internal staff. Based on the research, recommendations were made to the council on current and future needs for arts and cultural facilities in Cardinia. The council endorsed the final report, including recommendations to be implemented over the following five years.

Source: VAGO.

Consultation on Mitchell's Seymour Structure Plan, outlined in Figure 2L, occurred over a month and included various forms of promotion including newspaper advertisements, website updates, posters, Facebook content, radio segments, floor stickers and postcards, and events such as drop-in sessions at various locations.

**Figure 2L**  
**Case study: Seymour Structure Plan, Mitchell Shire Council**

During 2015–2016, Mitchell Shire Council consulted the community on the Seymour Structure Plan. The plan was intended to guide development over the next 20 to 30 years and provide an opportunity for community members to help shape the medium- to long-term future of Seymour and surrounding areas. Community input to this project occurred at four key stages.

The council established a community liaison group, a project website and an online forum. It also sought submissions, produced postcards, visited schools, ran community workshops, events and stakeholder meetings, and conducted face-to-face surveys. Community input from the first stage of the project informed stage two of the project.

Source: VAGO.

The development of Maroondah's housing strategy involved two rounds of community and stakeholder consultation, described in Figure 2M.

**Figure 2M**  
**Case Study: Maroondah housing strategy, Maroondah City Council**

Development of the updated Maroondah City Council housing strategy involved direct engagement with a wide range of community members and key stakeholders in 2015–2016. Public participation activities included an online survey, face-to-face engagement activities at public events and three stakeholder focus groups. Following the development of the draft strategy, the council undertook further community engagement activities including face-to-face engagement, a workshop with key stakeholders, an online survey and a dedicated website. Using the resulting feedback, the council refined the vision for housing and chose five focus areas and 10 key directions.

Source: VAGO.

## Public participation in council activities

Ballarat's Engaging Communities Program, outlined in Figure 2N, gave the community an opportunity to consult on and decide how a funding allocation would be spent. It is an example of a council empowering the community to make funding decisions.

**Figure 2N**  
**Engaging Communities Program, Ballarat City Council**

Ballarat City Council's Engaging Communities Program is an example of a council empowering the community to implement a local initiative. The program has been working with local communities in Buninyong, Miners Rest and Learmonth to improve local spaces and build a sense of local identity.

As part of the program, the council allocated \$100 000 in 2014 and another \$100 000 in 2015 to each of three project teams so they could develop and enhance their chosen project. The council established the following objectives for the program:

- increase community engagement and opportunities to empower the community
- implement new communication channels to increase community involvement
- improve coordination of project delivery and integration within council
- improve community confidence in and satisfaction with the council across the three local areas
- maximise the impact and benefits for the local community.

A key aspect of the program has been building community engagement through strong community relations and partnerships over a longer period of time than any one-off project engagement initiative.

As well as the \$600 000 investment, other council departments, state government and not-for-profit organisations have contributed more than \$1.7 million.

This successful program shows how practical opportunities for the community to work together on shared local projects can have wide-ranging benefits. The program received a high commendation in the 2015 Victorian Local Governance Association Governance Awards for displaying a strong commitment to good governance and community engagement.

Source: VAGO.

## 2.7 Implementation framework

It is important that councils clearly document public participation activities as they would for all other project activities, in a plan that provides an end-to-end roadmap for successful implementation. The length and detail of the documentation will depend on the scale and complexity of the activity. The underlying aims remain the same—to clearly and comprehensively document a plan for councils to follow and use to assess whether they are achieving the objectives of their public participation activities.

We tested whether councils had a framework for effective public participation for one of their recent investment decisions. The criteria included:

- having a fully informed description of the planned objectives and scope of public participation
- identifying those likely to be affected and how they should be approached
- identifying the resources, skills and time frame required to undertake the activity
- having a plan that is appropriately customised to the activity
- having evidence that public participation has been implemented as described in the plan
- evaluating the public participation activity.

Figure 2O shows our assessment of councils' public participation plans. Only Maroondah had a comprehensive community engagement plan for its nominated project. Murrindindi's project plan had most elements but was missing the crucial evaluation element.

**Figure 2O**  
Elements of better practice public participation plans  
and their implementation

	Ballarat	Cardinia	Maribyrnong	Maroondah	Mitchell	Murrindindi
Description of the planned objectives and scope of public participation	x	✓	✓	✓	x	✓
Identification of those likely to be affected	x	✓	✓	✓	x	✓
Identification of resources, skills and time required	x	○	x	✓	○	✓
A plan that is customised to the participation activity	x	x	x	✓	x	✓
Implementation of the public participation activity as described in plan	x	x	x	✓	x	✓
Evaluation of the public participation activity	x	x	x	✓	x	x

Note: Results are for a single project nominated by each council as an example of public participation.

Note: ✓ = element is present, x = element is not present, ○ = part of this element is present.

Source: VAGO.

Mitchell and Ballarat had some of the required elements in their project documentation, but they did not include crucial public participation information as part of an overall community engagement plan. As a result, we could not determine whether their public participation activity had been implemented as planned, or evaluate the success of the activity, and their documentation could not be considered better practice.

Councils could improve their public participation activities by developing a comprehensive public participation engagement plan based on better practice principles, including a step-by-step guide for council staff to conduct effective public participation activities.



## 3 Local Government Victoria

Local Government Victoria (LGV) is part of the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, and works cooperatively with Victoria's 79 local councils to ensure Victorians benefit from responsive and accountable local government. In partnership with the local government sector, LGV works to improve business and governance practices to maximise community value and accountability, and oversees the administration of the relevant legislation.

This part of the report considers LGV's role in promoting public participation to local councils and supporting them to engage with their communities.

### 3.1 Conclusion

LGV is responsible for directly promoting better practice in public participation to the local government sector, as well as reflecting better practice in its own activities. Although LGV has demonstrated better practice in a range of its own activities, it has not sought to address the low levels of community satisfaction with community consultation and engagement initiated by local councils. LGV should take a more active role in promoting processes and resources for better practice public participation.

### 3.2 Reviewing the *Local Government Act 1989*

LGV has been engaged in an extensive consultation and engagement process to inform the development of revisions of the *Local Government Act 1989* (the Act). LGV has consulted adequately with the community for the scale and significance of the project.

Phase one of the consultation process aimed to identify issues with the current Act and explore reform ideas. LGV released a discussion paper and commissioned 10 background papers by experts in different fields of local government. LGV established technical working groups comprising experts from the sector to work with its staff on policy and legislative questions. It also held a series of community forums around Victoria.

Phase two involved developing the directions for reform for the revised Act, outlined in LGV's discussion paper *Act for the Future: Directions for a new Local Government Act*, published in June 2016. LGV then conducted a second phase of intensive consultation, which continued to mid-September 2016.

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*Act for the Future* proposes a much stronger role for public participation in local government. It proposes ways to build stronger citizen engagement in shaping councils' directions and developing council plans. It also outlines ways for councils to ensure that they are transparent and accountable, and have a rigorous approach for responding to community complaints.

### 3.3 Local Government Performance Reporting Framework

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The Local Government Performance Reporting Framework (LGPRF) is a mandatory system of performance reporting for councils to ensure that they are measuring and reporting on their performance in a consistent way. The framework is made up of 66 measures, and a governance and management checklist of 24 items. Together these elements build a comprehensive picture of council performance.

LGV's participation in the development and implementation of the framework has been effective, and the associated public participation activities were at the Involve and Collaborate end of the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) spectrum of public participation.

During the development of the framework, LGV convened a series of regional workshops and sector engagement activities to obtain feedback on the draft LGPRF indicators, and to build councils' awareness of the framework and how it would affect them. Over 2 000 people representing all 79 councils contributed to one or more of the engagement activities.

LGV conducted a post-implementation survey to gauge the views of council staff on the LGPRF implementation process. The survey asked questions about satisfaction with the project team, the effectiveness of communication channels, the usefulness of processes for providing feedback on the LGPRF, and satisfaction with the consultation and engagement process.

LGV created the LGPRF website in collaboration with the local government sector and the community through a dedicated user group and a range of focus groups. LGV has also established a post-implementation steering committee, made up of members from a broad range of councils, peak bodies and ratepayer groups.



## 3.4 Data collection

### Local Government Community Satisfaction Survey

Each year LGV coordinates the statewide Local Government Community Satisfaction Survey (community satisfaction survey). This coordinated approach allows for far more cost-effective surveying than would be possible if councils commissioned surveys individually.

Participation in the survey is optional. Participating councils have various choices about the content of the survey and the sample size, depending on their individual strategic, financial and other considerations.

The main objectives of the survey are to assess councils' performance on a range of measures and to gain insight into ways they could provide improved or more effective service delivery. The survey also provides councils with a means to fulfil some of their statutory reporting requirements, and acts as a feedback mechanism for LGV.

In 2016, 69 of 79 councils participated in the survey. One of the core measures rates respondents' satisfaction with their councils' community consultation and engagement.

As part of the LGPRF, all 79 councils must report back to LGV on community consultation and engagement. If councils do not take part in the community satisfaction survey, they must complete their own survey on community consultation and engagement.

Councils must provide a rating out of 100 of their community's satisfaction with their consultation and engagement efforts. This includes consulting and engaging directly with the community on key local issues requiring decisions by council. The average overall score for all councils in 2015–16 was 55 out of 100.

From 2017, a community satisfaction survey score in any category of between 50 and 60 is rated as 'performing satisfactorily in this service area but needs to improve'. A score between 60 and 75 is rated as 'performing well in this service area, but there is room for improvement', and a score between 75 and 100 is rated as 'performing very well in this service area'.

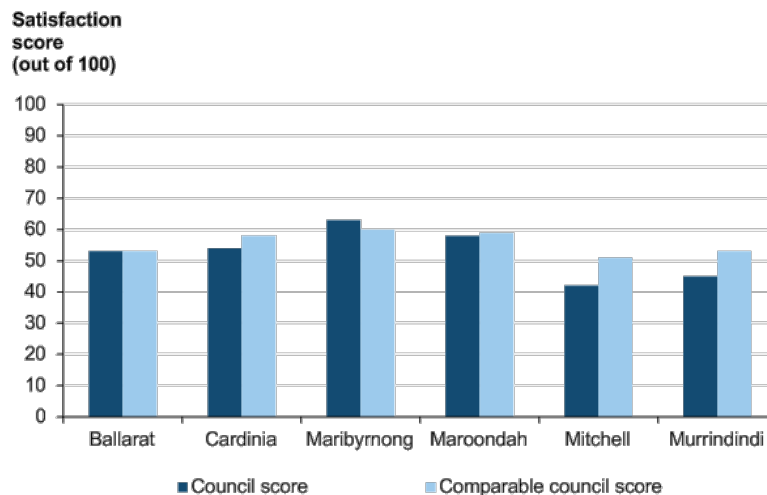
### Know Your Council website

The Know Your Council website provides an opportunity for the public and councils to access consistent information on the performance of local councils across Victoria. Users can view community satisfaction with councils' community consultation and engagement. They can also compare similar councils and view detailed profiles of councils. Other areas included on the Know Your Council website are governance, statutory planning, financial performance and sustainable capacity.

Figure 3A shows the level of community satisfaction with community consultation and engagement for the audited councils compared to similar councils.

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**Figure 3A**  
**Community satisfaction with audited councils'**  
**community consultation and engagement, 2015–16**



Source: VAGO, based on data from Know Your Council website, knowyourcouncil.vic.gov.au.

In 2015–16, four of the six audited councils scored lower than similar councils. Scores ranged from 42 to 63 out of 100. Mitchell and Murrindindi scored lowest and were well below similar councils, while Maribyrnong scored highest and was above similar councils.

Considering the relatively low scores, it would be beneficial for LGV to analyse the data and develop resources and initiatives that support councils to improve their practices.

### 3.5 Sector leadership

One of LGV's responsibilities is to demonstrate sector leadership by conducting better practice participation in its own activities. The following case studies show that LGV undertakes better practice public participation across all levels of the IAP2 spectrum, depending on the nature and needs of particular projects.

#### Victorian Aboriginal Local Government Action Plan

LGV developed the Victorian Aboriginal Local Government Action Plan during 2016. During the process, LGV conducted widespread consultation and incorporated feedback into the plan. The action plan recognises that local governments play a central role in closing the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Victorians in key areas such as health, education and economic outcomes. The action plan is a resource for councils, and brings together some positive initiatives already happening around the state.



LGV prepared a consultation draft of the action plan and workshopped ideas with specific community groups to gain feedback from the public. LGV also requested case studies of better practice engagement and partnerships between councils and Aboriginal communities. LGV sent a copy of the consultation draft to key stakeholders and held a number of targeted workshops and meetings. LGV modified the action plan in response to concerns and queries raised by stakeholders and the community, by incorporating more specific information and actions.

This is an example of the Involve level of public participation—the objective was to work with stakeholders to ensure LGV understood and considered their concerns.

### Local Government Model Financial Report

LGV is responsible for the annual review and update of the Local Government Model Financial Report (LGMFR) and associated better practice guide. LGV involved the community meaningfully in the process.

In preparing to update the documents for the 2015–16 reporting year, LGV consulted and engaged with the sector through three key channels—an online survey, a circular to all council CEOs and a workshop at the FinPro annual conference, an event for financial professionals in local government roles. Stakeholders provided 46 survey responses, six formal written submissions in response to the circular, and 26 comments and suggestions at the workshop.

LGV collated this feedback and formed a working group to consider, discuss and then approve any amendments for 2015–16. The working group included representatives from FinPro, CPA Australia, VAGO and LGV. It launched the updated LGMFR and better practice guide in February 2016 and held a series of five workshops throughout the state in May and June 2016.

Like the Victorian Aboriginal Local Government Action Plan, this case study represents the Involve level on the IAP2 spectrum.

### Citizens' jury

Following an Independent Commission of Inquiry, the Victorian Parliament dismissed the Greater Geelong City Council in mid-2016.

The Parliament agreed that the people of Geelong should be given a say in the composition and representative structure of their new council. The Minister for Local Government (the minister) conducted a citizens' jury process to inform the development of the new representative structure. This is an example of empowering the local community—the fifth level on the IAP2 spectrum.

LGV commissioned an independent research organisation, the newDemocracy Foundation, to design and oversee the process on behalf of the minister. LGV prepared a background paper to help the jury in its deliberations. The newDemocracy Foundation sought submissions on alternative models of representation from academics and others to produce aspirational options for the jury to consider.

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The 100 members of the citizens' jury were randomly selected and were representative of the gender, age and geographical diversity of Greater Geelong. The wider community contributed to the jury process through surveys, workshops and submissions. More than 1 000 people responded to the surveys, 29 submissions were received, and there were five public workshops and further targeted workshops involving 107 participants. The citizens' jury finalised its report in January 2017 and the government responded in March 2017.

LGV will commission an independent evaluation of the engagement activities in the citizens' jury project. The evaluation aims to capture and share the lessons learnt from the citizens' jury process as an example of a deliberative engagement process. This is particularly important as the proposed reforms to the *Local Government Act 1989* will require councils to undertake deliberative engagement with their communities when they are developing their four-year council plans.

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## Appendix A.

### *Audit Act 1994* section 16— submissions and comments

We have professionally engaged with Local Government Victoria (within the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning), the City of Ballarat, Cardinia Shire Council, Maribymong City Council, Maroondah City Council, Mitchell Shire Council and Murrindindi Shire Council throughout the course of the audit. In accordance with section 16(3) of the *Audit Act 1994* we provided a copy of this report or relevant extracts to those agencies, and requested their submissions and comments.

Responsibility for the accuracy, fairness and balance of those comments rests solely with the agency head.

Responses were received as follows:

Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning.....	30
City of Ballarat.....	32
Cardinia Shire Council .....	33
Maribymong City Council .....	34
Mitchell Shire Council.....	36
Murrindindi Shire Council .....	38

Appendix A. Audit Act 1994 section 16—submissions and comments

**RESPONSE provided by the Secretary, Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning**



Appendix A. Audit Act 1994 section 16—submissions and comments

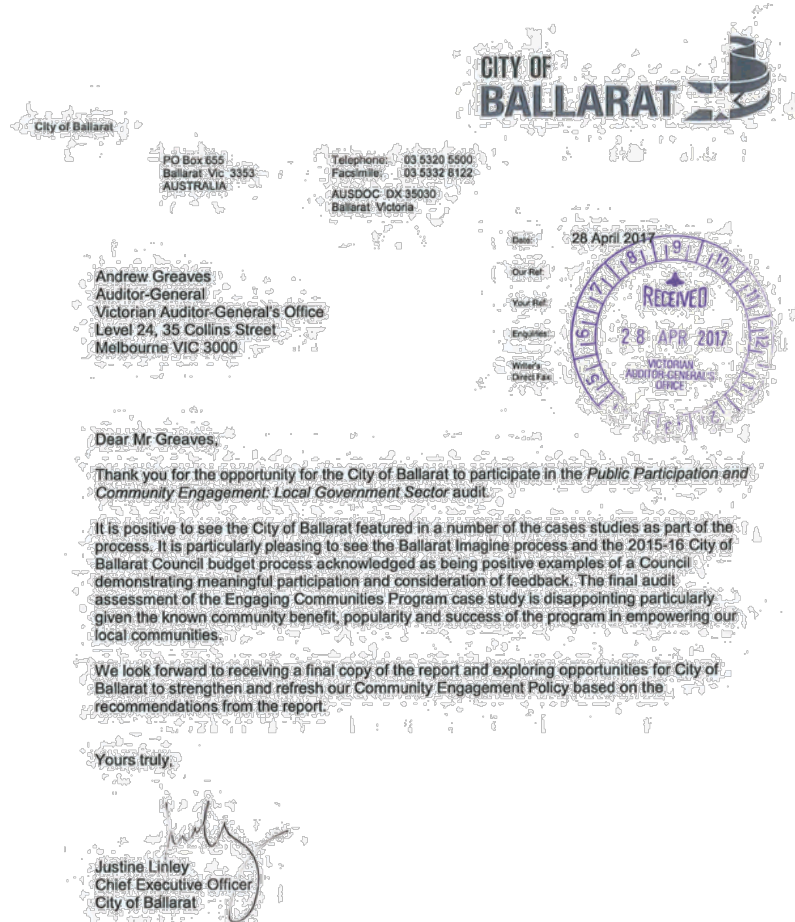
**RESPONSE provided by the Secretary, Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning – continued**

**DELWP ACTION PLAN**

**Performance Audit - Public Participation and Community Engagement  
Local Government Sector**

	DELWP Action	Completion Date
<b>Recommendation 4</b>		
That Local Government Victoria analyse public participation data and promulgate better practice public participation case studies, guidance and training.	Local Government Victoria (LGV) will develop best practice guidance and a web based repository of best practice examples after the completion of the review of the Local Government Act 1989.	June 2018
	LGV will analyse available public participation data on an annual basis.	June 2018
	LGV will present a paper to a Local Government Performance Reporting Steering Committee meeting on the inclusion of public participation performance indicator(s) as a requirement of the Local Government Performance Reporting Framework.	March 2018

## Appendix A. Audit Act 1994 section 16—submissions and comments

**RESPONSE provided by the Chief Executive Officer, City of Ballarat**



**RESPONSE provided by the Chief Executive Officer, Cardinia Shire Council**

Our ref: 15/110/12  
Year ref: 32572



20 April 2017  
Mr Andrew Greaves  
Auditor-General  
Level 24, 35 Collins Street  
MELBOURNE VIC 3000



Dear Mr Greaves,

Re: Performance Audit Report

Thank you for letter dated 13 April 2017 inviting a response to the proposed report regarding Public Participation and Community Engagement in the Local government sector.

Based upon the draft report received in March it was decided to review all of our engagement documentation (policy, procedures, handbook etc.) to address some of the areas identified within the audit before the recommendations were publicised. Council welcomes the findings of the audit as they can now serve as a template for best practice across all local government agencies.

We acknowledge that within the engagement process there are specific criteria where we do well and others where we can improve. Once our internal engagement desktop audit is complete we will be better placed to enhance the service we provide to the benefit of all our staff, community and external stakeholders.

Once again thank you for the opportunity to respond.

Yours sincerely,

Garry McQuillan  
Chief Executive officer

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Appendix A. Audit Act 1994 section 16—submissions and comments

RESPONSE provided by the Chief Executive Officer, Maribyrnong City Council

1 May 2017

Ms Karen Ellingford  
Senior Manager  
Performance Audit  
Victorian Auditor General's Office

By email [Karen.Ellingford@audit.vic.gov.au](mailto:Karen.Ellingford@audit.vic.gov.au)

Dear Karen,

**Re: Response to the Auditor General's report: Public Participation and Community Engagement: Local Government Sector**

Thank you for providing Council with the Auditor General's final report, we note where our responses to previous drafts have been considered. As per your invitation we would like to see the following comments included in the report tabled to Parliament:

Response to general recommendations relevant to local government:


1. Since the adoption of Maribyrnong City Council's public participation policy in 2014 the IAP2 model of engagement has been increasingly recognised as best practice and as such has been steadily adopted and integrated into Council's engagement processes, despite it not having been directly referenced in the 2014 policy.

Maribyrnong City Council is relatively unique in its model of a centralised business unit dedicated to community engagement. Rather than relying on individual units to take up planning for engagement based on a framework and staff handbook, staff in the centralised unit are trained in the IAP2 model and stay up to date with best practice. This unit works with other business units to identify best methods for engagement, ensure stakeholder identification is carried out and consultation is promoted through communication channels.

2. Whilst not explicitly referenced in the 2014, the subsequent introduction of an online platform and integration with the communications team allows for close monitoring of consultation reach and engagement. Since its adoption in 2015, Council's online engagement platform has achieved more than 20,000 site visits. Consultation outcomes are routinely reported through the online portal and social media as well as through all council reports.

Since the adoption of this policy an organisational restructure and implementation of new approaches to community engagement have reshaped Council's approach. In 2015, new staffing arrangements have seen an increase in staff and higher qualifications and experience in community engagement. The scope and timeframe of this audit therefore does not reflect the actual current practice of Council.

12



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**RESPONSE provided by the Chief Executive Officer, Maribyrnong City Council –  
continued**

- 2 -

The Auditor General's report should acknowledge that different Councils are at different stages of implementing their policies and framework. Maribyrnong City Council's four year policy and framework adopted in 2014 is relatively dated and now due for review. The audit's focus on policies and frameworks therefore is not necessarily reflective of actual practice. The review that will be carried out in 2017 will inform a new policy and framework that will be more reflective of Council's current practice and incorporate other components recommended in this report.

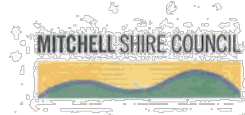
Thank you for your consideration of our response. If you require further information or clarification of any of the above, please do not hesitate to contact Celia Haddock, Council's Director Corporate Services.

Yours faithfully



**Stephen Wall**  
Chief Executive Officer

## Appendix A. Audit Act 1994 section 16—submissions and comments

**RESPONSE provided by the Chief Executive Officer, Mitchell Shire Council**

Please quote our reference in your reply.  
Our Ref: OUT/17/3130

4 May 2017

Andrew Greaves  
Auditor-General  
Victorian Auditor-General's Office  
Level 24, 35 Collins Street  
MELBOURNE VIC 3000



Dear Mr Greaves,

#### **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AUDIT RESPONSE**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a response to the Public Participation and Community Engagement: Local Government Sector proposed report. Thank you also for considering our feedback to the provisional draft.

Mitchell Shire Council sought community input on more than 40 projects or initiatives in the 2015/16 period covered by the audit. These ranged from basic input via public notices and Section 223 of the Local Government Act over relatively short periods of time through to extensive engagement programs conducted over several financial years.

#### **Community Engagement Framework**

We acknowledge the comments made regarding the Community Engagement Framework. We delayed a planned review of our Community Engagement Framework and further development of our internal resources and processes to await the outcome of the audit report.

The recommendations in the report will be considered as part of the review of this framework and associated enhancement of our staff resources including templated engagement plans and evaluation. This is currently planned for early 2017/18.

#### **Council Plan and Budget**

We are currently working with our community on the development of the next Council Plan and Budget. We have included a range of consultation methods and opportunities for interested community members to participate. This has been very successful so far with more than 1200 responses from a range of people and groups across the municipality. This input has been used to inform the preparation of the draft Council Plan and Budget. We are currently seeking input on the drafts.

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**RESPONSE provided by the Chief Executive Officer, Mitchell Shire Council –  
continued**

**Seymour Structure Plan**

We are disappointed that the Seymour Structure Plan did not receive partial compliance as it was a particularly extensive and valuable engagement program with many best practice elements incorporated.

We do, however, acknowledge that more formal documentation of our engagement plan and evaluation of the effectiveness of engagement activities by participants would have been beneficial in demonstrating best practice across all elements and moving Mitchell into full compliance across the areas assessed.

We will consider the formalisation of templated engagement plans and evaluation activities through the review of our Engagement Framework and associated resources.

We look forward to the continual evolution of engagement practices in the sector as we continue to explore ways to improve transparency and public participation to help make better decisions on behalf of our community, and our communities of the future.

Yours sincerely,

  
**DAVID TURNBULL  
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER**

Appendix A. Audit Act 1994 section 16—submissions and comments

**RESPONSE provided by the Chief Executive Officer, Murrindindi Shire Council**

SF/2093-17/24516-MA.ar 18 April 2017

Margaret Abbey

Mr Andrew Greaves  
Auditor-General  
Level 24, 35 Collins Street  
MELBOURNE VIC 3000

RECEIVED  
19 APR 2017  
VICTORIAN  
AUDITOR-GENERAL'S  
OFFICE

Murrindindi  
Shire Council

kyle.daykin@audit.vic.gov.au

Dear Mr Greaves,

**Re: Proposed Performance Audit Report – Public Participation and Community Engagement**

Thank you for your letter dated 13 April 2017 inviting a formal response to the draft report on Public Participation and Community Engagement.

Council recognizes the importance of community engagement and looks forward to implementing the recommendations from this Audit.

Yours faithfully,  
*Margaret Abbey*  
Margaret Abbey  
Chief Executive Officer

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## Appendix B.

# Better practice principles and resources for public participation

We compared the six audited councils' public participation policies and identified 12 common elements of better practice. Figure B1 describes each of these better practice elements.

**Figure B1**  
**Better practice elements in councils'**  
**public participation policies and frameworks**

Element	Description
Purpose	Sets out a council's commitment to public participation
Scope	Identifies which business units, staff and activities are covered by the policy
Objectives	Sets out the aims of the policy in undertaking effective public participation
Definitions	Outlines definitions of key terms, such as engagement, community, consultation, stakeholder
Responsibilities	Identifies staff responsible for undertaking public participation
International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) model	Diagram and description of how the council adapts and applies the IAP2 model
Principles and values	The principles and values guiding public participation, such as transparent, inclusive, fair and responsive
When to engage	Circumstances when councils should engage, such as to help make decisions on current and emerging issues and on all major council plans, strategies and policies, and when it is a statutory, legislative or regulatory requirement
How to engage	Guidance on when to use the various engagement techniques, such as workshops, community meetings, local events, public exhibitions and submissions, website and social media, community and stakeholder reference group, surveys, mail-outs, advertisements
Who to engage	Identifies potential stakeholders, such as residents, business owners, ratepayers, community groups and clubs and those who work or participate in leisure activities in the municipality
Monitoring, evaluation and review	Outlines monitoring and review for all public participation activities, including qualitative and quantitative evaluation
Engagement resources	Lists the resources needed for community engagement, such as staff guides, policies, training, templates, online engagement tools and social media

Source: VAGO.

## Appendix B. Better practice principles and resources for public participation

We also assessed the audited councils' staff guides and handbooks for public participation against our better practice guide. We identified 15 common elements in councils' public participation resources for staff, described in Figure B2.

**Figure B2**  
**Typical elements in councils' public participation resources for staff**

Element	Description
Community engagement checklist	Engagement process checklist to ensure the engagement activity has been properly planned, or guidance on key stages of the public participation process
Community engagement framework	A model the council uses to underpin its public participation activities
Community engagement planning	Considers who needs to be engaged and how, what information needs to be presented, what questions asked and how the information will be collected, used and fed back
Community engagement templates	Document containing the structure of a typical engagement plan
Engagement and communications plan	Describes the engagement activity and the method to be used to collect and distribute information
Engagement reporting	A review of the engagement process, engagement methods, communication methods, evaluation methods, key findings, conclusions and recommendations
Engagement tools and techniques	Wide range of public participation resources
Engaging hard-to-reach groups	Techniques for reaching groups such as newly arrived people, older people, homeless people, Indigenous people, older migrants, children and young people
Evaluation plan	Plan for evaluating the community engagement process
How to engage	Broad range of methods for undertaking community engagement, such as workshops, community meetings, public exhibitions, submissions, social media, surveys, mail-outs, interviews
IAP2 model	Describes how the council applies the IAP2 model
Stakeholder mapping	Identifies stakeholder groups with an interest in the public participation activity
Who to engage	Identifies which stakeholders will be targeted by the public participation activity
Why we engage	Presents the rationale for engaging with the community
When to engage	Outlines the circumstances in which the council will engage

Source: VAGO.

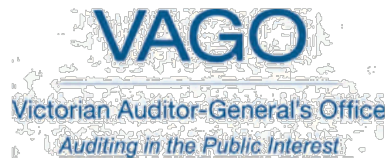


# Auditor-General's reports

## Reports tabled during 2016–17

Report title	Date tabled
Enhancing Food and Fibre Productivity (2016–17:1)	August 2016
Audit Committee Governance (2016–17:2)	August 2016
Meeting Obligations to Protect Ramsar Wetlands (2016–17:3)	September 2016
Efficiency and Effectiveness of Hospital Services: Emergency Care (2016–17:4)	October 2016
High Value High Risk 2016–17: Delivering HVHR Projects (2016–17:5)	October 2016
Security of Critical Infrastructure Control Systems for Trains (2016–17:6)	November 2016
Financial Systems Controls Report: 2015–16 (2016–17:7)	November 2016
Auditor-General's Report on the Annual Financial Report of the State of Victoria, 2015–16 (2016–17:8)	November 2016
Water Entities: 2015–16 Audit Snapshot (2016–17:9)	November 2016
Portfolio Departments and Associated Entities: 2015–16 Audit Snapshot (2016–17:10)	November 2016
Local Government: 2015–16 Audit Snapshot (2016–17:11)	November 2016
Public Hospitals: 2015–16 Audit Snapshot (2016–17:12)	November 2016
Access to Public Dental Services in Victoria (2016–17:13)	December 2016
Managing the Performance of Rail Franchisees (2016–17:14)	December 2016
Managing Community Corrections Orders (2016–17:15)	February 2017
Regulating Gambling and Liquor (2016–17:16)	February 2017
Managing Public Sector Records (2016–17:17)	March 2017
Effectiveness of the Environmental Effects Statement Process (2016–17:18)	March 2017
Managing Victoria's Planning System for Land Use and Development (2016–17:19)	March 2017
Public Participation in Government Decision-Making (2016–17:20)	May 2017

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