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14 May 2015

Dr Ron Ben-David
Chairperson
Essential services Commission
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Dear Ron

Local Government – Rates Capping and Variation Consultation Paper Submission

I would like to congratulate you and your team on the Rates Capping and Variation Consultation Paper released in April, 2015 as it was concise, demonstrated good knowledge of the relevant issues and raised queries on the relevant points to consider to further develop an effective process.

Please find attached the City of Greater Bendigo submission to the paper and I look forward to reviewing the outcomes of this consultation.

Yours sincerely

MICHAEL SMYTH
ACTING DIRECTOR ORGANISATION SUPPORT

Encl.

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LOCAL GOVERNMENT – RATES CAPPING & VARIATION FRAMEWORK

RESPONSE TO CONSULTATION PAPER BY CITY OF GREATER BENDIGO

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the Consultation Paper dated April 2015. The Greater Bendigo City Council makes the following comments.

THE FORM OF THE CAP

1. While a cap based on CPI is simple to understand and apply, are there any issues that we should be aware of?
2. What are some ways to refine the cap (for example, alternative indices), in line with the Government's objectives?
3. Should the cap be set on a single year basis? Is there any merit in providing an annual cap plus indicative caps for the next two to three years to assist councils to adopt a longer term view in their budgeting and planning, particularly when maintaining and investing in infrastructure often takes a longer term perspective? How should such a multi-year cap work in practice?
4. Should the cap be based on historical movements or forecasts of CPI?
5. Should a single cap apply equally to all councils?

Response

It is widely agreed that the rise in Local Government costs is higher than CPI by virtue of the fact that the major types of expenses related to local government are different to the expenses measured by CPI. However, we do recognise that a common and accepted index is essential to ensure the process of rate capping is not overly complicated. Provided a Local Government Cost Index can be substantiated, it would seem to be a fairer method of rate cap. Whichever method is ultimately selected it is essential that the process be transparent.

There is a lot of benefit in setting a multi-year cap. Effective local government planning requires a multi-year approach over a longer term of say up to four years. It is imperative that the Government projects the rate cap for at least a four year period. Advice on the rate cap for a four year period would enable councils to determine whether they can commit to longer term projects, develop accurate and meaningful Strategic Resource Plans and to determine whether in future years they need to prepare to seek an exemption from the cap. Annual provision of advice of the cap by the State Government will be unnecessarily onerous for councils.

Should the government use CPI to inform the level of the rate cap, it will need to consider both historic movements and forecasts to inform the cap, especially if four year caps are set.

It is our view that a single cap can apply equally to all councils, however the effort required, or criteria applied to achieve a variation, should include a number of criteria that may result in the variation process being more straight forward for some councils.

THE BASE TO WHICH THE CAP APPLIES

6. What base should the cap apply to? Does it include rates revenue, service rates/charges, municipal charges and special rates/charges?
7. Should the cap apply to total revenue arising from these categories or on average rates and charges per assessment?
8. How should we treat supplementary rates? How do they vary from council to council?
9. What are the challenges arising from the re-valuation of properties every 2 years?
10. What should the base year be?

<u>Response</u>

If the cap is introduced, it should apply to rate revenue and the municipal charge as both of these are methods to generate general rate revenue. Service charges and special charges are for the purpose of recouping costs related to a specific service. It is not relevant to apply a rate cap to these charges as they operate effectively as a 'user fee' which is applied to either all ratepayers or a group of rate payers for service specified under the *Local Government Act*.

Applying the cap to the total rate revenue (rates and municipal charge), rather than the average rates and charges per assessment, is the most transparent way of applying the cap. The total rate revenue is published in the annual budget documentation as the 'rates levied'. This figure plus the supplementary rates income for the year should be the basis.

In a revaluation year, it can be difficult to explain to residents the impact of the revaluation. This is likely to be compounded if the rate cap is applied to the average rates and charges per assessment.

It is essential that any requirements for a rate cap consider the role of supplementary valuations. Supplementary valuations generally relate to the natural growth of a municipality. A growing city is required to provide additional services to new residents. This may be in the form of the expansion of existing services such as more parks to maintain as a result of new subdivisions, or additional Maternal Health Services due to increased numbers of babies (i.e. higher outputs, or larger quantities), or new services required to be established (e.g. a new culturally sensitive service for a new ethnic grouping). Council's experiencing growth will be severely disadvantaged with rate capping, if supplementary rates are not included in the base on which the cap applies. Therefore, if a cap is to be applied, we strongly support the cap being applied to the total rate revenue for the year which includes supplementary valuations.

Biennial revaluations can cause significant confusion to ratepayers. In a revaluation year, any rate increase can only be applied to the total rate revenue received, not on an individual property due to the fluctuations experienced in valuations. Consideration should be given to extending the revaluation periods to three or four years, to better implement the rate capping policy. This would make the rate capping process more transparent, and would enable council staff to more easily align the rate capping variation process within the existing legislative process, which currently includes a revaluation every two years.

THE VARIATION PROCESS

11. How should the variation process work?
12. Under what circumstances should councils be able to seek a variation?
13. Apart from the exceptions identified by the Government (namely, new infrastructure needs from a growing population, changes in funding levels from the Commonwealth Government, changes in State Government taxes and levies, increased responsibilities, and unexpected incidents such as natural disasters), are there any other circumstances that would justify a case for above cap increases?
14. What should councils need to demonstrate to get a variation approved? What baseline information should be required for councils to request a variation? A possible set of requirements could include:
    - the council has effectively engaged with its community
    - there is a legitimate case for additional funds by the council
    - the proposed increase in rates and charges is reasonable to meet the need
    - the proposed increase in rates and charges fits into its longer term plan for funding and services
    - the council has made continuous efforts to keep costs down.

    We would like stakeholders' views on whether the above requirements are adequate.

2

Response

The variation process must take account of the already extensive legislation in place which councils are required to comply with regarding corporate planning and reporting. Already existing data that is provided to the State Government should be utilised as far as possible to avoid further duplication of process and information collation. The ESC should consider how the recently introduced Local Government Performance Reporting Framework can also assist in the variation process and, further, with the introduction of new requirements around rate capping whether other reporting requirements can either be relaxed or consolidated at state government level. The LGPRF should enable other previously existing reporting to state government to be abolished. Local government has not yet seen the reduction in reporting requirements. The introduction of rate capping is an opportunity to also reduce the existing onerous reporting burden.

The variation process should take account of the council's existing level of rates compared with other like councils. Past financial prudence of councils should be taken into consideration. Those who have been managing rate increases at a reasonable level in the past should not be disadvantaged by this process.

In addition to the circumstances identified by the Government, other circumstances that would justify going beyond the cap include:

1. To maintain long term financial sustainability.

2. For effective long term management of existing infrastructure. In particular the maintenance of civil infrastructure which is generally the asset categories of greatest investment by councils. In respect to the City of Greater Bendigo (COGB):

    - Total current replacement value of Council's asset base is $1.67 billion.
    - Proposed 2015/16 renewal funding is $23M.
    - Currently 2.3% of Council's overall asset base is in a poor and unacceptable condition. It will cost approximately $38M to replace these assets.
    - Assuming 2015/16 levels of renewal and maintenance funding continue for the next 10 years, it is predicted that the percentage of the asset base in an unacceptable condition will rise to 8% by 2024/25. It could cost approx. $134M to replace these assets (based on 2014 values).
    - To maintain 96% of the City's current asset base to an acceptable standard over the next 10 years, an average annual investment into renewal works of $30M and $18M for maintenance is required.
    - The above figures do not include the costs associated with non-Council owned assets, that Council will be expected to maintain and replace in the future.

3. To assist in the economic growth of the municipality or region. The investment by local councils in the creation of assets that effectively increase economic development for the community is significant. The recent publication, Local Government Growing Regional Australia produced by ACLEG in March 2015 for Regional Capitals Australia, outlines the key drivers of development including the importance of human capital, the skills of the people and the quality of the physical infrastructure. The COGB has invested in the amenity of the city through high quality community buildings, in particular for cultural pursuits and recreational activities. The programs run through these assets contribute to the city's vitality through increased visitation, creating immediate economic spin offs for the city. They are also an important catalyst for new residents and commercial investment attracted to the area, therefore diversifying the human capital in the city and improving the local economy for a longer term.

4. To implement State Government policy imperatives. Councils who are assisting in the delivery of specific state government policy imperatives may be undertaking programs and projects

that require additional funding. COGB is focussed on growing regional Victoria; creating an attractive and vibrant region as a realistic alternative option to living and working in the metropolitan area.

5. To meet the community's aspirations. Councils that can demonstrate their communities are expecting services and assets to be of a higher standard than are able to be achieved under a rate cap, should have the opportunity to seek a variation.

The requirements for getting a variation approved suggested in Question 14 (of this paper by the ESC) seem adequate.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

15. What does best practice in community engagement, process and information look like? Are there examples that we can draw from?

Response

It is our view that councils know their own communities best. Rather than stipulating a 'one size fits all' model for community consultation, councils should be given the opportunity to demonstrate the effectiveness of their current community engagement processes.

The City of Greater Bendigo operates under the International Association for Public Participation model which is the basis of our Community Engagement ToolKit used by Council and staff for any given circumstance, which is considered to be best practice.

Any community engagement process should not be focussed on whether further funding is required by council from rates, but rather to understand the community aspirations: what the community needs and wants.

A copy of City of Greater Bendigo's Community Engagement Guidelines and Toolkit is attached.

INCENTIVES

16. How should the framework be designed to provide councils with incentives to pursue ongoing efficiencies and respond to community needs? How could any unintended consequences be minimised?

Response

The extent to which councils must go to seek a variation should depend on the extent of variation sought. We believe a council seeking a variation of say 2% above the rate cap, should be required to demonstrate in more detail, their need for additional funds through rates, than those seeking less than 2%. It is the councils seeking the very high rate increases that the ESC or LGV need to spend the most time on, to understand the justification for the increased variation.

The existing Best Value provisions of the Act may provide a mechanism to guide the continuous improvement process within councils. In order for this to work effectively, the ESC should review the content of the Best Value guidelines.

TIMING AND PROCESS

17. A rates capping and variation process should ensure there is enough time for councils to consult with their ratepayers and for ratepayers to provide feedback, and for us to review councils' applications. To ensure the smooth functioning of the rates capping and variation framework, it is particularly important that it aligns with councils' budget processes. We are interested in stakeholders' views on how this can be achieved.

Response

The current corporate planning process, especially with the new requirement to have the budget adopted by June 30, is already time consuming and complex. Timing of the variation process will need to align with the timing of decision making for councils' plans and budgets. Councils will need to know how any rate cap will affect them, by at least the January before the financial year commences.

As the corporate planning process is already complex, it would be desirable for any rate capping variation process to be a multi-year variation process. This is particularly important to avoid a revaluation year.

TRANSITIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

18. What transitional arrangements are necessary to move to the new rates capping and variation framework? Is there merit in phasing in implementation over a two year period to allow for a smooth transition?

Response

Ideally the transition to the new arrangement should be over two years. All councils will be affected by a general revaluation next year (2016/17). The introduction of the rate cap in any year will require changes to be implemented. It will exacerbate the situation if this occurs in a revaluation year. From the perspective of the ESC or LGV, it would also be difficult to handle all councils seeking a rate cap variation in one year, should this happen.

ROLES

19. What are stakeholders' views on the respective roles of the key participants? Should the Commission's assessment of rates variations be advisory or determinative?

Response

Either ESC or the State Government could be the body to approve the variation, however should the ESC take on this role, over time, it will be important for the ESC to be abreast of changes in the sector and any additional requirements placed on local government that will impact on its rate revenue requirements.

OTHER MATTERS

20. Is there a need for the framework to be reviewed to assess its effectiveness within three years time?
21. How should the costs of administrating an ongoing framework be recovered?

Response

We draw your attention to the submission prepared by Glen Eira City Council which clearly outlines the expenditure that Local Government is incurring due to policy decisions by the State Government:

1. Cost shifting by requiring councils to take responsibility for certain services and assets with little or no funding support,

2. which has resulted in erosion of the real value of government funding of services, over the long-term.

CITY OF GREATER
BENDIGO
Living our potential

Community Engagement
Guidelines and Toolkit

The City of Greater Bendigo will use meaningful and effective communication and engagement with all sectors of the community as an input to decision-making.

April, 2011

April 2011

CONTENT

OVERVIEW

Interaction with our Community

"*For there to be real benefits from citizen engagement, consultation about public policy needs to move beyond the piecemeal and haphazard process which is evident in Australia today. At state and local government levels, in contrast with their federal counterpart, there is considerable evidence if a willingness to engage with citizens rather than merely consult people as users of public services or 'customers'. However while most states and many local governments have developed policies or protocols to facilitate this higher level of consultation, as well as signaling to their communities that such consultations are valued, there are few examples where effective engagement has been established and accepted as a citizen's right. The concept of engagement appears to be valued, perhaps even seen as necessary, but in few instances has the practice yet been accepted as a fundamental right of communities to enable them to assume a formal place in governance*"[1].

What is Community Engagement?

Engagement involves a range of activities that allows community members to be informed of council activities, to be involved with Council in improving the community and to have citizens providing input to Council on local issues.

These activities range form everyday informal discussions, contact with stakeholders during service delivery, group discussions or meeting, formal consultation processes through to Council supporting community members in taking action on issues themselves.

Engagement is not just about discussion and relationships, it leads to real outcomes in communities such as better services, facilities, policy and infrastructure. Engagement can help these outcomes be achieved by community members being more informed of Council direction and activities, being able to have input into some decisions, better understanding Council decisions and priorities and working more collaboratively with Council.

This doesn't mean that engagement is easy. Communities are complex and many issues involve a wide range of stakeholders often with different views. Engagement activities need to incorporate the diversity and dynamics of the community, help different groups deliberate issues constructively and manage potentially conflicting interests.

Why is Community Engagement Important?

Traditionally, local government has relied on the community representation of elected Councillors to ensure that community issues and priorities are reflected in Council activities. This is still crucial, but increasingly community members have an expectation of more direct involvement in providing input to Council priorities, being informed of Council activities, partnering with Council to address issues, and at times, judging Council's performance.

Not only is greater transparency and engagement with community expected, but it also makes good business practice for the Council and it can improve strategic planning and service delivery. Transparency on issues identified by community members, as well as elected Councillors, ensures that Council is addressing the priorities of the community. Citizens informed of Council operations and able to have input in a balanced and appropriate way can lead to community support and collaboration.

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[1] From Citizen Participation to Participatory Governance in Australian Local Government - by Chris Aulich published in the Commonwealth Journal of Local Governance, Issue 2: January 2009

Engagement does not mean that every detail of Council operation is open to community comment or control. Nor does it mean that staff will be distracted from their delivery of services. There are many situations where engagement is not necessary or possible and the Community Engagement Framework clearly identifies these situations.

Indeed, good Community Engagement can improve the effectiveness of services by ensuring that services meet community needs and expectations. There is also potential for collaboration between the community and Council such as joint projects with community groups. By having people informed and involved, good engagement can also reduce complaints and objections. It is also an opportunity to clarify any misunderstandings.

While engagement requires skills, resources and time, if it is planned and conducted well, it can be done efficiently and relatively easily.

Engagement is not new. Council staff and Councillors engage with the community everyday, often informally. This largely carries the Council's relationship with the community. The Community Engagement Framework aims to recognise and support this everyday engagement and make sure that it is enhanced within a broader set of engagement processes.

What Community Engagement is not?

While understanding what successful Community Engagement is and why it is important it is also good to work out what Community Engagement is not:

- about gaining community input when a decision has already been made and citizens can have little or no influence;
- a coercive process that obliges people to agree but about creating opportunities for different parties to reach agreement,;
- a single event or activity but a dynamic relationship that events and activities contribute to; and importantly,
- complete until citizens receive feedback, simply gathering input from people is only part of engagement.

Levels of Engagement

Council and community stakeholders engage each other at different levels on a spectrum of increasing engagement.

Stakeholder Engagement Spectrum				
Information	**Consultation**	**Involvement**	**Collaboration**	**Support**
Communicate information to stakeholders	Seek the opinion of stakeholders	Stakeholders participate in decision-making and action	Stakeholders share decision-making	Support stakeholders to implement their own actions

Low Community Participation   High Community Participation

International

The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) has developed the Public Participation Spectrum to demonstrate the possible types of engagement with stakeholders and communities. The spectrum also shows the increasing level of public impact as you progress from 'inform' through to 'empower'.

INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
Public Participation Goal:				
To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problems, alternatives and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public 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.
Promise to the Public:				
We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for direct advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.
Example Tools:				
• Fact Sheets • Web sites • Open houses • Media releases • Project Bulletins	• Public comment • Focus groups • Surveys • Public meetings • Targeted feedback eg specific stakeholders	• Workshops • Project/strategy planning • Steering Committees	• Citizen Advisory Committees • Consensus-building • Participatory decision-making • Sec 86 Committees	• Citizen juries • Ballots • Delegated decisions.

Level of Engagement

Level of Engagement	Aim	Role of Engager
Information - sharing is a one-way relationship in which information is disseminated to the community.	To provide citizens with balanced and objective information to assist their understanding or reaching solutions	To keep stakeholders informed.
Consultation is where a stakeholder, such as government, seeks the views of citizens on policies, programs and services. Consultation largely involves gaining stakeholder views on proposals or issues. A limited number of options are usually available and people are being engaged to determine which option they prefer.	To obtain citizen and stakeholder feedback on analysis, alternatives and decisions	To keep stakeholders informed. To listen to and acknowledge concerns Input to final decision To provide feedback on how stakeholders' input influenced decisions
Involvement is a situation where issues and solutions are unclear and citizens and government are involved in shaping policy, programs and services. Ultimately, the final policy or solution may be finally determined by one party, such as government.	To work directly with citizens and stakeholders throughout the process to ensure that issues and concerns are consistently understood and considered	To ensure that the concerns and issues of stakeholders is directly reflected in the alternatives developed Provide feedback on how stakeholder input influenced decisions
Collaboration is a situation where issues and solutions are unclear and Council and stakeholders work together with equal power and influence to identify and shape solutions. Collaboration is a partnership between stakeholders to identify and develop preferred alternatives. Ultimately, the final decision may be determined by Council.	To share decision-making power with stakeholders to develop agreed conditions and actions	To work with stakeholders in an equal partnership and to help facilitate jointly agreed action
Empowerment - Support for Community Action is a situation where community stakeholders are already making progress on issues. Power is shared in a true partnership and "external" stakeholders such as government agencies support and assist community stakeholders in conducting their own actions and services.	To share decision-making power and in each aspect of the situation including the development of alternatives and how to achieve action with other stakeholders	To work with stakeholders in an equal partnership and to help facilitate joint action.

Purpose and Objectives of the Community Engagement Framework

The objectives of the Community Engagement Framework is to establish a clear rationale that guides the approach and the way CoGB engages with the community, The objectives of the Community Engagement Framework will be to establish consistent and strategically targeted processes for Community Engagement and ensure those processes are implemented by CoGB staff and external consultants. The Framework will also take into account the legislative requirements for consultation such as notices of application for a planning permit.

Application of the Framework will enable improved decision making based on increased knowledge of community needs, aspirations and strengths. This will also help in targeting CoGB resources and service priorities. Processes will ensure that the community is kept informed of decisions emanating from Community Engagement.

A Community Engagement Framework will be relevant to many activities undertaken by the CoGB. This framework will provide the community with a clear policy statement and guidelines for how the CoGB will engage with it. The framework will enable Council to implement its commitment in the Council Plan to '*use meaningful and effective communication & engagement with all sectors of the community as an input to decision making*'.

Deliberate Consultation activities

The City of Greater Bendigo's Council Plan values are to work with the community and business, displaying leadership in decision making in an open manner, and basing decisions on sound information. To achieve the values, Strategic, Capital and Major Projects etc require the community to be engaged in the development of the project, have input into decision-making. This helps identify emerging issues and can tests ideas

Communication and Media Policy

The objective of this policy is that in order to build positive and lasting partnerships with the community effective two-way communication is required. The Policy commits Council to developing communication policies, practices and resources to:

- Inform the community on Council decisions, services, programs and initiatives;
- Promote accessibility;
- Promote transparency and accountability of Council's decision-making processes;
- Promote opportunities for public participation in Council activities and processes; and
- Build city pride through a positive image of the City of Greater Bendigo.

In all forms of communication, including verbal, printed and electronic, City of Greater Bendigo Councillors and staff are expected to adhere to the highest standards of ethical practice and professional competence.

Customer Service Strategy & Charter

The purpose of the Customer Service Charter is to clearly set out, what the customer can expect from the organisation in so far as accessibility, standards of service and how to obtain information, as well as how to complain if they are aggrieved by a lack of service.

Small Towns

The objectives of the Small Towns Community Planning process, is the development of Community Plans that are based on a shared vision for the future and include prioritised actions that the community has agreed on and prepared to act on.

Individual contacts Staff and Councillors - Customer Service Charter

Relationships with the Community Engagement Framework

DOCUMENT	RELATIONSHIP WITH COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FRAMEWORK
City of Greater Bendigo **Community Engagement Framework**	Provides the framework to undertake Community Engagement within the City of Greater Bendigo by Councillors, staff and consultants.
• City of Greater Bendigo Community Engagement **Policy**	Underpins the Community Engagement Framework. Provides a clear policy statement
• City of Greater Bendigo Community Engagement **Guidelines**	Provides the guidelines to ensure that the community is aware and empowered to participate in civic life and provides transparent and accountable procedures for how the City of Greater Bendigo will engage with the community.
• City of Greater Bendigo Community Engagement **Toolkit**	Provides the tools so that appropriate, relevant, strategic and consistent Community Engagement is undertaken across the organisation.
Greater Bendigo Community Plan Vision	Community Engagement Framework (Policy, Guidelines and Toolkit) are key elements in implementing the +25 Community Vision, *A progressive and vibrant provincial capital, Greater Bendigo draws life and inspiration from its heritage, the unique Box-Ironbark Forest, the land and its people.* *We value the diversity and creativity of our urban and rural communities.*
• **District Planning Process**	Uses the principles of Community Engagement combined with a community development approach in which communities are empowered to develop their own vision for the future and identify a prioritised action plan to work towards achieving that vision.
City of Greater Bendigo Council Plan - Vision	Community Engagement Framework (Policy, Guidelines and Toolkit) are key elements in implementing the stated Vision of City of Greater Bendigo as the 'best place to live, work and visit'.
City of Greater Bendigo **Communication and Media Policy**	Links closely with the Community Engagement Framework by providing overarching principles of communication and media to be used by Greater Bendigo City Council.
City of Greater Bendigo **Customer Service Strategy**	Outlines the Council's commitment to exemplary customer service, of which engagement is an integral part.

Forms of Engagement

Forms of Engagement	Level	Tools
Political - elected Councillors representing the views of constituents.	Information, consultation and involvement	Community Engagement Framework, Communication and Media Policy, Code of Conduct
Partnership - joint activities, supporting community-based initiatives and encouraging community cohesion.	Involvement	Community Engagement Framework
District Planning - Empowering Communities to plan their own future.	Information to Empowerment	District Planning Process, Community Engagement Framework
Community Involvement - community involvement/input planning, works and services.	Consultation, Involvement	Community Engagement Framework
Consultation - on specific issues associated with works, services and processes.	Consultation	Community Engagement Framework
Information provision - informing community members and other stakeholders of community and council activities. (Communication and Media Policy)	Information	Community Engagement Framework, Communication and Media Policy
Complaints - receiving and responding to complaints in a timely and effective way. (Customer Service Charter)	Involvement	Customer Service Strategy
Day to Day - front desk, phone enquiries, community events, media and newsletters, day to day contact between staff and community.	Information, Consultation	Customer Service Charter

Community Engagement Guidelines

CITY OF GREATER BENDIGO COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

Introduction

In May 2010 the Council resolved to approve the purpose and objectives of a proposed Community Engagement Framework for the City of Greater Bendigo as well as the process for its preparation and intended outcomes.

That report identified that while City of Greater Bendigo currently undertakes a wide range of Community Engagement and there is considerable expertise and experience already within the organisation, the development of a Community Engagement Framework would affirm the City of Greater Bendigo's commitment to Community Engagement and consolidate and enhance its practice.

The process endorsed by Council to undertake the Community Engagement Framework was to:
1. Conduct an audit on when, why and how the CoGB currently engages with the community.
2. Identify all the types of opportunities for CoGB engagement with the community.
3. Review national and international best practice on Community Engagement.
4. Development of a Community Engagement Framework which would ensure an informed, effective, consistent strategic approach to Community Engagement.

In the development of the Community Engagement Framework it was important to establish a definition of Community Engagement:

What is Community Engagement?

Engagement involves a range of interactions with community members allowing citizens to:
- be informed of Council activities;
- be involved with Council in improving the community;
- have citizens providing input on local issues; and
- help make decisions.

These interactions range from everyday informal discussions, contact with stakeholders during service delivery, group discussions or meetings, formal consultation processes through to Council supporting community members in taking action on issues themselves.

Engagement is not just about discussion and relationships, it leads to real outcomes such as better services, facilities, policy and infrastructure. Engagement can help these outcomes to be achieved with community members:
- being more informed of Council direction and activities,
- able to have input into some decisions;
- have a better understanding of Council decisions and priorities;
- working more collaboratively with Council;
- not a coercive process that obliges people to agree but creating opportunities for different parties to reach agreement; and
- a dynamic relationship that events and activities contribute to, not a single event or activity.

Communities are complex, have many differing issues and involve a wide range of stakeholders with varying views. Community Engagement needs to incorporate and respond to the diversity

and dynamics of the community, facilitate constructive deliberation of issues, and manage potentially conflicting interests.

Why is Community Engagement Important?

Citizens expect greater transparency, accountability, and engagement. This is good business practice, improving strategic planning and service delivery. The increasing expectation of citizens to be more directly involved in providing input to Council priorities ensures:

* more citizens are informed of Council activities, and
* more citizens partnering with Council to address issues and at times judging Council's performance.

Citizens who are informed of Council operations and able to have input in a balanced and appropriate way can generate community support and collaboration. This also ensures that services meet the community needs and expectations. Informed and involved citizens may lead to reduced complaints and objections.

What Community Engagement is Not

While understanding what successful Community Engagement is and why it is important, it is also good to work out what Community Engagement is not:

* about gaining community input when a decision has already been made and citizens can have little or no influence;
* complete until citizens receive feedback, simply gathering input from people is only part of engagement;
* making the decision;
* one size fits all, has to be designed for the issue and audience;
* always easy, as there are often multiple options;
* every individual resident getting exactly what they want; and
* consensus.

Engagement does not mean that every detail of Council operation is open to community comment or control. Nor does it mean that staff will be distracted from their delivery of services. There are many situations where engagement is not necessary. A strategic approach to Community Engagement will clearly identify these situations.

The preparation of a Community Engagement Policy is the first step as part of the preparation and implementation of a Community Engagement Framework. A Community Engagement Framework will apply to all aspects of Community Engagement at the City of Greater Bendigo.

Community Engagement Framework

Interaction with our community is happening daily and in various ways and means. A Community Engagement Framework has been developed to identify the extent and context in which the CoGB interacts with its community.
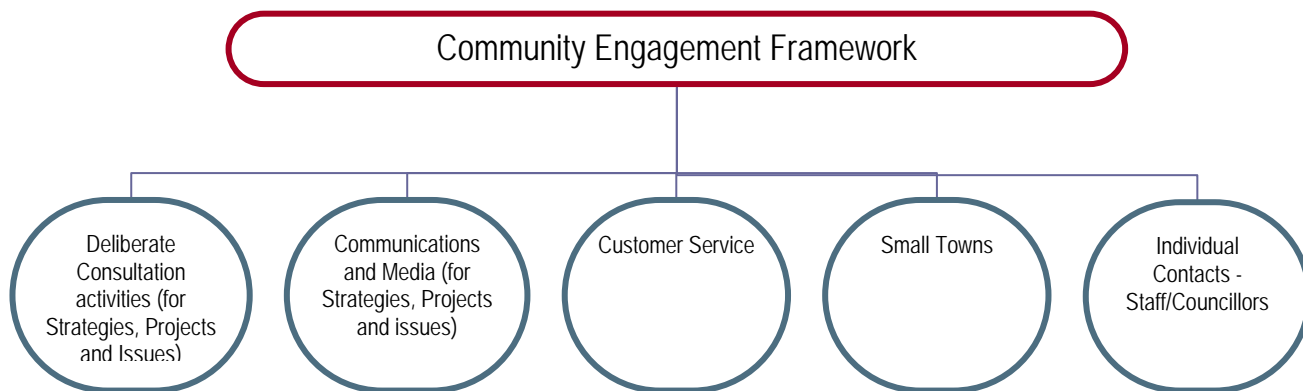
Community Engagement Policy

The purpose of this policy is to detail Greater Bendigo's commitment to effective and relevant community engagement. For the City of Greater Bendigo (CoGB) Community Engagement embraces ongoing dialogue with our communities to improve decision making processes through inclusive, accessible and responsive community participation.

This policy applies to Councillors, staff and consultants responsible for Community Engagement undertaken for or on behalf of the CoGB.

Community Engagement at the CoGB occurs before a decision is made except when informing the community about the change. It encompasses formal, planned opportunities for participation in exploratory, capacity building or decision making processes; information delivery or sharing; the informal building of networks and relationships; and individual interactions between the organisation and residents.

Policy

It is policy that, undertaking Community Engagement encourages practices within CoGB that can result in:

- Residents knowing when and how CoGB will consult with them and when Council needs to make a decision on their behalf;
- The CoGB Community being well-informed about issues, strategies or plans that may directly or indirectly affect them;
- Councillors, Council staff and consultants engaged by CoGB engaging effectively and appropriately within the community when making decisions or forming policies and plans; and
- Community Engagement being appropriate, designed for task and audience across all areas of Council.

To achieve this Community Engagement, in the City of Greater Bendigo is underpinned by the following guiding principles: Sincere intent; Focus; Inclusiveness, accessibility and diversity; Provision of information and feedback; Timing; Responsiveness and transparency; Evaluation; and Resourcing.

Appendix A - Is a detailed version of the City of Greater Bendigo's Community Engagement Policy.

Decision Making Framework

Community Engagement underpins the Council values as expressed in the Council Plan 2009/2013 (updated 2010); *Council will achieve its vision by working with the community and business, displaying leadership in its decision making, operating in an open manner and basing decisions on sound information.*

The framework for decision making framework for Community Engagement undertaken by CoGB can be identified/grouped in four main stages:
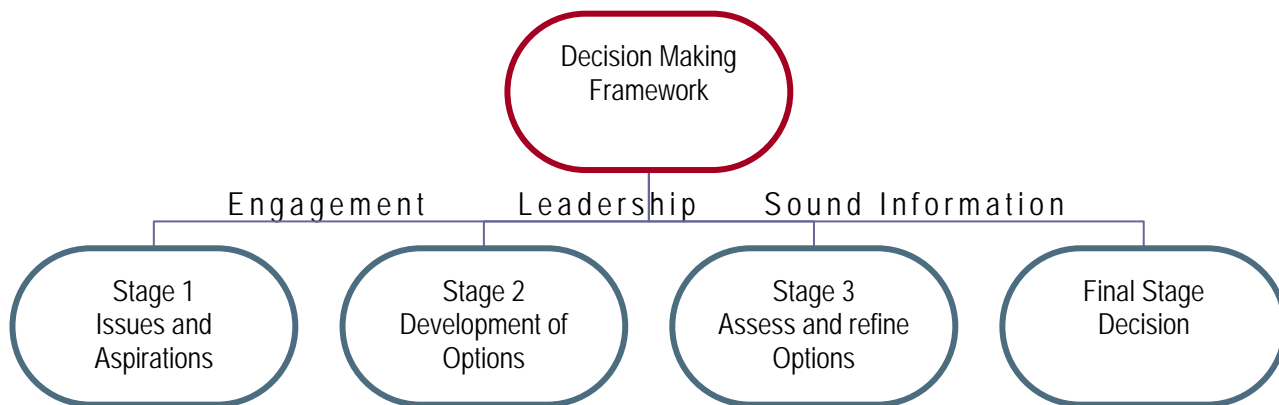
Community Engagement, leadership and sound information will be part of each stage of the decision making framework.

Community Engagement Guidelines and Toolkit

The Community Engagement Guidelines and Toolkit will be developed for use by staff and will be designed to support the Community Engagement Policy. These guidelines and toolkit will provide the 'how to' of effective Community Engagement processes.   A tick-a-box guide to prompt assessment of engagement needs and appropriate responses.   It will provide consistency, accountability and transparency in the practice of the Community Engagement Policy across CoGB.

Purpose of guidelines

These guidelines have been developed for use by staff, and are designed to support the Community Engagement Policy (Appendix A) adopted by on November 10, 2010. The guidelines provide the 'how to' of effective Community Engagement processes.

DO I NEED TO DO COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT?

Is Community Engagement necessary for your project or issue? One way of determining whether or not Community Engagement is necessary is by considering the following:

"Will there be a CHANGE in the level of existing environment, space, accessibility, convenience, or the actual provision of a service to the community?"

NO - If the answer is 'no' there may be no need to develop and implement a Community Engagement Plan. It may still be necessary to 'inform' relevant community members or groups, as appropriate, particularly if there is a perceived level of change from a community perspective. For example: an annual fee increase, changes to a garbage route/times.

YES - If the answer is yes, these Guidelines are for you! The steps that follow will help you to:
- clarify the decision that needs to be made;
- determine the type of Community Engagement that will be appropriate;
- design and undertake a Community Engagement process;
- undertake an evaluation; and
- clearly communicate 'next steps'.

Other considerations

What is the broader context of the project or issue at hand? When determining whether or not Community Engagement is necessary, consider the following:
- Is there a history associated with the project or issue that may impact on the current situation?
- Does the project or issue have the potential to become highly politicised?
- Is there an opportunity to build or maintain a positive relationship through engaging proactively and openly with a section of the community?
- Is there a chance that there will be considerable public outrage if the community is displeased with, or feels no ownership over, the outcome?

Where to start...
A Checklist has been developed to assist you with planning Community Engagement processes.
Appendix B).

Overview of Community Engagement Phases

Phase 1 – Planning your Community Engagement	Phase 2 – Designing and implementing your Engagement Plan	Phase 3 – Reporting and Evaluation
- Clarify the decision - Define objectives - Gather background information - Plan for participation - Select a level of engagement	- Select techniques - Decision maker approval - Develop an action plan - Establish evaluation measures - Action! -Run the Community Engagement session	- Collate and analyse information - Prepare feedback for participants - Report to decision makers

PHASE 1 – PLANNING YOUR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PLAN

Clarify the decision & define objectives

Prior to any Community Engagement process, it is necessary to clearly articulate the purpose of the Community Engagement process, including the formation of a 'Decision Statement'. This is a sentence that is acceptable to you and other stakeholders (managers, decision makers and the community). Can you clearly identify the decision that needs to be made?

> **What can I do?**
> Use the Checklist to:
> **Identify your project/issue/task** in a sentence or two.
> • Clearly state the **Decision** that needs to be made.

Before embarking on a Community Engagement process, it is vital that you are clear about the purpose of the process. What do you need to have by the end? What do other stakeholders require? What do you want the participants' experience to be?

> **What can I do?**
> Use the Checklist to:
> • Identify your **Aims;** the practical purpose of your engagement process, as well as the experience you are trying to create for participants.

After you have clarified the decision, consider the type of decision that needs to be made. Are there elements that are non-negotiable? Are you asking community members to explore ideas (open community engagement), or respond to set criteria or options (closed Community Engagement?) It is important to clarify these parameters at the start, and make these clear to all participants at the commencement of the Community Engagement process.

> **What can I do?**
> Use the Checklist to:
> • Identify whether your Community Engagement process will be 'open' or 'closed' and ensure the parameters of negotiable and non-negotiable elements are documented;
> • Consider the **Level of Risk and Impact** of your project or issue; and
> • Consider the amount of time and resources available to you to undertake a Community Engagement process – discuss options with your supervisor if required.

Gather and record background information

Who are the people who need to be involved, or who may consider themselves involved? What are their key issues or interests relating to your issue or project? Even for a small Community Engagement process it can be useful to undertake a quick stakeholder analysis to gauge an initial picture of potential responses. For larger processes, a stakeholder analysis may be pivotal to your planning and implementation process.

> **What can I do?**
> Use the Checklist to:
> • Identify the specific stakeholders affected by your issue or project;
> • Use the Stakeholder Analysis template (see Appendix C) to review the various players in more detail, if required; and
> • Gather any other relevant background data.

Planning for participation

It is important to have the right advice and support along the way - have you thought about who needs to be involved in the planning and running of your Community Engagement process? You've completed your stakeholder list; now you also need to consider who specifically can participate in the process.

What can I do?
Use the checklist to:
- Identify who needs to be involved in the planning of your process;
- Identify who will take the lead role in facilitating the process; and
- Identify who can participate in the process – refer to your stakeholder list.

Select a level of Community Engagement

The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) identifies and defines various levels of Community Engagement. The following spectrum depicts these different levels and your promise to the people you will engage with.

IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation

Increasing level of public impact

	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Public Participation Goal:	To provide balanced and objective information to assist understanding of topic, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work with the public throughout the process to ensure that concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including development of alternatives and identification of preferred solution.	To place final decision making in the hands of the public.
Promise to the Public:	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how 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 input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for direct advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.
Example techniques	Fact sheets. Web sites. Open Days.	Public comment. Focus Groups. Surveys.	Workshop. Deliberate polling.	Citizen Advisory Committee.	Citizen juries Ballots. Delegated decisions.

What can I do?
Use the checklist to:
- Help identify the Level of Participation required for your project or issue; and
- If required, use the Strategic Engagement Plan template to outline in detail who will be involved at different levels of participation.

PHASE 2 – DESIGNING AND IMPLEMENTING YOUR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PLAN

Select suitable techniques for Community Engagement

Choosing a suitable technique is an important part of planning a successful Community Engagement process. With that in mind, any number of techniques may be appropriate for your project or issue - there is generally more than one 'right' option. Refer to your responses in the Checklist relating to the level (from the IAP2 spectrum) and type (open/closed) of Community Engagement, and then consult the Matrix of Techniques located at Appendix D.

What can I do?
- Consider the resourcing and time required for different levels of community engagement;
- Choose a process/technique using the Matrix of Techniques located at Appendix D.;
- Complete the Strategic Engagement Plan template, located at Appendix E, recording the techniques associated with your chosen levels of participation; and
- For more techniques, check out the Department of Sustainability and Environment's Engagement Toolkit at :
  http://www.dse.vic.gov.au/CA256F310024B628/0/5BEE8070970CF42ACA257085001FEF94/$File/Book+3+-+The+Engagement+Toolkit.pdf

Consider legislative requirements & decision makers

A Community Engagement process will only be useful if decision makers are aware of, and endorse, its use. Community Engagement processes can raise community expectations; this can have a negative impact when processes are undertaken and then ignored by decision makers. This does not mean decision makers will necessarily commit to adopting the community perspective or recommendation. Rather, working with decision makers prior to undertaking the Community Engagement process can ensure that you develop an appropriate level and type of Community Engagement process for each project or issue. This will also enable you to clearly communicate the purpose of the engagement, and how the resulting community input or feedback will be used in the decision making process. In addition, it is necessary to ensure that any process is in line with Council's relevant legislative requirements.

What can I do?
Use the checklist to:
- Document the **decision makers you need to gain support from.** Ensure your manager/EMT/Council (as appropriate) supports the use of your proposed Community Engagement for this project; and
- Ensure that the process is in line with relevant legislative requirements.

Develop an Action Plan for implementation

The next step is to design the practical Community Engagement process itself. Use the Operational Engagement Plan template (Appendix F) to document:

- The engagement type;
- Tool(s) or activity(ies) to be used;
- Stakeholder(s) involved at each level;
- Resources required;
- Task delegation - who is responsible for each step?; and
- Facilitation and additional support.

What can I do?
- Using the information you have collated on the Checklist, complete the Operational Engagement Plan, and distribute to those involved.

Communication methods

If your Community Engagement Plan is based solely on non face-to-face communication (letters, surveys etc), refer to the Matrix of Techniques (Appendix D) for some advice on opportunities and pitfalls of these methods. Ensure that the methods you have chosen match the level of participation you have planned. Also see Council's Communications Policy for advice.

What can I do?
- Speak with the Communications Team Leader on 5434 6298 or c.earl@bendigo.vic.gov.au for assistance with media and communications distribution.
- Seek assistance with survey design to ensure you are asking the 'right' questions, to lead to the type of answers you need.

Public gatherings: Workshops/forums/meetings

If your Community Engagement Plan incorporates any type of public gathering, you will need to consider how the session will run. The facilitation of your public gathering is vital to the success of your overall Community Engagement process. Planning to ensure your event is inclusive, participatory, consistent with your Community Engagement aims, and relevant to the topic are all necessary elements of a well facilitated public event. Sometimes it will be appropriate for you to run the session yourself, other times you may need someone else to do it. At times it is best to have a facilitator who is independent of Council. This will allow you to separate the content and process, and to maintain the integrity of the process in a controversial or high pressure situation.

Facilitation

Appropriate facilitation can make or break your Community Engagement process. If you're planning to facilitate the session yourself, why not plan it with a colleague, or ask for some feedback on your plan? Sharing your ideas before the event will help you to clarify the purpose and ensure that your approach will be inclusive and engaging. There are a number of staff who have undertaken an intensive facilitation training course and are available to assist you. Contact the Community Engagement Working Group.

Establish evaluation measures

It is important to evaluate your Community Engagement process for a number of reasons:

- To determine the success of the process;
- To determine the success of the outcome;
- To learn from the process and reflect on any changes that you could make for next time;
- For organisational learning about 'what works' in Community Engagement for different situations; and
- To demonstrate links between processes and outcomes.

The checklist contains a section to assist in considering how to evaluate your Community Engagement process. For a larger Community Engagement process, it may be appropriate to undertake a full evaluation of the process. Appendix G has an Evaluation Plan template that can be used for this purpose.

<div style="border:1px solid #900; padding:10px;">

What can I do?

- Consider how important evaluation of the process will be for the project, and what type of evaluative data is required for whom;
- Use the Checklist to develop some Evaluation Objectives for your engagement process; and
- Use the Evaluation Plan template if you require a more comprehensive evaluation plan (for larger or more long term projects).

</div>

Action!

After all the planning and preparation, you're now ready for the 'doing'! A few last minute things to think about:

- If your Community Engagement includes a gathering:
  - Confirm the venue/catering/equipment is all booked, and that any assistance with set up etc is organised;
  - Think about the set up of the space you are using – try to make it;
  - comfortable, welcoming, inclusive and interesting;
  - Greet people as they arrive and ensure everyone has a name tag; and
  - Start and finish on time.

"The People who come/contribute are the right People!" – this principle is one to embrace for all your Community Engagement. Focus on the people who are contributing their time; give them your full attention and value their input.

PHASE 3 – EVALUATION AND REPORTING

Collate and analyse information

This phase is a great time for reflection and learning. Prior to the commencement of your Community Engagement process, you would have identified your aims and the type of data needed to assess the process. Council/decision makers/managers will be interested in the evaluative data you collect relating to your Community Engagement process, and it will also be an opportunity for you to capture what you have learnt about the process.

What can I do?
- Compile the data you have obtained (as per your evaluation questions or plan).

Prepare a Feedback Report for stakeholders

It is important for participants to know before the process commences how their input/feedback will be used. Equally as important is informing participants about how they themselves will receive feedback about their involvement in the process, and the resulting outcome or decision. Collect participant contact details and provide feedback in a timely manner (within 2-3 weeks of end of engagement process). To maintain the integrity of the process and to ensure transparency, where possible give participants access to a copy of the notes that represent the feedback/input they gave to the process. Maintain contact if the project or issue is ongoing, and provide updates to participants as appropriate.

> When collecting personal information, you need to ensure you comply with the Information Privacy Act. View the Principles at
> http://www.privacy.vic.gov.au/dir100/priweb.nsf/content/AAF32B312EE4BE7BCA256C4D000EF235?OpenDocument
> Contact Michael Smyth for details, on 5434 6121 or m.smyth@bendigo.vic.gov.au

What can I do?
- Give participants access to the notes that were taken based on their feedback, and give them an opportunity to correct/clarify if necessary.
- Document the results/outcomes and make them available to participants.
- Use the checklist to document how you will pass these findings to participants, and continue to provide updates if appropriate.

Prepare a Report for decision makers

Inform Council or decision makers of the way the process was undertaken as well as the outcome. If you are required to complete a Council Report or Brief following your project ensure that your Community Engagement Plan and Evaluation Plan are included in the 'Community Engagement' section.

What can I do?
- Brief Council or relevant decision makers on the outcome of the process. It is important to ensure you reflect both on the process used and the outcome obtained.
- Celebrate! You've completed your Community Engagement process – don't forget to congratulate yourself and your team, and always take the time to acknowledge the successes you have had. Well done!

APPENDICES

- Appendix A -Community Engagement Policy
- Appendix B -Community Engagement Checklist
- Appendix C -Stakeholder Analysis Template
- Appendix D -Matrix of Techniques
- Appendix E -Strategic Engagement Plan
- Appendix F -Operational Engagement Plan
- Appendix G -Community Engagement Evaluation Template
- Appendix I -Role of Councillors in Community Engagement

Appendix A - City of Greater Bendigo Community Engagement Policy

Approval Date:	
Review Date: (Generally two years)	
Author:	**Lindy Wilson,** Social Planner
Responsible Director:	**Prue Mansfield,** Director Planning and Development

1.   PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to detail Greater Bendigo's commitment to effective and relevant community engagement. For the City of Greater Bendigo (CoGB) Community Engagement embraces ongoing dialogue with our communities to improve decision making processes through inclusive, accessible and responsive community participation.

1.   Community Engagement is defined as 'a way to improve communities by identifying and addressing local ideas, concerns and opportunities by involving the public in certain processes that affect them and their community'.

2.   CoGB aims to be recognised as open and honest with the community it represents, willing to listen to and value what residents have to say about an issue. On a daily basis, CoGB makes decisions which affect the lives of its residents. One of the mechanisms CoGB uses from time to time to interact with its community is community engagement.

3.   Community Engagement does not replace the decision-making functions of Council, or the organisation, but informs it.

4.   While it is not possible to consult with the community on every issue, CoGB would like to ensure that the community is as well informed as it can be on major issues, plans and projects, has the necessary factual information to form an opinion and has opportunities through Community Engagement to enhance Council's decision-making.

2.   BACKGROUND

Community Engagement plays a vital role in assisting Councillors and CoGB staff to work together with communities and other stakeholders to achieve the stated Vision of Council as the best place to live, work and visit where:
* growth and living standards are managed to sustain and enhance quality of life.
* a regional culture of learning, creativity, and innovation allows people to flourish.
* its rich natural and cultural heritage is conserved for today and tomorrow.
* resilience, local spirit and identity are proudly celebrated.

Community Engagement underpins the Council values as expressed in Council Plan 2009/2013 (updated 2010); *Council will achieve its vision by working with the community and business, displaying leadership in its decision making, operating in an open manner, and basing decisions on sound information.*

Engagement involves a range of activities that allow citizens:

- to be informed of CoGB activities;
- to be involved with Council in improving the community;
- to provide input to Council on local issues; and
- to help make decisions.

Engagement allows CoGB to:
- gather information, data and facts.
- gather a range of opinions.
- understand better the opportunities and concerns.
- learn about unintended consequences.
- building alliances and relationships for the future.
- bring different groups together for a common outcome.
- think about how to address/minimise impacts.

These activities range from everyday informal discussions, contact with stakeholders during service delivery, group discussions or meetings, formal consultation processes, through to CoGB supporting community members in taking action on issues themselves.

Engagement is not just about discussion and relationships; it leads to real outcomes in communities such as better services, facilities, policy and infrastructure. Engagement can help these outcomes be achieved by community members being more informed of CoGB direction and activities, being able to have input into some decisions, better understanding CoGB decisions and priorities and working more collaboratively with CoGB.

Engagement does not mean that every detail of CoGB operation is open to community comment or control. Nor does it mean that staff will be distracted from their delivery of services. There are many situations where engagement is not necessary and a Community Engagement Framework will clearly identifies these situations.

3.   SCOPE
This policy applies to Councillors, staff and consultants responsible for Community Engagement undertaken for or on behalf of the CoGB.

Community Engagement at the CoGB occurs before a decision is made. It encompasses formal, planned opportunities for participation in exploratory, capacity building or decision making processes; information delivery or sharing; and the informal building of networks and relationships; and individual interactions between the organisation and residents.

4.   POLICY
It is policy that, in undertaking Community Engagement encourages practices within CoGB that can result in:
(a)   Residents knowing when and how CoGB will consult them and when Council needs to make a decision on their behalf.
(b)   The CoGB Community being well-informed about issues, strategies or plans that may directly or indirectly affect them.
(c)   Councillors, Council staff and consultants engaged by CoGB engaging effectively and appropriately within the community when making decisions or forming policies and plans.
(d)   Community Engagement being appropriate, designed for task and audience across all areas of activities.
(e)   Active, informed and engaged citizens

Community Engagement in the City of Greater Bendigo is underpinned by the following guiding principles and commitments.

Guiding Principles City of Greater Bendigo supports the guiding principles of:	CoGB Commitment Based on the principles, CoGB commits to the following:
Sincere intent	• CoGB will be upfront and explain the level of influence the community can have in the Community Engagement processes and will highlight the negotiable and non-negotiable elements of any community engagement.
Focus	• Each Community Engagement will have a clear focus which is available and understood by all. • All critical planning processes the city undertakes (ie Council Plan, Budget, Strategic Plans, major projects or significant changes to service delivery) a Community Engagement plan will be developed and effectively resourced.
Inclusiveness, accessibility and diversity	• CoGB will facilitate a diverse range of perspectives to be heard, and will actively seek to gain a broad representation of views when undertaking engagement processes. • CoGB recognises that there are a number of groups within the community who have particular requirements to enable them to participate effectively in consultative and decision-making processes. These groups include:- the aged, youth, parents/one parent family/carers with child care needs, people with disabilities; people from different religious and cultural backgrounds as well as people with language barriers.
Provision of information and feedback	• Sufficient, easy to read and accessible information will be provided to ensure the participants are given the opportunity to provide informed input to the engagement. • People participating in the Community Engagement process will be advised of progress on issues of interest or concern and on the outcome.
Timing	• CoGB will ensure that Community Engagement is timed so that the results are able to influence the policy, planning and decision-making process.
Responsiveness and transparency	• CoGB is committed to open and transparent Community Engagement with its communities, to enable them to have a more meaningful role in Council's planning and prioritisation processes. • CoGB will ensure participants know at the start of the Community Engagement how their input will be used.

Evaluation	• CoGB will monitor and evaluate the Community Engagement process, to assess whether the goals of the consultation process have been achieved.
Resourcing	• The effective resourcing of the Community Engagement will be identified and considered at the beginning of the engagement process. • CoGB will support staff to continue to develop capacity and gain confidence to engage effectively with communities.

5. ATTACHMENTS
CoGB Community Engagement Framework
CoGB Decision Making Framework

6. REFERENCES
Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities
The City of Greater Bendigo has observed the freedoms, rights and responsibilities outlined in The Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities in the development of this policy.
Local Government Act 1989
The City of Greater Bendigo has observed the requirements outlined in the Local Government Act 1989 in the development of this policy. Specifically sections '223 Right to make submission'. And the **Local Government (Best Value Principles) Act 1999** specifically 'Section 208B(e)', which states 'a Council must develop a program of regular consultation with its community in relation to the services it provides'.
UN Brisbane Declaration
The Brisbane Declaration on Community Engagement has drawn on a number of sources for global definitions and aspirations for Community Engagement including the **International Association of Public Participation's (IAP2) core values**. The process of developing the Declaration aimed to act as a catalyst for mobilising the global community and developing common understanding, shared visions and goals.

Appendix B - Community Engagement Checklist

Name of Project/Issue/Task:	Date:_____ Proposed date of Community Engagement:
Contact person:	Team/Unit:

PHASE 1 Planning for Community Engagement

<table>
<tr>
<td>Identifying the project/issue/task

Further info on page 16</td>
<td colspan="3">In a sentence or two, describe the project/issue/task:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td colspan="3">Identify the proposed changes to the level of service to the community from the project/issue/task:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td colspan="3">In one sentence, identify the DECISION that needs to be made:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify the aims of the engagement

Further info on page 16</td>
<td colspan="3">Identify the practical purpose of the engagement process (ie. What do you want to have by the end – a decision/document/ commitment/next step etc):

Identify the experience you would like the participants to take away from the process (ie. Feeling heard, seeing their input influence a decision, a clear understanding of the issues, hearing different perspectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will the Community Engagement be 'open' or 'closed'?

Further info on page 16</td>
<td>Open .... ☐
An open Community Engagement process allows community members to assist with setting the parameters of the issues relating to the project.</td>
<td>Closed .... ☐
A closed Community Engagement process asked community members to respond to identified solutions, usually with an 'agree' or 'disagree' option.</td>
<td>Other .... ☐

(eg. Elements of both open and closed engagement):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td colspan="3">NOTE: It is important to ensure that community members understand whether or not your engagement process is 'open' or 'closed' and for you to design your process accordingly. For example, do not ask an open question about an issue if you only want a yes or no answer to a set of predetermined solutions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From your perspective, list the possible positive and negative impacts

Further info on page 16</td>
<td>Positive impacts/outcomes:
•_____
•_____
•_____
•_____</td>
<td>Negative impacts/outcomes:
•_____
•_____
•_____
•_____</td>
<td>For the negative impacts, consider the following:
1. What is the potential severity of this impact/outcome occurring?
2. What is the probability of this impact/outcome occurring?
3. What is the possible reach of this impact/outcome within the community?

Consider how these risks might be mitigated:</td>
</tr>
</table>

Consider the level of overall risk: is there likelihood for political sensitivity, community outrage or other harm? Further info on page 16	Level of Risk H M L ?	NB. The higher the risk the greater the need for higher level participation	Consider the level of complexity: is the project/ issue easy to understand or complex in nature?	Level of complexity H M L ?	NB. The more complex the issue, the greater the need for deliberative participation
Who are the specific stakeholders? Tick which of the following community members you think could be affected by this project/issue Further info on page 16	• Permanent Residents • Non-Permanent Residents	Other_____	• Tourists • Volunteers • Staff • Community groups • Business groups • External agencies • Government Departments	• Culturally & Linguistically Diverse • Indigenous Australians • People with Disabilities • Aged • Young families • Early Years	• Students • Youth • Other: • _____ • _____ • _____ • _____ • _____
Who needs to be involved in planning? Consider who's advice or input is required to plan your community engagement. Further info on page 17	I'm happy to do the planning myself (with or without some support) ☐	I'd like to get another Council officer to assist with the planning the process. ☐	An independent external consultant/facilitator should assist with developing the process. ☐	I'm not sure who needs to be involved in the planning (See your supervisor for advice). ☐	
Who needs to be involved in undertaking the process? Consider who will facilitate your engagement process Further info on page 17	I'm happy to do it myself (with or without some support). ☐	I'd like to get another Council officer to assist with the process, so I can focus on content. ☐	An independent external consultant/facilitator should run the process. ☐	I'm not sure who needs to be involved in running the process (See your supervisor for advice). ☐	
Who can participate? Is the process open to all, or are random targeted or representative invites necessary? Further info on page 17	Open to everyone in a given community to participate. ☐	Targeted to certain groups/stakeholders. ☐	Random invites (to gain previously unheard perspectives). ☐	Stratified random sample (to gain perspective representative of wider community). ☐	
Levels of participation. Based on the potential negative impacts and overall risk, and the complexity of the issue, choose an appropriate level of participation. This will assist with the design of your process. Further info on page 17	Inform ……… ☐	Consult ……… ☐	Involve ……… ☐	Collaborate …… ☐	Empower ……… ☐
	Provide balanced & objective information	Seek feedback on alternatives and/or decisions	Work directly with the community during the process to ensure needs are considered	Partner with the community during each aspect of decision making	Final decision making power sits with community
	Promise to keep community informed.	**Promise to** keep community informed, listen to issues & provide feedback as to how input affected the decision.	**Promise to** ensure aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives and provide feedback as to how input affected the decision.	**Promise to** look to the community for advice and incorporate this advice into the alternatives.	**Promise to** implement what the community decides.
Examples of techniques More techniques are available in Appendix D	• Fact sheets • Website • Mail out	• Surveys • Public meetings • Focus groups	• Workshops • Deliberative polling	• Advisory Committees • Consensus building	• Citizens' Jury • Ballots

PHASE 2 Designing and implementing a Community Engagement Plan

Choosing a process/technique Further info on page 18	Go to the Matrix of Techniques in the Community Engagement Guidelines (Appendix D) and select an appropriate technique(s) for the engagement process, as determined by the level of participation you are hoping to achieve. You may choose more than one technique. **Method(s) chosen:**				
Gaining support from decision makers Indicate who you will need to gain approval from Further info on page 18	**I need support from my direct supervisor** ☐	**I need EMT to sign off on the process** ☐		**I need to inform Council/undertake a Council briefing** ☐	**I'm not sure who needs to approve this (see your supervisor for advice)** ☐
Develop an action plan Use your selected techniques to detail a step by step plan. Use this Who, What, When, Where, How framework to list all the things that need to be covered. Further info on page 19	**WHO** (needs to be there, know about it, help out? Etc)	**WHAT** (contribution can people make? etc)	**WHEN** (will it take place, will results be known? Etc)	**WHERE** (should we meet, should we advertise? Etc)	**HOW** (will I communicate, obtain relevant input? Etc)
	There are many people and tools available to assist with this design process. Refer to the Guidelines (page 11) as a starting point.				
Establish Evaluation Measures Use these questions as a guide to assist with developing an evaluation. Further info on page 20 Some larger projects may require a full evaluation plan. See the Evaluation Plan template at Appendix G for more information.	**What needs to happen for this process to be a 'success'?** (Consider the perspectives of both Council and Community/other stakeholders):				
	How will you know if this has been achieved? (ie. the visible signs of 'success'):				
	What data will you need to indicate this? (what will you need to demonstrate the results):				
	How will you collect this data? (participant feedback, surveys, informal discussions etc) :				
	How will you document the learnings (both positive and negative) from this process, for future learning for yourself and others in the Council?				
ACTION! Further info on page 20	You've got objectives, you know your stakeholders and you've thought about how they can participate, you've chosen a technique, developed an action plan and thought about how you'll evaluate once it's all done – the next step is to put all this work into action! Good luck!				

PHASE 3 *Reporting and Evaluation*

Collate and analyse your data (to be completed AFTER the engagement process) Further info on page 21	**Following your Community Engagement process, you will need to collate the data you have obtained, as per your evaluation questions (or Evaluation Plan if you completed one).**
Report to decision makers (to be completed AFTER the engagement process) Further info on page 21	**Use your evaluative data to compile a report that reflects on the process as well as the outcome you obtain. Reflect on the objectives and aims that you set out at the beginning of the Community Engagement process to assess your process. It can be useful to think about and document what you would do differently next time.**

Feedback to participants/stakeholders Communicate the outcomes of the process to participants. Further info on page 21	**Letter/email sent directly to all participants** ☐	**Follow up meeting** ☐	**Website/Groundswell/mass media** ☐	**Other:** _____ ☐
	Note: ensure you obtain relevant contact information and advise participants of how/when you will be communicating with them.			

Is ongoing communication required? Where projects occur after the engagement process, progress updates to be provided. Further info on page 21	**How will you continue to communicate with participants (and the wider community) about the progress of the project?** **Will the implementation of the project sit with another area of Council** Yes ☐ No ☐ **Identify the Units/teams you may need to be in contact with to obtain updated information:**

Notes

_____
_____
_____

Approval/sign off If required, record the agreement between you and your supervisor to undertake this Community Engagement process.	**I will undertake a Community Engagement process as per the information contained in this checklist** **Officer name:** _____ **Officer signature:** _____	**I have read and support the use of this Community Engagement Plan.** **Supervisor Name**: _____ **Supervisor signature:** _____

Appendix C - Community Engagement Stakeholder Analysis

Project Name:		Contact person:						Date:							
Ref no	**Stakeholder**	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
1																
2																
3																
4																
5																
6																
7																
8																
9																
10																
11																
12																
13																
14																
15																

Key

+ = collaborating

x = conflicting

m = mixed

n = neutral

u = unknown

Source: Adapted from Department of Sustainability & Environment,
http://www.dse.vic.gov.au/CA256F310024B628/0/CEC9B0589CAA10C0CA257085001FDCAD/$File/CACHE_DUVIE=eee0b2ff226db24e62b4f4af03332030/Book+2+-+The+Engagement+Planning+Workbook.pdf

Appendix D - Matrix of Techniques

Table 1 – Engagement techniques for INFORM level

Consider techniques for **INFORM** level	Always Think It Through	What Can Go Right	What Can Go Wrong
Printed Materials • Fact Sheets • Newsletter • Media Advertising – local papers • Brochures • Issue Papers	• Keep it short & simple • Make it visually interesting and engaging but not too busy or slick • Proof-read all documents • Ask randomly selected staff members to trial material & provide feedback before distribution to the public • Use language that is inclusive and jargon free • Always include opportunities for comment and include reply paid forms or envelopes to encourage two-way communication • Explain public role and how comments have affected project decisions • Offer interpretation services	• Can reach a large target audience • Public look for information in regular format eg. Newsletter, Media column • Allows for technical & legal reviews • Written comments returned in reply paid format • Documentation of public involvement facilitated • Mailing list development	• Distribution planning inadequate • Materials do not reach the mark • Materials not read • Limited capacity to communicate complicated concepts • Information misinterpreted
Displays Council Offices Libraries Community Centres, Shopping centre Schools Childcare centres	• Establish regular sites if possible to build on community culture • Develop a distribution list • Make sure personnel at locations know what materials are about & where they are located & who to contact for further information • Consider electronic displays, eg. Touch screens, TV video loop presentations • Make sure materials are removed when past their use by date	• Information is accessible to the public at relatively little cost • Public use the distribution locations to look for materials • Public visit Council facilities & may learn more about service provision • Public ask for further information at Council distribution sites	• Distribution sites are overcrowded with information & the materials get lost among the collection of materials • There is no active promotion of the materials • Upkeep of information at sites is not well managed
Website Information directly into the household	• Needs to be visible & easy to navigate • Keep information updated	• Capable of reaching a large audience at low cost • Popular information resource	• People without access disadvantaged • Technical difficulties • Hard to navigate

Community Engagement Guidelines

Table 2 – Engagement techniques for CONSULT level

Consider techniques for CONSULT level	Always Think It Through	What Can Go Right	What Can Go Wrong
Printed Materials, Displays, Website	Refer to Table 1	Refer to Table 1	Refer to Table 1
Briefings • Council Staff • Councillors • Technicians • Consultants • Key Stakeholders • Community groups (including marginalised groups)	• Keep it short & simple • Use clear, jargon free, inclusive language • Use easy to read diagrams and visuals that are consistent with the verbal & written content	• Control of information/presentation • Opportunities to clarify misinformation • Reach a wider variety of people • Build community capacity • Evaluate & readjust approach	• Some groups may be left out of briefings • Inaccurate information may be passed on to community • Expectations may be raised • Information may be used inappropriately
Mailed Surveys/Questionnaires/Response Sheets • Blanket distribution • Random distribution • Selected distribution	• Surveys/Questionnaires should be developed using specific guidelines and trialled before distribution • Collection and method of analysis to be considered & clarified • Level of engagement & parameters need to be clear	• Can gather information from people other than those with special interest • Gather information from people who might not attend meetings • Can gather specific information • Statistically tested results have more credibility	• Response rate can be poor • Communities over surveyed • Can be labour intensive • Questions may be misinterpreted • Results not trusted • Results not fed back to communities effectively
Technical Assistance Attendance at: • Briefings • Meetings • Workshops	• Technical resource persons must be perceived as credible by communities • Ensure technical resource persons have access to information about the communities attitudes	• Build credibility & address public concerns about equity • Facts in dispute can be debated & consensus reached	• Resource availability may be limited • Technicians may not be prepared for working too closely with communities & may lack empathy with community concerns
Open House • Communities engage at their own pace in a comfortable environment • Drop in to individually to view plans, ask questions, give opinions have an informal chat & a coffee, tea etc.	• Be there when you say you are going to be • Consider the demographics of the area & time sessions accordingly • Greet people at the door & explain the format, provide comments sheet • Give people a task eg. "good/bad" dots to place on the displays to record their preferences	• Facilitates a wide variety of people • Break down perceived barriers • Fosters communication • More convenient for people • Engages people more effectively • Minimise aggressive approach to Council staff	• Special interest groups may boycott or disrupt • Groups may use "dots" to lobby for special interests • Staff resource intensive • May not be accessible to people who rely on public transport
Feedback Register • Resident pool for feedback	• Check the register content is relative to your purpose	• Gather input from a broad range of people	• Register maintenance can be resource intensive

Table 3 – Engagement techniques for INVOLVE level

Consider techniques for **INVOLVE** level	**Always Think It Through**	**What Can Go Right**	**What Can Go Wrong**
Printed Materials, Displays, Website, Briefings, Information Contact, Technical Assistance, Open House	Refer to Tables 1 &2	Refer to Tables 1 &2	Refer to Tables 1 &2
Focus Groups Use to test message with randomly selected people or to gain input to assist planning for engagement	• Clear tasks • Relevant representation • Skilled facilitation	• Provides opportunity to test material • Verify prior assumptions • Raise unexpected additional benefits	• Participants may feel restricted by the approach • May be perceived as exclusive • May be costly
Interviews • Face to Face • Telephone	• Be clear & open about the intent • Consider questions carefully to gather relevant information • Ensure effective information recording methods • Be inclusive • Be equitable	• Gather clear understanding of public concerns & issues • Individuals feel inclined to provide input based on personalised format • Able to reach more people by varying timeframe for interviews	• Can be very time consuming • Participants can take their issues out on the interviewer • Participants are tired of being interviewed on a range of issues & will not engage willingly
Workshops Commence with presentation & allow for interaction in small groups with feedback to larger group to bring all the information together at the end of the workshop	• Know how you plan to use public input before the workshop • How you are going to manage the group – rules for engagement • Use trained facilitators & give them clear instructions to ensure the aims of the workshop are achieved • How are you going to feedback outcomes of workshop to participants	• Participants can use the opportunity to raise their concerns, needs, issues • Foster equity and credibility • Opportunity to hear the "silent" voices • Special interest groups get to listen to other voices • Unexpected additional benefits • Relational benefits	• Small numbers of participants • Resistance to breaking up into small groups by some participants • Special Interest groups monopolise the workshop • Participants alter the agenda • Facilitators not impartial or not skilled enough to deal with some behaviours • Information session format used rather than workshop format • Feedback not recorded effectively
Field Trips Tour of project site or comparable site for stakeholders, elected members, community groups, media	• Set up booking system to manage demand effectively • Make accessible to diverse groups • Provide itinerary/tour guide • Plan question/answer session • Plan refreshment break & provide water during the trip • Consider safety	• Opportunity to develop rapport with stakeholders • Increase knowledge of issues & process for all involved • Unexpected additional benefits	• Number of participants can be limited by resource availability • Intention can be misinterpreted • Project site may reveal unintended conditions • Aggrieved participant may take the opportunity to monopolise captured audience

Community Engagement Guidelines

Table 4 – Engagement techniques for COLLABORATE level

Consider techniques for **COLLABORATE** level	Always Think It Through	What Can Go Right	What Can Go Wrong
Council Advisory Committees with specific focus	• Chairperson needs to be engaging, clear and inclusive • There needs to be formal mechanism for Advisory Groups to feed directly into Council's decision making process, otherwise it may be tokenistic • The Terms of Reference and focus of Advisory Group need to be clearly defined • Tasks/actions need to be outlined and carried out	• Potential for larger number of representatives on specific issues and increases 'representativeness' • Developing skills of larger number of people • Detailed input can be gained	• Can be costly - providing necessary assistance to these groups so they can overcome any barriers to participation • (e.g. may include need for interpreters, childcare, assistance for disabled, staff time for administration and support) • Participants may misunderstand their role as advisors, not decision makers.
Community representatives on Council committees	• Input is ongoing - this aids planning and other developmental processes • Representatives, if they are not Councillors, are seen by community and Council as 'independent' Establishing Council Committees such as 'Other Special Committees' are referred to in Section 88 of the Local Government Act (1989) • Requires timely administration and individual liaison in particular the provision of minutes and reports to assist decision making	• Demonstrates Council's commitment to citizen participation in decision making • If combined with support, can develop skills of representative so they can develop skills of people in their own community • Opportunities to develop multi-sector partnerships e.g.: public, private, Non Government and community partnerships and bring together different resources, skills and energies to respond to priority issues in the community	• There is a limit to number of community representatives who can be on a committee, so they are not able to represent everyone • Costly to develop skills of representatives • Can be costly to provide necessary administration and assistance to overcome barriers to participation such as interpreters, bilingual workers, assistance for sensory disabled, childcare etc

Table 5 – Engagement techniques for EMPOWER level

Consider techniques for **EMPOWER** level	Always Think It Through	What Can Go Right	What Can Go Wrong
Mediation/Negotiation/Dialogue Designed to create shared meanings through effective listening and reflective questioning	• Establish firm guidelines • Ensure the role of the mediator/negotiator & participants are clear • Seek commitment to the process	• Helps participants towards an understanding of others viewpoint • Forward thinking approach sets new directions • Win/Win outcomes • Promotes accountability on both sides	• Can be difficult to identify who the parties are & who & what they represent • Time & resource intensive • Knowledge and skill base required to facilitate mediation/negotiation not acknowledged

Other techniques not currently used - for others please refer to the Department of Sustainability and Environment Engagement Toolkit http://www.dse.vic.gov.au/CA256F310024B628/0/5BEE8070970CF42ACA257085001FEF94/$File/Book+3+-+The+Engagement+Toolkit.pdf

	Always Think It Through	What Can Go Right	What Can Go Wrong
Citizen Juries Group of citizens selected to learn about an issue & then examine the data by questioning decision-makers, technicians, and interested parties – all of who are witnesses to the process. The Jury makes recommendations based on their evaluation of the discussions	• Ensure the sessions are managed by a skilled facilitator • Be clear about how the results will be used • Ensure a cross-section from the community • Consider current levels of expertise of participants	• Great opportunity to develop deep understanding of an issue • Positions of interest can shift • Limitations & possibilities can be identified • Can dispel misinformation • Can build credibility • Can provide unexpected benefits	• Group selection can be mistrusted • Participants may not show up on the day • Sessions can loose focus • Cost can be extensive
Design Charrettes Sessions where participants become involved in the design of a projects features	• Plan how the design sessions will take place • Provide clear information & guidelines for participants • Provide clear parameters • Provide technical support • Provide opportunities to foster creative ideas	• Can create effective partnerships & working relationships with communities & individuals • Can develop sense of trust for all concerned • Can identify issues & concerns in early stages of projects • Can result in improved outcomes	• Participants bring unrelated agenda to the session/s • Not enough time allowed for sessions • Small representation of community • None of what is discussed in the session/s is incorporated into the final design • Future expectations can not be met
Deliberative Polling Selecting people from communities to measure informed opinions. Essential elements required to ensure a democratic deliberative process are, influence, inclusion and deliberation, Carson, Hartz-Karp, 2005.	• Ensure a skilled facilitator is used • Commit to full process • Consider resources required & check against budget & hidden costs • Aim for a cross-section of participants from communities • Plan to develop capacity in communities	• Participants can be exposed to views & arguments from different backgrounds • Special interest lobbying can be diffused • Can develop capacity in communities • Can provide unexpected benefits	• Mistrust of the organisers & unfamiliar process can hamper participation • People do not have the time required to commit to the process • Timeframes are unrealistic • Agenda too ambitious or not specific enough

Community Engagement Guidelines

Appendix E - Strategic Engagement Plan

Project Name:	Contact person:	Date:

	The project team:	The organisation:	The community/other stakeholders:
What success looks like for:			

Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and provide feedback on how your input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for direct advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how your input influenced the decision.	We will implement what you decide.
Stakeholders	Stakeholders	Stakeholders	Stakeholders	Stakeholders
Tools	Tools	Tools	Tools	Tools

Appendix F - Operational Engagement Plan

Project Name:	Contact person:	Date:

Engagement type	Tool/activity	Stakeholder(s) involved	Resources required	Who is responsible?	Start and finish dates		Feedback method	Who is responsible?	Start and finish dates

Community Engagement Guidelines

Appendix G - Community Engagement Evaluation Plan Template

Purpose of evaluation	Key evaluation questions	Who is interested in the answers?	Sources of evidence	Methods of measurement	Who is responsible?	When
How successful was the engagement?						
What could we do better?						
What did we learn?						

Appendix I - The Role of Councillors in Community Engagement

One of the most important roles of a Councillor is to participate in making policy and decisions on behalf of their community.

Community expectations about decision-making processes have changed over time. The days of citizens electing representatives and leaving them to make decisions on their behalf during their term of office without being engaged in the process are long gone.

Increasingly, citizens expect to have some control over matters that affect their living environment, and to see governments actively telling them about what plans they have, and listening and responding to concerns about matters which impact on the social, economic or environmental wellbeing of their local community.

Facilitating informed decision-making

Some issues to consider regarding Councillor roles in the Community Engagement process follow.

- It is prudent that Councillors not take an active "hands on" role in the Community Engagement process, but rather maintain a neutral position and be clearly seen as listening to what their community has to say.
- However, in circumstances where a Councillor has stated a position, it may be appropriate for a statement to be openly made that this is the case. This leaves it in the hands of the community to have input into swaying the strength of, or conviction to maintaining that stated position. In these cases, the argument for Councillors not having a hands on role during the Community Engagement process is strengthened, to avoid community perception of a biased process.

It is important to **maintain the integrity of an objective and unbiased Community Engagement process**. Whilst it is difficult to make hard and fast rules about how to achieve this, some useful tips follow.

- During the Community Engagement planning phase, consider nominating suitably experienced staff, engaging specialist consultants, or inviting prominent citizens or community leaders to chair sessions or to facilitate workshops with key stakeholder groups to identify the main issues and gauge their engagement expectations.
- On occasion it may be acceptable for Councillors to have more prominent roles in Community Engagement processes. Care needs to be taken however, that Councillors maintain the integrity of an objective and unbiased Community Engagement process as previously discussed.
- It may be appropriate for the Mayor to "chair" a process by playing a "master of ceremonies" role, but take care that this does not extend to a hands-on, facilitator role.
- The presence of Councillors during the information gathering phases, for example at Community Forums, demonstrates an interest in hearing what the community has to say, but they must clearly be seen as listening. Where they have particular information or facts to contribute, care should be taken by Councillors to provide information in an objective and non-defensive way.

Councillors ultimately need to consider the outcome of any Community Engagement process within the context of strategic planning directions for the whole Council area, resource and budgetary constraints, and broader regional or State policies where relevant.

Having made a final decision, **community confidence will be enhanced by providing feedback to those who participated** about how their input was taken into account in the decision making process. Councillors have an important role in this regard, for example, the Mayor may convey messages verbally, in writing or through the media, which adds strength to the message that "we have listened and taken your views into account in our decision making".