



Community Engagement Guidelines



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Signed by the Mayor

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Documents are amended from time to time, therefore you should not rely on a printed copy being the current version. Please consult the Swan Hill Rural City Council website - www.swanhill.vic.gov.au - to ensure that the version you are using is up to date.

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Introduction

Interaction with our community is happening daily and in various ways and means. Community and stakeholder engagement is an essential part of significant project planning and decision-making. International research shows that the decision-making of governments is improved when communities are involved (Parvin 2018). It makes local government: respond better to the diverse needs of the community; design better services; and best of all, use the ideas of our community to respond to change. Community involvement in decision making builds trust in government as people become involved, they see themselves reflected in outcomes. A Community Engagement Framework has been developed to identify the extent and context in which the Swan Hill Rural City Council interacts with the community. These guidelines support the implementation of the Council's Community Engagement Policy.

What is community engagement?

Community engagement is having conversations with people who are potentially impacted by Council decisions. It also involves discerning issues that are important to the community, or to groups within the community, in order to advocate to state and federal government and other bodies that have influence in our area. In our engagement we listen, we consult, we act and report back to our community.

Community engagement is a planned process with the specific purpose of working with identified groups of people, whether they are connected by geographic location, special interest, or affiliation, or connected through issues affecting their wellbeing. The scope is broad with the focus on the collective, rather than on the individual. Engagement must be inclusive and accessible, reflecting the diversity that exists within our community.

Community engagement can take many forms and the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) has developed the 'IAP2 public participation spectrum' to help groups define the public's role in any public participation process.

	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Public participation goal	To provide the community with information to assist them in understanding the problems, alternatives and/or solutions; to keep the community informed of the issue and decision.	To obtain input on issues, draft documents and/or decisions; to acknowledge and consider public concerns.	To work directly with the community to determine public concerns and opinions and ensure that these are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and decision made.	To work in partnership with the community on each aspect of the decision making process, including understanding of the issues, developing alternatives and identifying the solution.	To fully delegate control of the decision making process to the community; Council participates in this process as one of the stakeholders and works with the community to implement the decision.

Source: IAP2 – foundations for public participation

Why we engage

Community engagement is a collaborative process that connects Council with the community in a mutually beneficial sharing of new ideas, skills, knowledge, expertise and experience.

Effective community engagement has real benefits for both Council and the community, these include:

- better project and service delivery outcomes
- improved quality of policy being developed
- improved planning and service delivery
- more resilient relationship with the community
- enhancing reputation and meeting local needs
- increased understanding of community issues
- better shared partnerships and networks
- ability to deal with complex issues and emerging issues
- opportunities for a diversity of voices to be heard
- communities are able to identify priorities for themselves and own the solutions

When we engage

At a minimum, community engagement should take place when:

- Council resolves formally to engage;
- There is a requirement to understand the expectations, needs and priorities of the community; to help identify community needs that are not already known;
- Planning for the development of Council's Annual Budget and Council Plan;
- A decision or plan will substantially impact the community and there is some part of the decision or plan that is negotiable;
- Community members have expressed an interest or could be interested in a plan or decision that is negotiable;
- Community input can enhance decision-making, project outcomes or future opportunities; or
- There is legislation, policy or agreement requiring community engagement.

In some instances, Council is legislatively and/or legally required to engage with the community. In these cases, we will treat the legally required level of community engagement as the minimum standard.

There are times when Council's level of engagement with the community and key stakeholders will be limited. In certain circumstances, Council will inform the community and stakeholders of Council's decisions and actions.

This includes times when an immediate resolution is required; technical or other expertise is required; an initiative involves confidential or commercial information; there are clear and defined legislative responsibilities that must be met; when council is developing or reviewing internal policies and procedures; when responding to an emergency; and where there is a risk to public safety.

Who we engage with

Council will engage with community and stakeholders that are impacted by/interested in a project or Council decision. This can include anyone who lives, works, plays, visits or has an interest in the Swan Hill Municipality.

For each engagement Council will identify the communities or stakeholders who are impacted and seek to engage with them to ensure Council has representative feedback to guide the project or decision making.

Stakeholders bring value to an issue such as: expertise, local knowledge, diverse perspectives or potential support. They also have a varying level of interest or influence, and this variation needs to be identified in the scoping phase of engagement planning.

How we engage

There is no one-size fits all approach to community engagement activities. A variety of methods and tools will be required to cater for the different purposes of engagement as well as the broad range of groups and individuals in the community.

Council recognises that no single model or formula fits all situations. The method, extent and depth of Community Engagement will vary according to the scope and scale of the issue, strategy or plan.

The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) identifies and defines various levels of Community Engagement. The IAP2 spectrum in Figure 1 depicts these different levels and the promise to the participants you will engage with.

Appendix A provides a valuable list of techniques for assisting in the planning, implementation and evaluation of community engagement activities. This is not intended to provide an exhaustive list, but rather it offers a broad selection of techniques covering all types of engagement from 'inform' to 'empower'.

Figure 1: IAP2 spectrum

Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Provide balanced and objective information.	Seek feedback on alternatives and/or decisions.	Work directly with the community during the process to ensure needs is 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.
Example techniques				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Let's Talk • Fact sheets • Web sites • Open days • Public Notices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Let's Talk • Public comment • Focus groups • Survey 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Let's Talk • Advisory committees • Workshop • Deliberate polling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Let's Talk • Citizen advisory committee 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Let's Talk • Citizen juries • Ballots • Delegated decisions
Example of when this engagement level may be appropriate				
In the event of an emergency	Undertaking a survey on playground redevelopment	Seeking input from an Advisory Committee on sustainability initiatives and plans	Stakeholder led discussions on developing community vision key directions	Building capacity skills of small business employees through skills based training
Role of the Community and/or stakeholders				
Listen	Contribute	Participate	Partner	Lead

Deliberative engagement

Deliberative practices take place at the highest three levels of influence on the IAP2 spectrum, 'Involve', 'Collaborate' or 'Empower'.

Deliberative engagement allows for discussion and the possibility of consensus if needed. The key features of a deliberative process are to come to a decision after considering all information and prioritising and weighing solutions. By its very name, it requires a level of engagement that is measured, considered and has the involvement of others. Deliberation can be scaled to fit the size and impact of the project. Some projects may require skilled facilitators to ensure a fair and equitable process.

Examples of deliberative practices are

- working with advisory groups
- online proposals and ideas are discussed by a panel of community members
- participants are asked to consider and prioritise ideas
- a representative group participates in a series of sessions of information exchange in order to reach consensus.

Projects most suited to a deliberative approach include those where the outcome will have a far-reaching or long-term effect, and issues where there is considerable community concern or division about the alternatives.

Participatory engagement

Participatory practices take place at the first two levels of influence on the spectrum, 'Inform' and 'Consult' and involve one-way information exchange either from Council to community or community to Council.

Participatory engagement typically occurs when feedback is invited on ideas, alternatives or draft documents.

Examples of participatory practices are

- Surveys
- Polls, ideas gathering
- Submissions

Participation at this level can be very broad, including by stakeholders who choose to track the project but offer no direct input.

Submissions process

Members of the community have a right to make submissions on matters relevant to the activities and projects of Council under a number of Acts, including the Local Government Act 1989 and the Planning and Environment Act 1987.

Council will continue to follow any prescribed process in relation to the public's right to make a submission.

Statutory requirements

Some elements of community engagement are directed by statutory requirements.

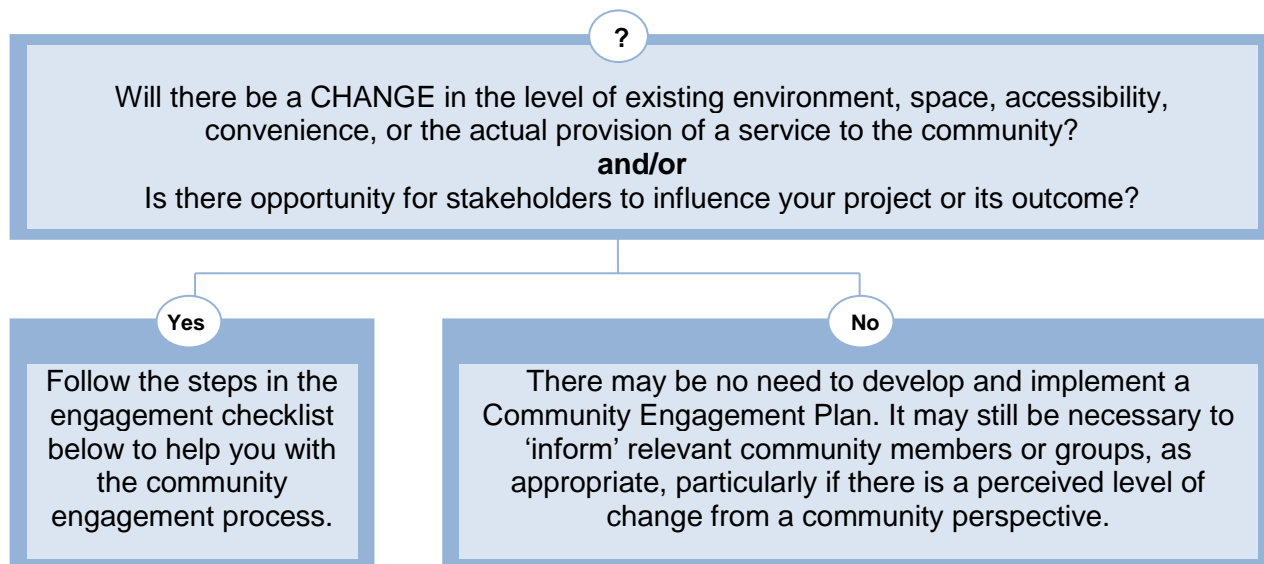
Under the Local Government Act 2020 Council has a statutory obligation to develop a long-term Community Vision, Financial Plan and Asset Plan, as well as a four-year Council Plan.

Under the Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008 Council has a statutory requirement to develop a four-year Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan.

Council will meet its statutory obligations by ensuring the community will have an opportunity to participate in the development of these plans.

How do you determine if you need to undertake community engagement?

Engagement is a planned process with the specific purpose of working with identified groups of people, whether they are connected by geographic location, special interest, or affiliation and/or identify to address issues affecting their well-being. By linking 'community' to 'engagement' the scope and focus shift from the individual to the collective, with the associated implications for inclusiveness to ensure consideration is made of the diversity that exists within any community.



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?
- Do you need to take into account any relevant legislation?

As a guide, the lowest type of community engagement to be implemented is set out below:

Matter	Community engagement approach
Community Vision	Deliberative engagement
Council Plan	Deliberative engagement
Financial Plan	Deliberative engagement
Asset Plan	Deliberative engagement
Budget	Participatory engagement
Making of a Local Law	Participatory engagement
Acquiring or selling land	Participatory engagement
Other statutory and non-statutory plans, strategies or policies, service planning and capital works projects	Level to be selected depending on the complexity of the matter

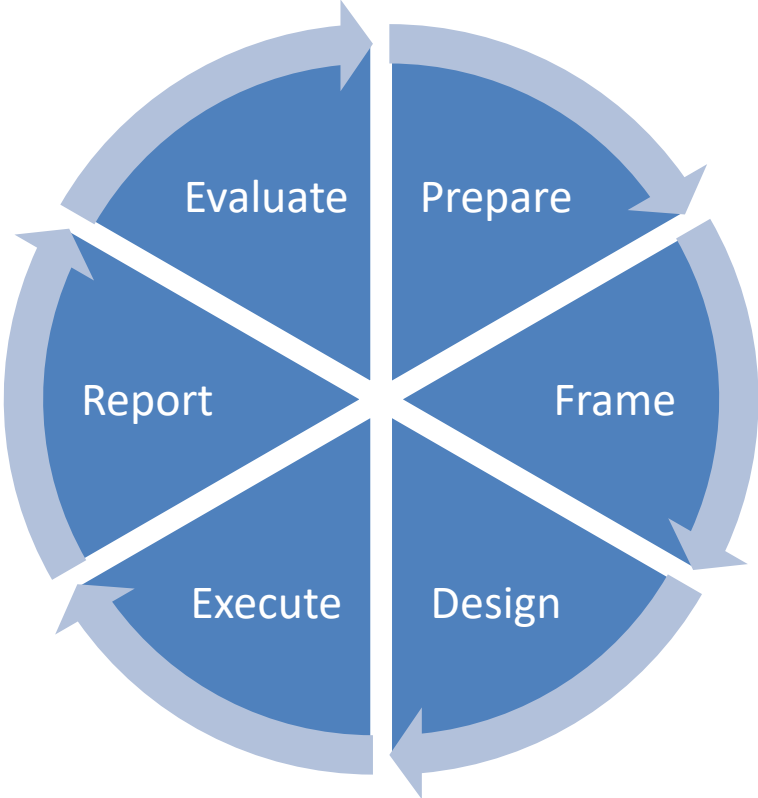
Roles and responsibilities for good practice engagement

Community	Mayor & Councillors	CEO & Executive	All Staff	Engagement specialists
Expect council to provide meaningful engagement opportunities	Lead engagement with the community on the development of the Council Plan and other key strategic documents	Champion CE principles and CE policy within the council in the deliberative practices	Plan, deliver and evaluate engagement including advising the community of the outcomes of engagement on council decisions	Provide expert advice for better engagement practice and outcomes
Become active citizens by participating in engagement opportunities	Enact the requirements of the Act by approving a CE policy that includes the CE principles and deliberative practices	Provide advice (advocate) to councillors on the requirements of the Act to embed CE principles and have a CE Policy including deliberative practices	Embed the Council's community engagement policy (including deliberative practices) into the way we work	Collaborate and share knowledge across council teams and build capacity of staff over time
Become well informed about the issue and listen to diverse perspectives before contributing	Set the strategic direction for Council as articulated from the community via the deliberation	Provide the authorising environment for staff to deliver effective engagement	Work collaboratively with other staff and share engagement data and learnings	Champion evaluation of engagement activities for continuous improvement and learning
Track council's follow-through on promises from engagement	Mayor has a leadership role on reporting the progress to the community (once per year on implementation of the Council Plan)	Be prepared to learn and adapt/develop the organisations deliberative approaches over time	Be prepared to learn and adapt/develop the organisations deliberative approaches over time	Be prepared to learn and adapt/develop the organisations deliberative approaches over time
Expect feedback on how engagement results have informed Council's decision making	Be willing and prepared to give some higher level of influence to the community for some key projects / issues / plans	Follow through on the 'Promises' made to the community about their level of influence for any given project / planning process		

Engagement Checklist

This checklist has been developed to promote and assist Council to implement good community engagement practice. It is based on the IAP2 Quality Assurance Standard.

The actions are divided into six stages including prepare, frame, design, execute, report and evaluate.



Stage 1: Prepare

Preparation is integral to developing a relevant, targeted, and successful engagement program that is tailored to the expectations and needs of persons and groups affected by the subject matter. A thorough understanding of the subject matter will set a strong basis for framing and design.

- Research and understand the context, scope and purpose of the Plan, Strategy or Project. Also conduct research into industry trends, best practice examples and drivers.
- Identify any legislative requirements including reporting and deadlines for the completion of the project.
- Review the Council Community Engagement Policy to understand the underlying approach, principles, and governance structures.
- Identify Council resources including human, equipment and technology that will be required to take part in the engagement program.
- Research current Council plans, strategies and projects that are interlinked to your project to ensure consistency.

Stage 2: Frame

Your engagement should have a robust framework, identifying key issues, internal and external stakeholders, and performance measures. Building your framework will increase transparency and the level of participation as you will have clarity of scope when discussing the engagement with participants.

- Convene a project control group including Council officers you have identified through your resources review and allocate responsibilities.
- Collaborate with the project control group to define the problem and articulate:
 - Issues that need to be addressed/answered/resolved
 - Elements that are negotiable & non-negotiable
 - Legislative requirements in relation to making the decision
 - Who the final decision maker is
 - The decision maker's ideal outcome
- Prepare a stakeholder analysis to identify internal and external stakeholders with an interest in the subject matter. Identify issues and the best communication channels for stakeholder groups.
- Conduct a risk assessment including identification of internal and external parameters.
- Determine the desired level of public participation, and the weighting their input will have on decision making.
- Set key performance indicators regarding level of engagement, satisfaction with engagement methods and outcomes of engagement.
- Confirm your engagement budget for the project.

Stage 3: Design

The design of your engagement plan brings together the key decisions you made in prepare and frame stages. How you design your engagement will impact the evaluation and reporting elements of the project.

- Extend the problem definition work already conducted. Consider the best way to seek input from the public including:
 - What is the purpose of the question?
 - Am I seeking data or more in-depth feedback?
 - What engagement tools will be most effective for the stakeholders I am seeking to engage?
 - How will I record the feedback?
 - Is this question understandable and free of jargon?
 - Is the question relevant and related to an aspect of the project that the community will influence through their feedback?
- Develop an engagement plan that is tailored to promote the inclusion, participation, and accessibility of stakeholder groups by:
 - Identifying engagement tools and techniques that will be used to maximise participation;
 - Considering a design thinking approach that outlines the phases and timeframes for key milestones including;
 - The release of information in a format that is easily accessible to stakeholders;
 - The rollout of engagement activities;
 - Providing feedback to the project control group, engagement participants and the community;
 - Dates for submission and approval of key documents;
 - Reporting requirements for key performance indicators;
 - Identify the resources that will need to be used at each stage of the engagement.
- Your engagement plan should be complemented by a communications strategy which outlines:
 - Deadlines for the provision of information to engagement participants, the project control group and decision makers;
 - Channels to communicate with potential participants (social media, newspaper advertisements, media releases, mailing lists, engagement platforms, webinars, seeking the assistance of stakeholder groups to distribute information);
 - How you are going to measure the reach and effectiveness of communication channels.
- Reach out to stakeholder groups and leaders to seek their input into the engagement design.

Stage 4: Execute

You have developed an engagement plan that has the objective(s), identified stakeholders and the best way to engage them – now put your work into action.

- Test any platform you will be using, particularly for online engagement. Develop comfort with its functionality and be sure to provide basic trouble shooting advice to participants.
- Consider occupational health and safety when you are packing, transporting, and setting up engagement activities. Also check if there are any permit or site-specific requirements to address.
- Conduct a pre-engagement brief with your engagement representatives. It is important that participants know that representatives are informed and understand the key issues that are affecting them. The briefing should also identify any potential 'hot topics' and provide representatives with the tools to discuss them in a constructive manner with the community.
- When talking with participants:
 - Acknowledge the scope of the engagement and any limitations or constraints;
 - Be clear about participant's level of influence in decision making;
 - Be open to new ideas, connections and partnerships that may be established through engagement;
- Ask questions that extend the thoughts and ideas of participants to test robustness. Don't be afraid to ask the 'what if' or 'have you considered' questions. And don't be afraid of answers that don't meet your own values;
- If you are unsure you have understood the input, check back in by rephrasing the participants' thoughts to make sure you understood them correctly;
- Remember, you do not have to provide a solution to every issue that is raised on the day. The important thing is to hear what a participant is saying and respond with authenticity and an open mind;
- Have a mechanism for referring issues that do not relate to the engagement that participants raise on the day. It is important to bring participants back to the subject at hand while giving them concrete pathways to follow up their other concerns.
- Take the time to pack down neatly.
- Conduct a debrief straight after the engagement to ensure you are able to identify key learning's and areas for further exploration or follow up.

Stage 5: Report

The purpose of this stage is to advise participants, stakeholders and decision makers about the findings of the engagement and how the input has been used to make decisions. This part of the engagement plan is often referred to as 'closing the loop'.

- Examine the findings of your engagement and determine:
 - Major themes from feedback;
 - Any data trends that are evident;
 - Any contrary views, what level of support they have, and how can they be compared to the support of major themes;
 - What projects, propositions or idea have strong or weak support;
 - Areas for further investigation;
 - Difference in feedback between demographics (gender, age, income, education);
 - Difference in the feedback offered by different townships and regions.
- Feedback the findings to participants, stakeholders and decision makers through mechanisms identified in your communications plan. Present the analysis in a format that is understandable to a broad audience, and provide an avenue for participants, stakeholders and decision makers to offer clarification if required.
- Record the analysis of engagement and articulate how it has been used in determining scope, content and direction of the piece of work.

Stage 6: Evaluate

Reflective practice allows us to refine and continually improve our practices. Evaluation is an important element of any engagement activity.

- Seek feedback from participants, stakeholders and decision makers about the process.
- Measure your progress against the KPI's you set during frame stage regarding level of engagement, satisfaction with engagement methods and outcomes of engagement.
- Ensure any changes in practice align with Council's continuous improvement mechanisms.

Appendix A: Matrix of techniques

Table 1 – Engagement techniques for INFORM level

Consider techniques	Always think it through	What can go right	What can go wrong
Printed materials <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fact sheets • Newsletter • Media advertising • Brochures • Issue papers • Letters • Media releases • Media conference 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep it short and 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 and 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 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can reach a large target audience • Public look for information in regular format e.g. newsletter, media column • Allows for technical and legal reviews • Written comments returned in reply paid format • Documentation of public involvement facilitated • Mailing list development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distribution planning inadequate • Materials do not reach the mark • Materials not read • Limited capacity to communicate complicated concepts • Information misinterpreted
Displays <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council Offices • Libraries • Community centres • Shopping centre • Schools • Childcare centres 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information is accessible to the public at relatively little cost • Public use the distribution locations to look for materials • Public visit Council facilities and may learn more about service provision • Public ask for further information at Council distribution sites 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distribution sites are overcrowded with information and 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Needs to be visible and easy to navigate • Keep information updated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capable of reaching a large audience at low cost • Popular information resource 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People without access disadvantaged • Technical difficulties • Hard to navigate

Table 2 – Engagement techniques for CONSULT level

Consider techniques	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 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council staff • Councillors • Technicians • Consultants • Key stakeholders • Community groups (including marginalised groups) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep it short and simple • Use clear, jargon free, inclusive language • Use easy to read diagrams and visuals that are consistent with the verbal and written content 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Control of information/presentation • Opportunities to clarify misinformation • Reach a wider variety of people • Build community capacity • Evaluate & readjust approach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blanket distribution • Random distribution • Selected distribution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Surveys / questionnaires should be developed using specific guidelines and trialed before distribution • Collection and method of analysis to be considered and clarified • Level of engagement and parameters need to be clear 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Briefings • Meetings • Workshops 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technical resource persons must be perceived as credible by communities • Ensure technical resource persons have access to information about the communities attitudes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build credibility & address public concerns about equity • Facts in dispute can be debated and consensus reached 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resource availability may be limited • Technicians may not be prepared for working too closely with communities and may lack empathy with community concerns
Open house <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 and a coffee, tea etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be there when you say you are going to be • Consider the demographics of the area and time sessions accordingly • Greet people at the door and explain the format, provide comments sheet • Give people a task e.g. “good/bad” dots to place on the displays to record their preferences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficult to document public input • Agitators may stage themselves at each display • Usually more staff intensive than a meeting
Feedback Register <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resident pool for feedback 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check the register content is relative to your purpose 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gather input from a broad range of people 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Register maintenance can be resource intensive

Table 3 – Engagement techniques for INVOLVE level

Consider techniques	Always think it through	What can go right	What can go wrong
Printed materials, displays, website, briefings, open house, information, technical assistance,	Refer to Tables 1 and 2	Refer to Tables 1 and 2	Refer to Tables 1 and 2
Focus Groups Use to test message with randomly selected people or to gain input to assist planning for engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear tasks • Relevant representation • Skilled facilitation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides opportunity to test material • Verify prior assumptions • Raise unexpected additional benefits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants may feel restricted by the approach • May be perceived as exclusive • May be costly
Interviews <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Face to face • Telephone 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be clear and open about the intent • Consider questions carefully to gather relevant information • Ensure effective information recording methods • Be inclusive • Be equitable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gather clear understanding of public concerns and issues • Individuals feel inclined to provide input based on personalised format • Able to reach more people by varying timeframe for interviews 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 and will not engage willingly
Workshops Commence with presentation and allow for interaction in small groups with feedback to larger group to bring all the information together at the end of the workshop	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 and give them clear instructions to ensure the aims of the workshop are achieved • How are you going to feedback outcomes of workshop to participants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set up booking system to manage demand effectively • Make accessible to diverse groups • Provide itinerary/tour guide • Plan question/answer session • Plan refreshment break and provide water during the trip • Consider safety 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunity to develop rapport with stakeholders • Increase knowledge of issues and process for all involved • Unexpected additional benefits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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

Table 4 – Engagement techniques for COLLABORATE level

Consider techniques	Always think it through	What can go right	What can go wrong
<p>Council Advisory Committees with specific focus</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential for larger number of representatives on specific issues and increases representativeness • Developing skills of larger number of people • Detailed input can be gained 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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.
<p>Community representatives on Council committees</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Input is ongoing - this aids planning and other developmental processes • Representatives, if they are not Councillors, are seen by community and Council as ‘independent’ • Requires timely administration and individual liaison in particular the provision of minutes and reports to assist decision making 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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	Always think it through	What can go right	What can go wrong
<p>Mediation / negotiation / dialogue Designed to create shared meanings through effective listening and reflective questioning.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish firm guidelines Ensure the role of the mediator / negotiator and participants are clear Seek commitment to the process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Helps participants towards an understanding of others viewpoint Forward thinking approach sets new directions Win / Win outcomes Promotes accountability on both sides 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can be difficult to identify who the parties are and who and what they represent Time and resource intensive Knowledge and skill base required to facilitate mediation / negotiation not acknowledged
<p>Citizen juries Group of citizens selected to learn about an issue and 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.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Great opportunity to develop deep understanding of an issue Positions of interest can shift Limitations and possibilities can be identified Can dispel misinformation Can build credibility Can provide unexpected benefits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Group selection can be mistrusted Participants may not show up on the day Sessions can lose focus Cost can be extensive
<p>Design charrettes Sessions where participants become involved in the design of a projects features</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plan how the design sessions will take place Provide clear information and guidelines for participants Provide clear parameters Provide technical support Provide opportunities to foster creative ideas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can create effective partnerships and working relationships with communities and individuals Can develop sense of trust for all concerned Can identify issues and concerns in early stages of projects Can result in improved outcomes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants can be exposed to views and arguments from different backgrounds Special interest lobbying can be diffused Can develop capacity in communities Can provide unexpected benefits
<p>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).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure a skilled facilitator is used Commit to full process Consider resources required and check against budget and hidden costs Aim for a cross-section of participants from communities Plan to develop capacity in communities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants can be exposed to views and arguments from different backgrounds Special interest lobbying can be diffused Can develop capacity in communities Can provide unexpected benefits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mistrust of the organisers and 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

How we do it

Community engagement planning at Council sees expert teams working together across our organisation and utilising our broad relationships across our community.

Internally our staff can draw on our:

Communication and Engagement Team

The communication and engagement team:

- oversee these guidelines and build general staff's community engagement capability;
- are skilled at research methods, can help plan engagements and develop engagement tools;
- hold data on previous engagements and are constantly building knowledge on what the community tells us;
- oversee the evaluation of community engagements and advise Council on best practice;
- let our community know about opportunities to participate, and, provide feedback on the resulting decisions of Council; and
- oversee important communication channels to the community, such as our Community Newsletters and Social media platforms.

Advisory committees

These committees are made up of community members, leaders and experts interested in giving their time to help Council decision-making.

These committees can help our staff plan engagement, particularly in groups our traditional methods have not reached, such as young people, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, and non-English speakers.

Staff across council

Relationship building is a key function of all Council business and Council staff maintain and build relationships and connections with communities, interest groups, cultural groups, and businesses.

Council staff provide a wealth of connection that can be drawn on for quality community engagement.

Resources and tools to support community engagement

Independent research

Community satisfaction and preferred methods of engagement are captured in regular independent research.

Council uses feedback from Local Government Victoria's annual community satisfaction survey, a survey that collects feedback about Council from randomly selected local community members, to compare our customer satisfaction ratings with other Victorian councils and benchmark our performance from year to year.

Communication channels

Council promotes opportunities to participate in community engagement activities through a range of communication channels including:

- [Let's Talk](https://letstalk.swanhill.vic.gov.au/)
- [Swan Hill Rural City Council website](https://www.swanhill.vic.gov.au/)
- Community newsletters
- Social media including Instagram, Facebook and Twitter
- Print promotions such as letters, posters or flyers
- Drop in sessions, site visits and open days
- Focus groups, workshops and stakeholder briefing sessions
- Media releases and/or advertising

All communications must be in line with Council's Design and Writing Style Guide.

Engagement platform

Council's engagement platform captures all community engagement activities at a central location that our community can access 24/7. The platform has many tools to communicate content and collect feedback, enabling Council staff to craft unique and enjoyable experiences that inspire the community to engage with us.

Training

Staff undertake training to increase understanding of community engagement processes and tools, and to build capacity in order for staff to deliver sound community engagement activities.

Appendix B: References

Quality Assurance Standard, For Community and Stakeholder Engagement, (2015)

<https://iap2.org.au/resources/quality-assurance-standard/>

IAP2 – foundations for public participation

Rural Council Victoria (2020) Community Engagement – A guide to community engagement in rural and regional Victoria

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Local Government Victoria

Local Government Act 2020