Greater Dandenong Community Engagement Planning Framework

2022

The Greater Dandenong City Council acknowledges and pays respects to the Bunurong people of the Kulin Nation, as the Traditional Custodians of the lands and waters in and around Greater Dandenong.
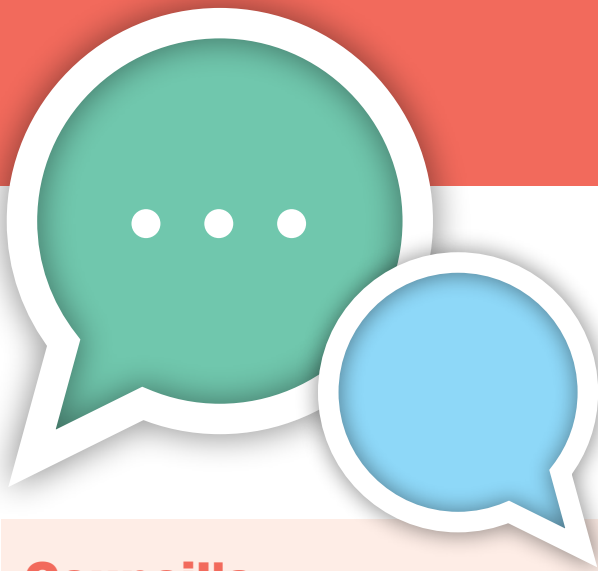
We value and recognise local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, heritage, and connection to land as a proud part of a shared identity for Greater Dandenong.

Greater Dandenong City Council pays respect to Elders past, present and emerging and recognises their importance in maintaining knowledge, traditions, and culture in our community.

Greater Dandenong City Council also respectfully acknowledges the Bunurong Land Council as the Registered Aboriginal Party responsible for managing the Aboriginal cultural heritage of the land and waters where Greater Dandenong is situated.

Table of Contents

Council's Commitment

Greater Dandenong City Council has made a strong commitment to engage with the community in a genuine and meaningful way. Community engagement plays an important role at every level of the decision-making process. Council uses various approaches and consultation tools to improve the community's contribution and role in relation to its decision making.

Council is committed to maintaining high quality processes in the area of community engagement and continuing to strive for best practice.

Vision Statement

Greater Dandenong City Council is committed to genuine, responsive, transparent and effective community engagement. It strives for a level of participation that will assist in informing responsible decision-making and encourage cross collaboration between Council and the community.

Council's Community Engagement Framework

Effective and thoughtful community engagement provides an opportunity for the community to participate in decision-making and for Council to enhance its relationship with key stakeholders and residents.

This Community Engagement Planning Framework is a practical and useful tool for Council to use to successfully engage with the community and stakeholders about key issues or decisions that Council is considering. It is designed to support the achievements of the key principles outlined in the Community Engagement Policy. Given the importance of consistent and successful engagement, this planning framework provides a strong foundation for selecting and implementing the most effective methods to maximise appropriate levels of community participation in planning, decision-making and project implementation.

The Community Engagement Planning Framework is supported by a number of different methods of community engagement which ensures that the approaches used by Greater Dandenong City Council are fair and equitable and tailored to the diverse communities who live and work in the municipality.

What is Community Engagement?

"Community engagement is about involving the community in decision-making processes, which is essential in the successful development of acceptable policies and decisions in affecting local government and the community."[1]

Why is Community Engagement important?

- All Council services should be responsive to community needs

- Council believes better outcomes are achieved by working in partnership with the community

- Council wants the views of its diverse community to help guide its decision-making processes.

In the past, local government has relied on the representation of elected Councillors to ensure that community priorities are reflected in decision-making and service provision. While this is still the case today, it is expected that the community should have greater involvement in policy making, be more informed about key activities and have greater input into the setting of priorities and agendas of the Council.

The *Local Government Act 2020* states that a Council must in the performance of its role give effect to the overarching governance principles which include:

- priority is to be given to achieving the best outcomes for the municipal community, including future generations

- the municipal community is to be engaged in strategic planning and strategic decision making

- the transparency of Council decisions, actions and information is to be ensured.

Further to this Council is required to adopt and maintain a Community Engagement Policy. Greater Dandenong City Council's policy was

adopted in February 2021 and complies with all the requirements of the Act.

The policy outlines Council's role in providing the community with the means to express their expectations, aspirations and ideas. The policy is applied to projects, activities, plans or processes where the input of community stakeholders can make a valuable contribution to Council's decision-making and when changes to services or infrastructure are required. It outlines the principles which guide community engagement, sets out how and when community engagement activities are undertaken by Council, promotes a consistent approach across all Council services, outlines the process of reporting engagement outcomes back to the community and ensures diversity in participation and community viewpoint is supported and encouraged.

In addition to the Local Government Act, community engagement may be required under the following legislation:

- *Planning and Environment Act*
- *Public Health and Wellbeing Act*
- *Road Management Act*
- *Victorian Disability Act*
- *The Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities*.

Engaging with the community helps Council to better understand the needs, aspirations and ideas of residents and stakeholders and this understanding enhances the democratic process and decision making. Effective community engagement builds trust between Council and the community and strengthens democracy and community capacity.

Where Council staff are managing a community engagement process that is being undertaken by a third party organisation, Council's advice will always be based on the Community Engagement Policy and this Framework.

Council's Meeting Procedure Local Law provides guidance about how residents and ratepayers can participate in the governance processes of Council through mechanisms such as public question time, deputations and having petitions presented to the Council. These approaches are formal and are prescribed under the Local Law. They are recognised

[1] Adapted from www.dpi.wa.gov.au/communityengagement/717.asp

as further ways that the community can participate in Council's decision making. Community engagement, when done in an effective and genuine way, results in improved perceptions around transparency and leads to greater respect, integrity, trust and positive partnerships.

Principles of Community Engagement

The *Local Government Act 2020* has a strong focus on community engagement and outlines five key principles which all Victorian Councils must comply with:

- a community engagement process must have a clearly defined objective and scope

- participants in community engagement must have access to objective, relevant and timely information to inform their participation

- participants in community engagement must be representative of the persons and groups affected by the matter that is the subject of community engagement

- participants in community engagement are entitled to reasonable support to enable meaningful and informed engagement; and

- participants in community engagement are informed of the ways in which the community engagement process will influence Council decision making.

Greater Dandenong City Council is committed to these principles and ensuring that they are reflected in all community engagement processes. Council is also committed to ensuring that engagement will:

- be genuine and transparent in seeking valuable input from the community

- respect people's time and their right to privacy

- respond to the issues and needs being expressed by the community

- reflect the diversity that exists across the City of Greater Dandenong; and

- foster positive relationships between Council and the community.

How Council monitors Community Engagement performance

Greater Dandenong City Council participates each year in the Community Satisfaction Survey coordinated by Local Government Victoria on behalf of Victorian councils. A core theme of this survey is community consultation and engagement. The Community Satisfaction Survey provides comparisons to previous years as well as benchmarking the Greater Dandenong City Council with other local government areas. This provides a broad level of monitoring.

Council regularly monitors its performance regarding specific community engagement activities via feedback from those involved and their level of participation. An evaluation should be conducted and feedback on each engagement activity must be actively sought and used to improve future processes.

Respect for Diversity

To meet the needs of our diverse communities and in line with Council's Diveristy, Access and Equity Policy the following will inform and guide the community consultation process:

- an Indigenous Acknowledgement of Country to be included in all consultations

- all information will be developed in clear and simple English

- access to interpreter and translation services will be promoted and interpreters will be available on request

- submissions in languages other than English will be encouraged

- at all times respect will be given to gender, cultural and religious differences in undertaking community engagement activities

- venues with disability access will be provided and promoted to ensure all members of our community can participate in engagement activities.

At all times respect will be given to gender, cultural and religious differences in undertaking community engagement activities.

The Community Engagement Planning Framework

The City of Greater Dandenong has adapted the IAP2[2] Public Participation Spectrum to develop this framework. This will help us tailor community engagement to a specific service area, project or activity.

The key levels of community engagement defined by IAP2 are:

INFORM	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problems, alternatives and/or solutions.
CONSULT	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.
INVOLVE	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public issues and concerns are consistently understood and considered.
COLLABORATE	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.
EMPOWER	To place final decision-making in the hands of the public.

[2] International Association for Public Participation

The following spectrum reflects the varying degrees of community participation depending on the requirements of the decision-making process.
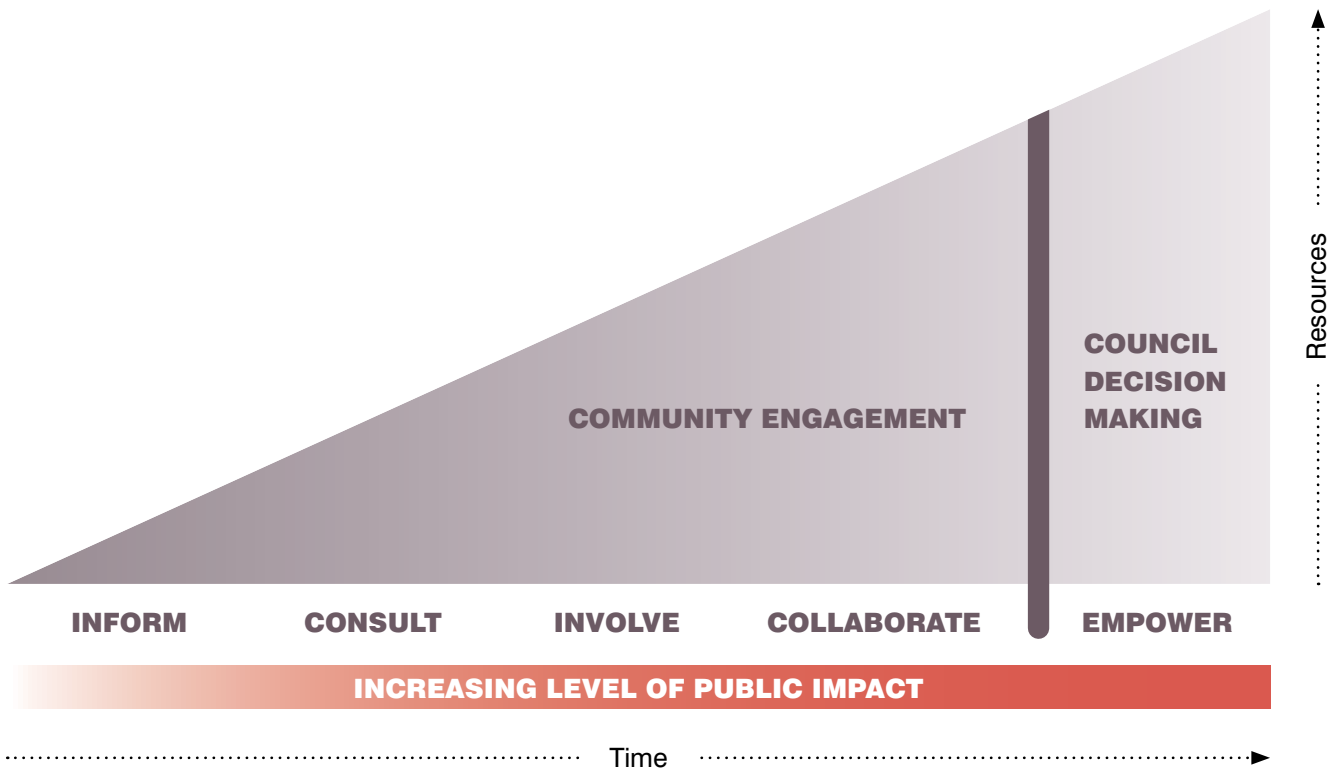
While it is an excellent tool for community engagement, the highest level of 'Empower' will rarely be used as the final decision-making in local government rests with the Council and not the public. As elected representatives on behalf of the community, final decisions ultimately rest with the elected councillors or a delegated CEO, board, etc. As the spectrum above demonstrates, the Inform, Consult, Involve and Collaborate levels all apply to community engagement (to the left of the solid black line) while the Empower level is reserved primarily for Council decision-making or decisions delegated to the CEO or boards.

It is also noted that the further along the spectrum of public participation one travels in response to the increasing level of public impact, the more **time** and **resources** are required for community engagement. This is an important factor in determining the appropriate level of community engagement for each project or activity.

Identifying the level of impact in Community Engagement

The IAP2 spectrum of public participation takes account of the level of public impact of a service, project or activity. Added to this is the level of risk or significance that a service, project or activity may have for the organisation or community.

Once the level of impact has been identified using the guidelines below, the extent of community engagement can be better defined. Generally speaking, the higher the risk, and/or the more significant the impact, the greater the extent of community engagement. This framework can also be used to evaluate requests for topic based open-ended community engagement to be considered by Council.

LEVEL OF IMPACT	DEFINITION	EXTENT OF ENGAGEMENT			
		INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE
Low	• Minimum level of impact for community • Low level of risk • Little risk of controversy • Little interest likely from the community • Outcome may reflect a small change to service or activity	✔	✔		
Medium	• Reasonable level of impact for the community • Medium level of complexity • Likely to raise interest, debate and varying views from the community • Outcome is likely to reflect some change or reduction to a service or activity	✔	✔	✔	
High	• Potential for significant level of impact for community • High level of interest from the community • More likely risk of controversy or conflict • Outcome will reflect change or loss of a service or activity	✔	✔	✔	✔

Council's risk management framework provides guidance about the assessment and management of risk from the perspectives of:

- financial risk
- people risk
- risk to business or service continuation
- environmental risk
- reputational risk
- political risk.

When assessing the level of impact of a particular issue or matter that Council seeks to decide on, the above risks should be considered and will help to inform the level of community engagement that will be required.

Community engagement plans need to be tailored for each particular issue. Careful and consistent planning will ensure that the appropriate levels of community engagement and appropriate techniques are chosen to maximise community participation. It should also be noted that while there is an overall level of engagement identified, activities may target different stakeholders at different levels. This acknowledges that varying levels of impact may exist for different people, requiring varying levels of participation in the community engagement process.

It may be possible that the level of community engagement might change throughout the life of a particular issue, depending on the progress and impact of potential outcomes. The table on the following pages indicates how the IAP2 spectrum for public participation applies to the Greater Dandenong City Council, with examples taken from local projects and activities.

GREATER DANDENONG COUNCIL	INFORM Level 1	CONSULT Level 2	
PUBLIC PARTICPATION 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 decision.	
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.	
EXAMPLES	• Council's e-newsletters and magazine • Website and social media platforms • Open Day – Alex Wilkie Nature Reserve	• Budget Input	

	INVOLVE Level 3	COLLABORATE Level 4	EMPOWER Level 5
	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public issues and concerns 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.
	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and issues 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 on formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendation into decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.
	• Positive Aging Advisory Committee • Business sector workshops	• Arts Advisory Board • Youth Summit • Community Safety Advisory Committee • Council Plan	• Council • Dandenong Market Board of Management • Community Vision

Applying the Community Engagement Framework

When considering the level of impact of a service, project or activity and the appropriate level of community engagement, it is important to consider the communities and stakeholders that will be asked to participate. All consultations should consider the following factors:

- exactly who the stakeholders are and how they might best be engaged (certain communities may respond best to particular community engagement methods)

- recent engagement outcomes and the feedback provided by the same communities and stakeholders

- the experience of other Council staff who may have engaged with similar people

- whether there is an opportunity to combine with another project or activity so that the community is asked to participate in a single process that informs more than one set of outcomes.

Once the risk and level of engagement have been determined, the community engagement techniques need to be chosen so that a community engagement plan can be developed and approved. The following table contains a list of suggested techniques that are preferred by Greater Dandenong City Council, depending on the specific project or consultation:

TECHNIQUE	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE
Printed Material	✔	✔	✔	✔
Displays	✔	✔	✔	✔
Website / Social Media	✔	✔	✔	✔
Information Sessions	✔	✔	✔	✔
Open Days	✔	✔	✔	✔
Surveys		✔	✔	✔
Touch Screen Kiosks		✔	✔	✔
Briefings		✔	✔	✔
Phone Hotline		✔	✔	✔
Interviews		✔	✔	✔
Focus Groups		✔	✔	✔
Meetings		✔	✔	✔
Drop-In Sessions		✔	✔	✔
Ward Meetings		✔	✔	✔
Stakeholder Meetings			✔	✔
Workshops			✔	✔
Field Trips			✔	✔
Forums, cultural / language specific events		✔	✔	✔

TECHNIQUE	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE
Deliberative Panel			✔	✔
Expert Panels			✔	✔
Polling			✔	✔
Community Sounding Boards			✔	✔
Negotiation / Mediation				✔
Community Summits				✔
Community Reference Groups / Committee	✔	✔		
Advisory Committees	✔	✔	✔	
Advisory Board	✔	✔	✔	✔

Advisory Committee

If the level of engagement is determined to be to Collaborate, two options which can be explored are the formation of an advisory committee or recruitment of a deliberative engagement panel specifically for that consultation.

> Identify need for Advisory Committee in approved community engagement plan

⬇

> Prepare Terms of Reference for approval by Council

⬇

> Appoint Advisory Committee in accordance with Terms of Reference with membership approved by Council

⬇

> Advisory Committee meets for agreed duration

⬇

> Advisory Committee is disbanded at conclusion of an issue

Deliberative Engagement

Deliberative engagement is based on careful and considered discussions about particular issues which allow those who are involved to provide well-informed opinions. Multiple points of view are considered with a group decision as the final outcome. The purpose of this approach is to provide better opportunities for residents and business owners to be closer to the decision making of local Councils.

A Deliberative Panel consists of a randomly selected panel of community members who are representative of the demographics of the municipality. The recruitment of members is best undertaken by an independent company to ensure no bias is involved throughout the process. The *Local Government Act 2020* requires all Councils to undertake a deliberative process for the development of their Community Vision, Council Plan, Long Term Financial Plan and 10 Year Asset Plan.

Planning for Community Engagement

In this section, the process of developing and implementing a community engagement plan is outlined. An accompanying toolkit will help identify the techniques that can be used for community engagement and should be read in conjunction with this Framework.

The first question to ask is: **Will there potentially be a change in Council's decision-making strategic direction, policy position, level of service provision or delivery of particular actions as a result of community engagement?**
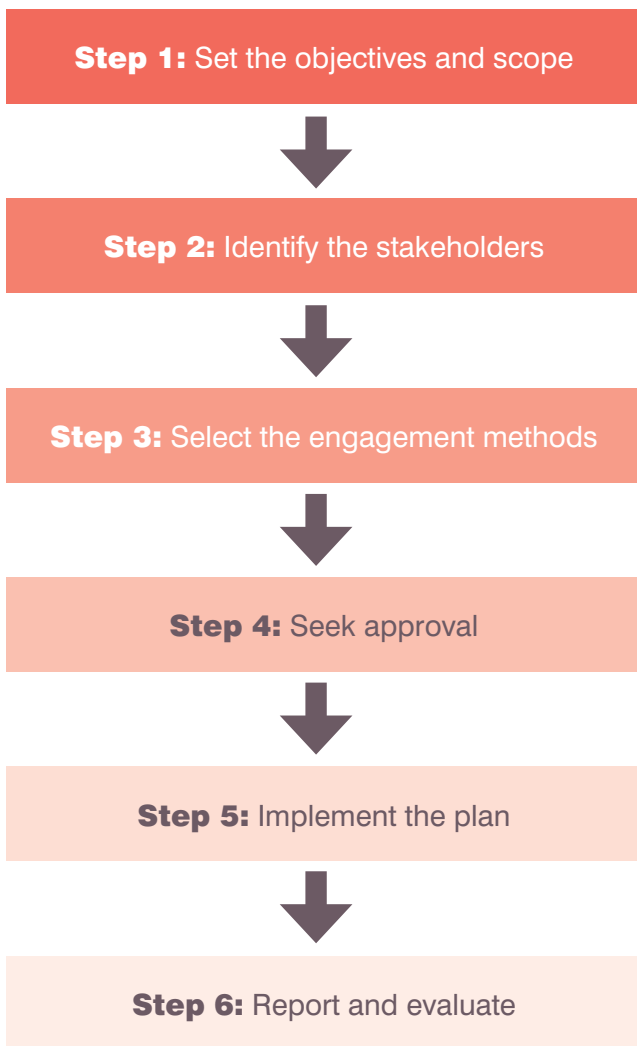
NO	The answer to this question might be **NO** for various reasons including:
	• Community Engagement has already taken place, there is no value in further consultation and a decision is pending
	If the answer is **NO**, there may be no need to develop a community engagement plan. There may be a requirement to inform the community of the decision, however it is clear that the community cannot influence the decision.
YES	If the answer is **YES**, then a community engagement plan will need to be developed to ensure that the processes undertaken are consistent with Council's Community Engagement Policy.

The steps to undertake Community Engagement are:

Step 1: Set the objectives and scope

↓

Step 2: Identify the stakeholders

↓

Step 3: Select the engagement methods

↓

Step 4: Seek approval

↓

Step 5: Implement the plan

↓

Step 6: Report and evaluate

Step 1: Set the objectives and scope

At the beginning of any consultation it is important to clearly define the objectives. These are statements that articulate what you intend to achieve by undertaking community engagement. When developing the objectives, consider:

- all relevant background information that has led to this point
- is community engagement required by legislation?
- who will be making the final decision?
- what engagement has occurred in the past for this project, or this community, and what were the learnings?
- what are the expected outcomes from the community engagement process?
- what level of engagement is appropriate for the particular issue?

Defining the scope of the community engagement process involves putting boundaries around what is required and appropriate – and may include:

- subject matter that is included and excluded
- geographic area/s
- defining different levels of engagement for different types of stakeholders
- defining aspects that might be non-negotiable and other aspects where community input is required to influence the final decision. Set clear expectations for participants and clearly communicate limitations.

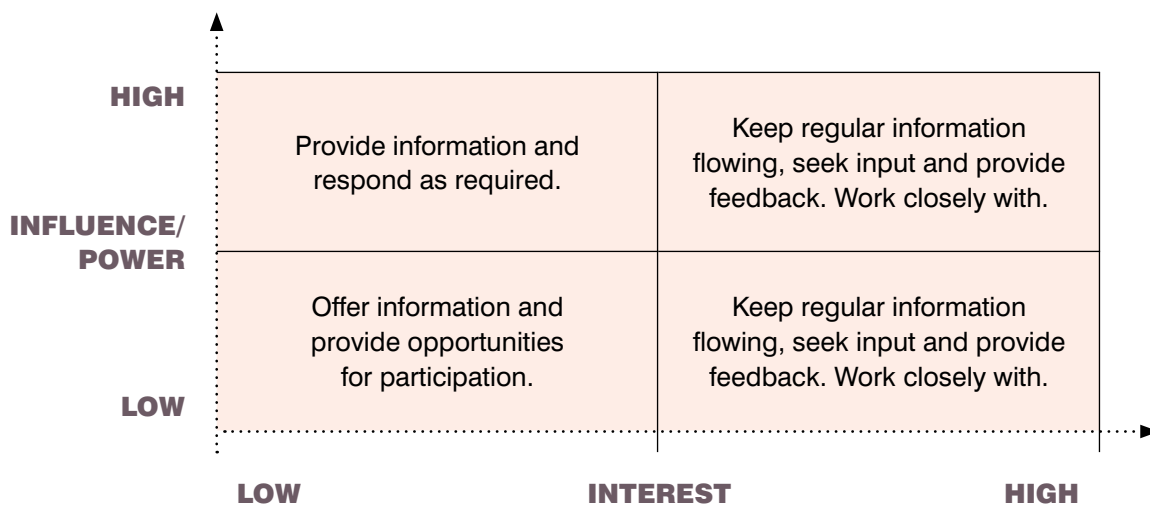## Step 2: Identify the stakeholders

It is important to understand who should be invited to participate in the community engagement process and to consider who will have an interest or who might be affected by the final decision. Not all stakeholders necessarily need to be engaged at the same level so some thought should be given to defining the involvement level of each stakeholder group as they are identified.

When developing a list of stakeholders, the following provides some examples as a guide and checklist.

Residents and Ratepayers	Owners and renters – residential and business Residents in particular streets, suburbs or wards Resident and ratepayer representative groups Children and young people
Interest Groups and Lobby Groups	Local, Municipal and Regional
User Representative Groups	Resource Centres Formal Groups providing a voice for minority sectors
Community Organisations	Not-for-profit Neighbourhood Houses Historical societies Environment groups Faith groups Schools
Council Representatives	Committees and Forums with Council Representation
Service Clubs	Local and head office
Sport and Recreation Groups	Local, Association / League, State Association industry groups / representatives
Cultural Organisations	Refugee, Language and Social Groups Community Leaders Local, Regional and Statewide
Private Sector	Developers, Builders and Investors Consultants, Suppliers and Contractors Service Providers
Government	State and Federal Government Departments, Offices and Agencies, Local Government Sector Federal, State and Local Members and Politicians
Business	Industry and Commercial Interests / Peak Bodies Local and Small Business / Traders Shopping Strips and Centres
Councillors	Greater Dandenong Councillors Surrounding municipality / other councillors if and as appropriate
Media	Web communities and social networks Journalists and publicists
Demographic	Specific target groups – generational, gender, family status

Once the stakeholders have been identified it is useful to complete a simple 'mapping' exercise to understand the extent of community engagement that may be required for each stakeholder group.

The diagram below indicates how stakeholders might be grouped into levels of interest and influence and the resultant community engagement measures that might be used.

HIGH	Provide information and respond as required.	Keep regular information flowing, seek input and provide feedback. Work closely with.
INFLUENCE/ POWER		
LOW	Offer information and provide opportunities for participation.	Keep regular information flowing, seek input and provide feedback. Work closely with.
	LOW	**INTEREST** **HIGH**

Another technique to effectively map stakeholders is to identify the level of impact of outcomes on groups of stakeholders as indicated by the table below.

COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDERS – AFFECT & INFLUENCE	
DIRECTLY AFFECTED e.g. it may change the services people receive, or the way they interact with the Council.	List here…
STRATEGIC INTEREST e.g. it may have longer-term implications for the community or Council, which may not be apparent right now.	List here…
INFLUENCERS e.g. Councillors, other levels of government, funding providers, agencies, forums with Council representation.	List here…

One or both of these techniques can be used to clearly identify the involvement of all appropriate stakeholders in the community engagement process.

In a world where we are becoming more and more connected we need to focus on those people who are both closest to us, and also highly-involved in the issues of the day. It is through them that we can have the most success in influencing the rest of the community.

Step 3: Select the engagement methods

Once the level of engagement and stakeholders have been determined, this assists with narrowing the list of engagement methods to choose from. For each method selected, the stakeholders should also be identified so that a matrix of community engagement is built as the primary working document for the community engagement process.

To select the most appropriate methods, consideration should be given to:

- who is leading the overall process and who will be involved in each component?
- the level of awareness of the issue among the stakeholders and their understanding of the role and responsibility Council has regarding the issue
- opinions and views that stakeholders might currently have about Council and the service, project or activity
- language or cultural barriers
- urgency – the project timelines
- any OHS considerations
- what is required and how input is likely to be used to influence outcomes?
- time of year – school holidays, public holidays, seasons, daylight savings, major and religious events, etc.

Be mindful to select only those methods that are likely to provide the most effective participation and outcomes. There is no need to 'go overboard' with too many methods, it is best to select carefully and execute a few methods exceptionally well rather than try to achieve too much.

All methods must be well documented to ensure that all the required tasks are identified and planned for.

A Communication Plan should also be developed in addition to the community engagement plan so that informing and reporting back to the community is well managed at critical points during the engagement process. This also allows adequate time for Media and Communications to prioritise resources for promotion, design and website requirements for consultation activities.

Step 4: Seek approval

The timelines for completion of a community engagement process should allow sufficient time for the community to participate in a fair and equitable way. It is also important that the community engagement plan can be implemented in its entirety within the agreed timelines.

A centralised register of community engagement activities will be managed by the Media and Communications Unit and shared with Councillors via weekly Infosum reports. A calendar of engagement activities will also be made available to staff to enable better co-ordination. Advice and liaison throughout the entire community engagement process can be provided by the Media and Communications Unit.

Budget considerations must also be factored into the planning for a community engagement process. Sufficient expertise and resources must be costed and included in the plan.

Once the community engagement plan is completed, approval must be sought prior to implementation. This approval is provided by the Team Leader, Coordinator or Manager of Media and Communications and the Manager and Director of the relevant Council department. Councillors should be consulted on plans for significant strategic documents or initiatives, most likely at a formal Councillor Briefing Session where they also have the opportunity to ask questions and provide feedback.

Step 5: Implement the plan

Once all this is done, it's time to get started. Stick to the plan and ensure that the community engagement process is inclusive, thorough and professionally executed. Remember that the people who participate in the community engagement process are giving up their time to be involved. This commitment is to be respected and their contributions valued.

At the commencement of a community engagement process, customer service and other relevant Council staff are to be notified of the community engagement methods that will be used in case they receive questions from the community.

Step 6: Evaluate and report

At the conclusion of the community engagement process, all results will be collated, summarised and reported on as part of the final reporting and decision making process.

A critical part of the process is to report back to the stakeholders who participated in the community engagement. It is important to advise all stakeholders how their input has influenced the final decision-making and what other factors may have led to the final outcomes.

On projects that affect a large part of the municipality or where there has been a strong response to the community engagement, project outcomes will be reported on Council's website, in the Greater Dandenong Council News magazine and through any other appropriate mediums.

At the conclusion of each community engagement program, time must be given to a 'reflect and evaluate' process as part of Council's commitment to continuous improvement, where:

• the performance of the community engagement plan against its objectives is assessed

• each of the community engagement methods used is critically evaluated to determine its success in the context of the issue

• any improvements to the community engagement method are identified and reported on so that future community engagement consultations can benefit from learnings and improvements.

These reflections should be documented and saved into Objective for all staff to access in future. This will assist with educating others who want to learn from previous consultations.

Relevant reference documents

• Community Engagement Policy

• Community Reference Group Guidelines

• Advisory Committee Guidelines

• Council Plan 2021–25

• Privacy and Personal Information Policy

• Risk Management Framework

• Community Development Framework

• Diversity, Access and Equity Policy

• Disability Policy

• Disability Action Plan