

## COUNCIL POLICY

<b>Council Policy Title:</b>	<b>Community Engagement</b>
<b>Council Policy ref. no:</b>	2.5
<b>Responsible Department:</b>	Chief Executive Officer
<b>Date of adoption/review:</b>	24 July 2013

### 1. PURPOSE

The Colac Otway Shire Community Engagement Policy details Council's commitment to the value of public participation and outlines principles and practical methods of successful engagement of the community to achieve a high level of mutual community and Council understanding, communication and deliberation in decision making.

The objectives of the Community Engagement Policy are to:

- Strengthen organisational capacity through the development of an integrated system that encourages a coordinated approach to community partnership.
- Establish clear processes and tools within a framework that can be applied with confidence across a range of issues and stakeholders.
- Build community capacity through enhanced opportunity to interact with Council in planning and decisions making.
- Ensure successful engagement by working within a continuous improvement framework that evaluates and improves approaches and knowledge.

### 2. INTRODUCTION

Council has an obligation and a legal right to make decisions and govern on behalf of the citizens it represents. Colac Otway Shire Council has a strong belief that effective governance is achieved through open leadership and sensitivity to community needs, interests and aspirations. Council is guided by the Council values of:

- Respect
- Integrity
- Goodwill
- Honesty
- Trust

Decisions will take into account relevant technical advice and information provided and the input from community engagement.

Community engagement fosters a sense of belonging to a community, sharing in decision making and recognition of personal community involvement and effort. Council has a commitment to building partnerships with a range of stakeholders, and seeking greater community involvement in its activities and decision making process.

Sound engagement processes build relationships with citizens. As these relationships are strengthened the ability of Council is strengthened to deal with complex issues as well as day to day delivery of services. As these relationships are strengthened the capacity of the community to respond to Council is also enhanced.

The Public Participation Spectrum developed by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) provides a structure that enables Council to build on existing community relationships and tools for actively increasing public participation and partnership. Attachment 1

This two-way relationship strengthening operates through differing levels of engagement depending on goals, time frames resources and level of interest in the decision to be made or the goal to be reached.

Colac Otway Shire Council's Community Engagement Policy will be underpinned by the following principles:

- Transparency, openness and clarity -ensure stakeholders are given all the information they need to make informed contributions.
- Commitment - show respect for both stakeholders and participants in the process.
- Accessibility - provide different ways for people to participate.
- Accountability - respond to participants with information on how their contributions have influenced the outcome and final decisions.
- Responsiveness –a willingness to listen to the contributions of people who have participated in the process
- Willingness to learn – ensure the process is based on a willingness to learn from the consultation process

## **2.1 Links with best value**

Consultation on Council services is mandatory under the Local Government (Best Value) Act 1999 which states the *“all services provided by Council must be responsive to the needs of the community and that a Council must develop a program of regular consultation with its community to the services it provides.”*

The Community Engagement Policy sets out a strategic and integrated approach to community engagement and consultation.

## **2.2 Statutory obligations in consulting with the community**

A number of Government legislative frameworks require Councils to consult with the community prior to adopting a policy or making a decision. These outline the minimum statutory requirement under the relevant frameworks. They include:

### **2.2.1 Planning and Environment Act 1997**

Council has a number of obligations to advertise or 'give notice' of planning permit applications and amendments to the Colac Otway Planning Scheme which are set out under the Planning and Environment Act 1997.

By giving notice of planning permit applications and proposed amendments Council ensures members of the community know about changes that may affect them. It

also gives those affected the opportunity to voice their concerns or support for the proposed changes.

Council also has a policy of allowing the proponent and objectors to speak briefly on planning proposals and items on the agendas of its Planning Committee meetings. Some examples of documents for consultation and minimum timeframes under the Planning and Environment Act 1997 include:

<b>Document</b>	<b>Minimum Timeframe Required Under Act</b>
Amendments to Planning Scheme	28 days
Planning Permits	14 days – Public Notice 16 days – Adjoining Neighbours 28 days – Referral Authorities

### **2.2.2 Local Government Act**

Section 223 of the *Local Government Act* outlines provisions for the rights of people to make a submission to Council.

The minimum requirement for submissions from the date of publication of a public notice inviting submissions is 28 days. Some of the documents governed by Section 223 include:

<b>Document</b>	<b>Minimum Timeframe Required Under Act</b>
Council Plan	28 Days
Budget	28 Days
Local Laws	28 Days
Road Closures	28 Days
Road Discontinuance	28 Days
Intention to Sell	28 Days
Intention to Lease	28 Days

Section 163 of the Local Government Act 1989 governs Special Rate and Special Charges. Council has developed a Special Charge Scheme Policy to ensure the procedures for the creation and implementation of contributory projects in providing works and services authorised under Section 163 are consistent and equitable, and as a guide for the fair and reasonable distribution of costs for those persons obtaining a special benefit.

The Act requires Council to give public notice of its intention to declare a Special Charge at least 28 days before making the declaration. People can also make submissions on Special Rates and Special Charges under Section 223 of the Act.

Council is meeting its statutory obligations in following the requirements of these legislative frameworks.

However, Council can use the methods outlined in this policy and guidelines as a basis for determining the approach to and extent of the consultation process.

### 3. SCOPE OF THE POLICY

This policy applies to all full time, part-time, and casual Council officers and volunteers of Colac Otway Shire Council, and the associated departments that are intending to undertake a consultation process with the community.

This policy and associated guidelines should be used as a basis for planning the consultation process for any document, policy or strategy not governed by state legislative frameworks. This includes initial consultation with the community prior to a document undergoing an official consultation process.

This procedure does not govern the community consultation processes undertaken during the implementation of Special Charge Schemes.

The Public Relations Coordinator is the key contact for any staff member undertaking consultation. The fortnightly Interdepartmental Managers Meeting will review and advise on all individual engagement processes.

The method of consultation within the IAP2 framework should be determined by utilising the attached guide. (Attachment 1)

### 4. DEFINITIONS

**Community** is a broad term that defines groups of people brought together through a common interest such as geographic location, common business or industry link, community club or sporting club affiliation, environmental sustainability or a particular environmental or land use planning issue.

**Engagement** is also a broad term that encompasses a range of interactions with people such as simple one way information sharing or more involved levels of consultation and dialogue.

**Council community engagement** is the participation of Council and community in a two way relationships to achieve a particular outcome or resolve a range of issues.

**Public Participation Spectrum** is a tool developed by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2). The spectrum of engagement demonstrates different levels of engagement for example:

- **Informing** the community of policy directions or decisions.
- **Consulting** the community by seeking feedback into policy development.
- **Involving** the community through a range of mechanisms to ensure that issues and concerns are understood and considered as part of the decision-making process.
- **Collaborating** with the community by developing partnerships to formulate options and provide recommendations.

- **Empowering** the community to make their own decisions and implement and manage change.

**Stakeholder** - A stakeholder or stakeholder group is any individual or group who may be involved in, affected by, or expresses a strong interest in, the management of a particular resource or area.

**Primary Stakeholders** - are those directly, ultimately or mostly affected by a proposal/project. They are generally those groups with some level of dependence on the resource or a long association with it. In most projects, primary stakeholders will be categorised according to social analysis. Thus, primary stakeholders should often be divided by gender, social or income classes, occupation or service user groups. In many projects, categories of primary stakeholders may overlap.

**Secondary Stakeholders** – are those that have a public or special interest or stake in the project. They are often those groups who have an intermediary role or a collective voice through a consultation process.

## 5. TRAINING REQUIREMENTS

Staff will be provided with training to ensure compliance with the policy and attached guide.

## 6. POLICY

### 6.1 Principles of Good Engagement

According to Best Value Victoria (VLGA) the following principles underlie all good engagement practice, and as such, will be adopted and incorporated into this policy.

#### 6.1.1 Participation/Inclusiveness

Community members are welcome and encouraged to initiate discussion with Council. There are a number of ways in which this can occur, however, it is up to the individual or organisation to choose the method that they consider best suits their need or the issue at hand.

All affected and interested parties will be encouraged to participate in engagement. Equal opportunity and accessibility for participation will be given to all members of the community taking into account geography and diversity of the Shire.

Representatives may be selected to work with Council. Engagement will be sensitive to the needs of particular individuals or groups to maximise their ability to contribute. Council will actively seek out individuals for engagement.

#### 6.1.2 Focus

- The rationale behind engagement will be clear
- The purpose of engagement will be documented in a clear statement
- Chosen engagement methods will be appropriate for the task or issue

- An engagement plan will be developed for every significant project, policy development and strategy and will be presented to Council as part of the endorsement of the draft document.

### 6.1.3 Provision of information

People who are to be consulted must be given sufficient information to be able to provide informed input.

### 6.1.4 Timing

The engagement process will be timed to ensure that community members are able to identify the issues and that community input is able to influence the decision-making process. Sufficient time will be allocated to ensure the greatest opportunity for input from all stakeholders.

The official consultation period, during which Council receives submissions on documents, strategies and policies, will be six weeks. This timeframe does not refer to consultation conducted prior to a document being endorsed by Council for public comment.

Council will endeavour at all times to allow a reasonable period of time for public response during a period of community consultation. Officers should note that many interested persons are often not in their principle place of residence during holiday periods and consider the appropriateness of undertaking consultation during these times or make allowances.

Officers should also note that many stakeholder groups such as Clubs or Committees meet only once a month and a six week time frame would generally be more appropriate ensure that the respective stakeholder group has the opportunity to agenda and discuss the relevant strategy, policy or Council decision. Timeframes will be extended beyond minimum requirements where applicable.

Council will agree to the following minimum timeframes for key council documents determined by Council as appropriate for community engagement processes. The justification for a decision on the appropriateness of engagement for example on internal Council 'New Policies' must be included in the report to Council to enable Council to make an informed decision.

#### Agreed minimum timeframe for key Council engagement documents

Document	Timeframe
Council Plan	6 weeks
Council Budget	6 weeks
New Council Policies	6 weeks
Local Laws	6 weeks
Structure Plans & Planning Scheme Amendments	6 weeks
Strategies	6 weeks

Shorter time or longer frames may be appropriate depending on statutory requirements or other circumstances related to external deadlines. The justification for the proposed time frame must be included in the report to Council to enable Council to make an informed decision or recommend alternative action.

### 6.1.5 Responsiveness and feedback

The engagement process will be transparent, providing community members with knowledge and understanding of how their input will be used. Council will consider submissions from all participants and community members. The engagement process will include continuous feedback. Council will make reasonable attempts to resolve conflicts, if they arise, and reach equitable, appropriate solutions. Council will communicate their decision with those involved in the engagement process.

### 6.1.6 Evaluation

If a difference occurs between community input and Council's final decision, the reasons will be clearly and unambiguously stated. As part of its commitment to the effectiveness of engagement, Council's associated decision making process will be evaluated after a final decision has been made.

Engagement plans should be evaluated once a decision is made. Participants will receive feedback about their input and how the final decision was reached.

### 6.1.7 When Will Engagement Occur?

Different issues and situations will call for different levels of engagement and different methods according to the IAP2 Spectrum. Examples of the different levels of decision making requiring different approaches to consultation are:

- **Site specific** – Matters about a particular site such as a change in use or sale of a property, excluding matters to be decided under the Planning and Environment Act.
- **Area improvement** – Matters that affect people in a neighbourhood or township eg. change in service delivery, township strategy or structure plans.
- **Service planning for entire municipality** – To develop or improve a service that would see a significant change in the level of service provided.
- **Policy development** – To develop or improve policies or Council's position on particular matters. This does not include internal operating procedures.
- **Key strategic issues/major development** – A project that, because of its size could impact on the finances or future of the whole municipality.
- **Strategic plans for the shire** – Establishing the decision-making framework of Council. For example, the Council plan.
- **Legislative requirements** – This refers to all prescribed activity under the *Local Government Act (1989)* and any other relevant Acts.

## 7. RELATED LEGISLATION

- *Local Government Act 1989*
- *Planning and Environment Act 1987*
- *Information Privacy Act 2000*

## 8. RELATED POLICIES/PROCEDURES/GUIDELINES

- Community Engagement Procedure
- Media Relations Policy and Guidelines
- Information Privacy Policy
- Special Rates and Charges Policy
- Social media policy and procedure

### ADOPTED/AMENDMENT OF POLICY

<b>Policy Review Date</b>	<b>Reason for Amendment</b>
28 July 1999	Adopted by Council
23 August 2006	Review
23 May 2007	Review
27 January 2010	Review
24 July 2013	Review



## Community Engagement Procedure

---

### 1. PURPOSE

This procedure aims to provide Colac Otway Shire Council's staff with clear guidelines as to how to prepare and execute a Community Engagement process.

### 2. INTRODUCTION

Council has a strong commitment to building partnerships with a range of stakeholders, and seeking greater community involvement in its activities and decision making process.

This procedure outlines a number of methods Council will use to gain community input into its service delivery decision making processes. It will identify the process for determining the level and methods Council will use to engage the community.

### 3. SCOPE OF THE POLICY

This policy applies to all full time, part-time, and casual Council officers and volunteers of Council and the associated departments that are intending to undertake an engagement process with the community.

This policy and associated guidelines should be used as a basis for planning the engagement and consultation process for any document, Council policy or strategy not governed by state legislative frameworks. This includes initial engagement with the community prior to a document undergoing an official consultation process.

This procedure does not govern the community engagement processes undertaken during the implementation of Special Charge Schemes and internal Operational Policies.

The Public Relations Coordinator is the key contact to advise any staff member undertaking community engagement. The community engagement plan may also be referred through the appropriate Unit manager to the Interdepartmental Meeting for assessment and advice.

### 4. TRAINING REQUIREMENTS

Staff will be provided with training to ensure compliance with this procedure.

### 5. PROCEDURE

Prior to any community engagement, Council staff will be required to develop an engagement plan based on the Public Participation Spectrum developed by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2). Attachment 1

This plan should include reference to the timeframe, taking into account agreed minimum timeframe for key Council engagement documents (See p7). It should also include reference to the method of engagement selected from the IAP2 Spectrum. The plan is to be presented to Council as part of the report to endorse the project or document for public comment. Reference to the plan and its key elements must also be included within the Council report under the heading Community Engagement.

#### 6.1 Scoping a Project for Community Engagement

The following steps should be taken to ensure the completeness of any engagement process

##### Research

- Identify the range of issues that may be involved
- Identify any policies or strategic plans of council that may impact on any of these issues
- Identify any residents groups or other groups that may have an interest in any of the issues

- Establish what the responsibilities of council are in relation to each of the core issues that have been identified

### **Setting the Framework for the Engagement**

- Define the purpose of the engagement
- List specific aims
- Define all the internal stakeholders
- Define all the external stakeholders
- If an issue is likely to be controversial always consider including an independent expert who can develop credibility with both sides
- Using the IAP2 Spectrum decide the most appropriate way for working out how to reach these audiences.

### **Plan the Consultation Process**

- Prepare a timetable for consultation that is realistic
- Establish that you have the necessary budget including advertising, possible venue hire, analysis and reporting
- Prepare the initial information on which the engagement will be based
- Circulate this information or provide access to it for all the stakeholders you have identified

## **6.2 Engagement Methods**

Please note: Hard copies of documents for public comment should be made available for inspection at Council's Colac and Apollo Bay Customer Service Centres and from the Colac Community Library and Learning Centre, the Colac Library Annexe, and the Apollo Bay Library in ALL instances.

- **Print media** – Advertisements in local print media are an important means of advising the community about an engagement matter. Print media could include local newspapers such as The Colac Herald, The Echo, or regional newsletters such as the Otway Light, Apollo Bay News Sheet or Birregurra Mail. The choice of where to advertise and advertising frequency should be guided by a requirement to maximise the opportunity to reach key stakeholders. To discuss options for advertising, speak to the Public Relations Unit.
- **Website** – Information can be placed on Colac Otway Shire's website at [www.colacotway.vic.gov.au](http://www.colacotway.vic.gov.au). Residents can provide feedback via Council's email address [inq@colacotway.vic.gov.au](mailto:inq@colacotway.vic.gov.au).
- **Colac Otway Shire's Community News/ Council Column** – This monthly column is an avenue for information about community engagement activities/events. It is designed to provide small bites of information, and direct people to our website for more details.
- **Write a letter** – This is a personally addressed letter to all affected households. It will outline the issues and invite comment. It will always indicate where the comment should be directed within Council. Citizens may initiate an exchange through this medium.
- **Township and community groups** – Local progress association and community groups are a valuable means of giving and receiving feedback on a range of issues. When the issue is localised it may only be selected individuals or associations that are consulted.
- **Media release** – This involves issuing media releases and conducting interviews with local journalists. The media release will be made available to local television, newspapers and relevant community newsletters.

- **Social media** – Council’s suite of facebook pages may be an appropriate platform to use for community engagement. Due to the more casual and conversational nature of social media, it is better suited to simpler issues of wide community interest. Speak to the Public Relations Unit for more information on social media.
- **Survey** – This is a statistically correct survey of particular qualitative and quantitative data. The data may include individual’s attitudes, beliefs or information. Electronic surveys are also a user-friendly way to seek feedback from our community, but please note these surveys are typically self-selected and therefore do not provide a statistically significant sample.
- **Letterbox drop** – Council seeks feedback through an unaddressed leaflet or flyer delivered to an affected area. The flyer will summarise the relevant issues.
- **Personal briefings** – These are held at the request of a member or members of the local community to discuss a particular issue with a responsible officer, which may include a Councillor(s).
- **Focus groups/review groups/forums** – These are discussion groups of around 15-20 people, usually led by a trained person or appropriate staff member. The participants are invited because they are residents or because they have a particular interest, involvement or stake in the subject being discussed. The group may be made up of professionals and/or residents with particular skills and competences relevant to the issue. The purpose is to find out the range of options that exist on a particular topic. Focus groups cannot measure how widely those various opinions are held in the community.
- **Public meetings/information sessions** – These may be held at a community venue, at the site of the matter under engagement, or at the Council offices. Invitations can be sent by either an advertisement, letterbox drop or via the media.
- **Telephone** – Two way communication between Council and resident (initiated by either)
- **Mediation** – Independent mediators may be appointed by Council to either manage a consultation or engagement process or to provide independent advice on the issue.
- **Receive petitions** – Council receives and responds to petitions generated by residents/stakeholders and reacts appropriately, in accordance with Colac Otway Shire’s Local Law.
- **Workshops** – Workshops may use a number of different styles and presentation formats as a means of involving communities in the engagement process. The workshop could include techniques such as storyboarding (to plan action and suggest means of problem solving), mind maps (brainstorming exercise for exploring solutions to problems), soap boxes or speak out (where individuals are provided with the opportunity to provide an opinion or information within a specified time period), or kitchen table discussion (small informal meeting usually in someone’s home or a local café).
- **Exhibitions/street stalls/festivals** – Informal methods of communication allowing community engagement and consultation to take place “where the people are.” It is important that the individuals conducting the exhibitions be sufficiently briefed and prepared to deal with a wide range of issues raised by the community.
- **Posters** – A simple poster placed in a high profile area (post office, noticeboard, corner store etc) could help you reach secondary stakeholders or help reinforce key aspects of the consultation process.

- **Photovoice** – A process of collecting information and expressing issues and concerns through photography. A great option for electronic engagement methods.

### **6.6 Evaluation**

Evaluation is imperative to the ongoing development and refinement of the Community Engagement process. Feedback and monitoring should be encouraged throughout the entirety of the engagement process. Evaluation can assist in identifying what has been learnt and what might be done better. The evaluation should focus on both the impact and process of community engagement. It should include the views of participants about the value of the exchange, especially whether the consultation process achieved its objective and whether the methods used were suitable.

### **6.7 Conclusion**

Whichever IAP2 level of community engagement or methods chosen, the process needs to be open, responsive, inclusive, consistent and accountable.

Council should make a concerted effort to confer with all parties for whom there are issues, which may be of interest or concern. There is a need to recognise that different methods may need to be employed to reach different groups or individuals, and to allow for variations in circumstance.

Council should guard against the possibility of being unduly swayed by vocal or influential minorities. Satisfactory engagement also requires that the community is given adequate time and opportunity to respond during any consultation process.

Council must meet its obligations giving prompt and effective feedback and following through with any undertakings it gives.

## **6. RELATED LEGISLATION**

- *Local Government Act 1989*
- *Information Privacy Act*
- *Planning and Environment Act 1987*
- Information Privacy Policy
- Special Rates and Charges Policy

## **7. RELATED POLICIES/PROCEDURES/GUIDELINES**

- Community Engagement Policy Oct 2009
- Media Relations Policy and Procedure
- Social Media Policy and Procedure

## Engagement Template

This template should be used as a guide to develop your Community Engagement Strategy. Your engagement strategy should form part of the planning process for your project.

### 1. Determining the need for engagement (Research phase)

This addresses the principle focus to ensure that the engagement is purpose driven and the type of engagement chosen from the IAP2 Spectrum is appropriate to the task.

- What is the issue or issues to be resolved?
- Are there any policies/strategic plans of council that may impact on any of these issues?
- What are Council's responsibilities in relation to any of the core issues identified?

### 2. Determining Objectives for the Engagement

- What outcome are you trying to achieve?

More than one method of engagement may be needed to achieve a successful outcome.

Objectives	IAP2 Spectrum	Methods

### 3. Identifying Stakeholders

Stakeholder	Concerns

### 4. Design Of Key Messages

What do you want to communicate to stakeholders involved in the engagement process? What information do they need to know to make an informed decision? What information could stakeholders get wrong or misunderstand?

Use plain English and keep messages short. Remember the less key messages the easier it is for stakeholders to retain information.

**5. Develop a Timeline for Project Completion**

**6. Evaluation**

For each of your objectives consider how you will know when you have achieved success.

<b>Objective</b>	<b>Performance Indicator</b>