



Mildura Rural City Council

Community Engagement Policy Policy – CP020

Prepared	Reviewed	Approved	Date	Council Minute No.
Community Engagement Officer	Executive Leadership Team	Council	January 2021	2021/0006
Trim File: 18/02/01		To be reviewed: January 2025		
Document Owner: Manager Community Futures		Review Frequency: Every four years		

1. Purpose

Mildura Rural City Council (Council) is committed to accountable, transparent and responsive decision making informed through the consistent application of well-designed community engagement

This policy must be read in conjunction with the Community Engagement Framework and the Community Engagement Planning Guide which outline the *type and form of community engagement proposed having regard to the significance and complexity of the matter and level of resourcing.*¹ The companion documents describe the specific planning, implementation and reporting activities to be undertaken for engagement processes.

By undertaking our engagement planning process, Council will apply the following elements:

- Members of our community have the right to be informed and to have the opportunities to influence Council decisions that impact their lives or the environment in which they live, work or participate.
- Community and stakeholder knowledge/awareness enhances a sustainable decision making process.
- Council will consider the issue at hand and the number of people affected. Council's level of engagement will reflect this.
- Community involvement in Council decision making will result in greater trust and confidence in Council's decision making process.
- Council decision making will be equitable, transparent, responsive, accountable and accessible.

¹ Section 55 (2) (e) Victorian Local Government Act 2020

2. Policy Statement

This Policy underpins Council's strategic commitment to community centered practice, through systematic integration of the key elements of good community engagement design into our day to day practice.

As a result this policy seeks to emphasise the importance of:

- Early engagement planning to ensure appropriate consideration of all implications in particular the impact on community.
- Community Engagement practice as a meaningful, collaborative and user focused process, to be delivered consistently at the level appropriate to the circumstances (see Table 4 – Levels of Engagement).
- Embedding the *Local Government Act 2020* Community Engagement principles, and IAP2 Values into our organisation's engagement practice, policies and strategic plans.
- Determining the appropriate tools and methods for community engagement based on a wide range of factors, including but not limited to:
 - Purpose
 - Scope
 - Objectives
 - extent of the impact on the community
 - who will be impacted by the decision
 - consideration of community concerns and priorities
 - consideration of project timeframes and resources
 - genuine need to engage
 - Legislative, or regulatory requirements.
- Innovation to build on the effectiveness and accessibility of the opportunities for community to participate in engagement with Council.
- Empowering the entire organisation to be confident and effective community engagement practitioners.
- A continuous improvement approach to community engagement practice through strategic evaluation and valuable measurement systems.
- Closing the communication loop, feeding back information to community about their contribution to the decision; and the outcome of the decision making process.

3. Implementation and Engagement Resources

The day to day practice to support implementation of this Policy is available to ensure our organisation can implement the requirements in line with best practice community engagement, staff will be supported in the following ways:

- Access to a suite of resources and tools to support them to prepare, design, deliver, report and evaluate their community engagement activities. This includes a planning process, a plan development template, a companion Community Engagement Planning Guide, planning tools, checklists and a dedicated community engagement platform.
- Access to training and professional development.
- Access to expert staff support to provide advice and guidance on matters relating to engagement planning and delivery, resource allocation, communications and best practice engagement methods.

4. Scope

This policy applies to Council members sitting as the elected body, Council employees, contractors, agents and consultants acting on behalf of Council with the understanding that well planned community engagement is the responsibility of our entire organisation.

5. Principles and Values

The principles and values table below (Table 1) guides the Community Engagement Practice objectives for Mildura Rural City Council.

They are aligned to the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) *Core Values for the Practice of Public Participation*, the Victorian Auditor General's Office (VAGO) *Public Participation Principles* the Community Engagement principles outlined in the *Local Government Act 2020* (the Act) with the values and expectations of our community.

Table1.

The Act Principles	IAP2 Core Values	Community Values	Our Practice Commitment (developed in reference to Section 55 (1 & 2) of the Act)
<p>Participants in community engagement must have access to objective, relevant and timely information to inform their participation.</p>	<p>Public participation provides participants with the information they need to participate in a meaningful way.</p>	<p>Respectful</p>	<p>We respect community’s right to be involved in decisions that impact them.</p> <p>We will respect the lived experience of our community members; and ask that they equally respect Elected Members and Council staff.</p> <p>We will listen to the wants and needs of the community.</p>
		<p>Meaningful</p>	<p>We will provide opportunity to the community in relevant circumstances to co-design solutions for the betterment of our community.</p> <p>We will engage on matters that are of importance to our community.</p> <p>We will provide authentic opportunities for community involvement.</p>
		<p>Transparent</p>	<p>We will be clear in our communication to the community as to scope and objectives and the community’s influence on the outcome.</p> <p>We will allocate sufficient time for the review of information and participation in engagement activities.</p> <p>We will endeavour to have clear marketing and visibility of the opportunities for participation.</p> <p>We will provide feedback to the community in a timely manner.</p>
<p>The community engagement process must have a clearly defined objective and scope.</p>	<p>Public participation seeks out and facilitates the involvement of those potentially affected by or interested in a decision.</p>	<p>Accessible</p>	<p>We will use a variety of methods and engagement platforms - online, print and face-to-face methods to maximise our reach for deliberative engagement and to remove potential barriers to participation.</p> <p>We will reach out to our community to invite their involvement and to hear from affected and interested groups.</p> <p>We will provide information that is objective, relevant, timely and easy to understand.</p> <p>We will endeavour to be inclusive and make our community feel welcome to participate and contribute through our communication, in the selection of locations, tools and methods of engagement.</p>
<p>Participants in community engagement are entitled to reasonable support to enable meaningful and informed engagement.</p>			

		Equitable and inclusive	<p>We will identify early the people and groups likely to be affected by our decision and ensure they have opportunities for equitable and inclusive participation.</p> <p>We will address physical, social, geographical cultural and technological barriers to participation.</p> <p>We will empower stakeholders with relevant, objective and plain English information and resources to allow informed participation.</p>
Participants in community engagement must be representative of the persons and groups affected by the matter.	Public participation is based on the belief that those who are affected by a decision have a right to be involved in the decision-making process.	Representative	<p>We will consider the needs and perspectives of all groups that may want to be involved in the process.</p> <p>We will identify the people, communities and stakeholders who are affected by and interested in the topic of engagement.</p> <p>We will actively seek the views of the whole community and design our engagement activities to be inclusive of our demographics.</p>
		Flexible Section 55 (2) (e)	<p>We will adapt our Engagement approach to meet evolving circumstances, including allowing for newly identified stakeholders to engage as necessary throughout the process.</p> <p>We will offer a range of engagement opportunities and methods and tools to allow community to participate in a way that is convenient and accessible for them.</p>
Participants in community engagement are informed of the ways in which the community engagement process will influence Council decision making.	Public participation promotes sustainable decisions by recognising and communicating the needs and interests of all participants, including decision makers.	Collaborative	<p>We will share information with community and ask that they share information with Council to develop a shared understanding to enable collaboration.</p> <p>We will provide opportunities for collaboration with community to determine sustainable solutions to complex local issues.</p>
		Influence	<p>We will advocate on behalf of the community where the work of external agencies (including other tiers of government) impacts our community.</p> <p>We will actively seek input from community members on their opinions, needs and interests to inform Council decision making.</p>
	Public participation seeks input from participants in designing how they participate.		

	Public participation includes the promise that the public's contribution will influence the decision. Public participation communicates to participants how their input affected the decision.	Accountable Section 55 (2) (g)	<p>We will inform participants of the level of influence they will have in a decision making process, and we will ensure they know the outcomes of any decisions made.</p> <p>We will report back to the community in a timely manner, explaining what we asked, what we heard, and what we did.</p> <p>We will action decision outcomes in a timely manner.</p> <p>Accountability is a key requirement in the preparation of a community engagement plan.</p>
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6. Roles and Responsibilities

6.1 Role of the Mayor

The role of the Mayor is to:

- Be a champion for the Council's Community Engagement activities.

6.2 Role of the Councillor

The role of every Councillor is to:

- Actively promote opportunities for community to participate in engagement activities.
- Encourage community to represent their needs and interests to Council so as to inform the decision making process.

In performing the role of a Councillor, a Councillor must:

- Consider the diversity of interests and needs of the municipal community.
- Although not specified in the Act Councillors are encouraged to:
 - Actively participate in engagement processes mandated by the Act; and
 - Undertake all engagement activities in accordance with the Engagement Policy.

6.2 Functions of the Chief Executive Officer

The role of the CEO is to:

- Lead the organisation to embed and sustain a positive, proactive attitude towards a best practice culture through support and encouragement of consistent high quality community engagement processes and outcomes.

6.4 Role of Executive Leadership Team

The role of the Senior Management Team is to:

- Apply better engagement practice through review of strategic documents against the Community Engagement Policy, Community Engagement Framework and Guide.
- Review evidence of engagement planning documentation.
- Lead each branch to create a strong community engagement culture that values engagement practice to support sustainable Council decision making processes.
- Value the time, budget and resources required for high-level engagement practice, through appropriate funding and resource allocation.
- Recognise, remove and/or mitigate internal barriers to engagement.

6.5 Managers/ Coordinators

The role of Managers and Coordinators is to:

- Endorse engagement plans developed and ensure the engagement activity level to be undertaken is appropriate and in accordance with the Community Engagement Policy.
- Value the time, budget and resources required for high-level engagement practice, through appropriate funding and resource allocation.
- Review post engagement evaluations and share the learning.
- Provide reports to Council that openly and transparently reflect the findings of a community engagement processes.
- Consider community and internal feedback to identify priorities and resources for development of Business Plans.
- Ensure staff undertaking community engagement have adequate training and/ or have sought mentoring support.
- Ensure teams, committees, reference groups, contractors and volunteers are aware of the Community Engagement Policy, Community Engagement Framework and the Engagement Planning Guide and undertake all engagement in accordance with the Policy.

6.6 Staff

The role of all staff is to:

- Assess the requirement for community engagement.
- Register evidence into Content Manager to demonstrate assessment process has determined if community engagement is required or not required.
- Undertake the engagement planning process to determine the scope, context and level of engagement required. Engagement plans are to be developed in accordance with the Community Engagement Policy.
- Register engagement plans and supporting documents into Content Manager to evidence planning and community engagement undertaken.
- Seek peer support for plan development and implementation, if required.

- Seek Managerial support, and endorsement of engagement plan documentation.
- Embed evaluation, monitoring and review into the engagement planning.
- Close the communication loop – ensure results of engagement are feedback to all internal, external stakeholders and participants in a timely manner.

6.7 Community Engagement Officer

The role of the Community Engagement Officer is to:

- Build capacity of the organisation to further embed community engagement practice through the implementation of the Community Engagement strategy actions.
- Provide in house advice and guidance regarding best practice in community engagement.
- Support project teams to plan, develop and evaluate engagement programs.
- Initiate the review of the Community Engagement Policy every 4 years.

6.8 Community Development Team

The role of the Community Development Team is to:

- Provide peer support through mentoring and guidance regarding best practice in community engagement.
- Support project teams to plan, develop and evaluate engagement activities.
- Support the review of the Community Engagement Policy.

6.9 Marketing and Communications Unit

The role of the Marketing and Communications Unit is to:

- Support development and implementation of community engagement through strategic and coordinated communications.

7. Legislated Engagement Requirements – *Local Government Act 2020*

Councils Community Engagement requirements are divided into the following categories:

- Legislated engagement
- Non- legislated engagement.

Council has specific requirements to undertake engagement under the:

- *Local Government Act 2020*; and
- Other State and Federal Acts specifically referring to community engagement and/or public consultation.

In some instances, an Act will prescribe a minimum legislative requirement; in other instances an Act may refer to the requirements as stated in Council's Community Engagement Policy at a minimum.

Legislated Engagement requirements specified in the Act (Section 9 (2) (g); and Section 55 (1 & 2); and Section 56 and Section 57 are tabled below, in accordance with the Community Engagement Policy, legislated activity should be undertaken (as a minimum).

Community Engagement Planning must be undertaken to evidence planning and due consideration of community impact and the application of the Community Engagement Policy principles and values for each of the legislated requirements in the sections of the Act as set out in the policy.

Deliberative Engagement Council should also be aware of the specific requirement to deliberative engagement practices in the development of Council plans, documents, policies and procedures, and that all principles within this Policy should also be applied, where relevant. For example, financial management, public transparency, strategic planning and service performance deliberative engagement practice must also be considered.

7.1 Section 9 (2) (d) of the Act

One of the overarching governance principles of the Act states *“the municipal community is to be engaged in strategic planning and strategic decision making”*.

Section 55 (2) (g) refers to the type and form of engagement as being deliberative engagement. Council is required to include deliberative engagement practices for the sections in the table below:

Legislated – Deliberative Engagement requirements.

Topic	Section Reference
Community Vision	Section 88
Council Plan	Section 90
Financial Plan	Section 91
Asset plan	Section 92

Legislated – Engagement requirements.

Topic	Section Reference
Community Engagement Policy	Section 55
The Governance Rules	Section 60
Proposing a Local Law	Section 73
Preparation of Budget or Revised Budget	Section 96
Acquisition and Compensation	Section 112
Restriction on power to sell or exchange land	Section 114
Lease of land	Section 115

Non- legislated engagement

In addition to legislated engagement requirements Council may consider undertaking community engagement, when engagement could;

- **Inform Decisions:** by providing opportunities for the community to contribute to the decision making processes.

- **Build Capacity:** by educating the community on a specific theme or issue to increase knowledge or change behaviours.
- **Strengthening Relationships:** by building new relationships and/or improve relationships with the community.

When to Engage

Engagement should happen early in the planning stage for any changes to or in the development of new; services, facilities, policies, plans or local laws that impact our community, including Council's budget. Engagement may need to occur at several stages in the lead up to final plans or decisions. The greater the impact on the community, the more interactive the consultation will be. Where necessary we will conduct technical research and feasibility of options before seeking community input to ensure the community is appropriately informed.

Council's Non legislated engagement practice will be guided by the Principles, Core values and Council's practice statements in Table 1 of this Policy.

Examples of non-legislated engagement could include but is not limited to:

1. Targeted Policies, strategies and ' initiatives.

This may include strategy development on issues that impact particular groups and/or areas and can also include positioning policies such e.g. Toilet Strategy, Public Open Space strategy.

2. Service planning and operational matters.

This includes activities undertaken to identify Community need and establish community interests in the discretionary services and day to day operational matters of Council, e.g. upgrades to local playgrounds.

How to Engage

Council's engagement planning process is guided by the IAP2 *Spectrum of Engagement* which describes five levels of engagement, from 'inform' through to 'empower'. It pairs up the role of the community with the level of influence they should expect to have. The spectrum is not intended to imply that participation can only be linear, that one type of participation should be completed before progressing to another. It is also not intended to suggest that some types of participation are better than others, or that only one level of participation, is appropriate for each process. Rather, many projects will involve more than one level of engagement at different stages of the process, or regarding different components of the project. This is because the community can have different levels of influence at different stages of the project and different groups within the community may be more directly impacted than others.

Community engagement involves a variety of engagement methods and communication techniques appropriate for the level of engagement and the needs of participants.

Table 4. Below describes the five levels of the spectrum and the roles of Council and community.

Council's role...	EMPOWER	COLLABORATE	INVOLVE	CONSULT	INFORM
	DELIBERATION				
	Level 3				
	Level 2				Level 1
	Place the final decision-making in the hands of the public.	Working together to develop an understanding of all issues and interests to work out alternatives and identify preferred solutions.	Working alongside the Community through multiple stages of a project to help identify issues and views to ensure that concerns and aspirations are understood and considered prior to decision.	Two way communications designed to gain Community feedback on a particular issue / topic to assist in decision making.	One way communication providing the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding about something that is to happen or has happened, the alternatives, opportunities and/ or solutions.
Our promise to the Public.	We will implement what you decide.	We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations and provide feedback on how public input influence the decision.	We will keep you informed.
Community will be given the opportunity to...	Act	Partner	Participate	Contribute	Listen
Example Techniques.	Citizen Juries Ballot Elections.	Citizen advisory committees Consensus-building Participatory decision-making.	Workshops Deliberative engagement polling.	Focus groups Surveys Public meetings.	Fact sheets Social media Newsletter.

Who to Engage

The breadth of activities for which we will engage with community and stakeholders is vast, therefore “who we engage” may vary from project to project. However, by undertaking Council’s community engagement planning process underpinned by the (IAP2) Core Values for the Practice of Public Participation, and the *Local Government Act 2020* (the Act) Principles will ensure we consistently involve all representative persons (both internal and external) organisations and groups (stakeholders) affected by the matter that is the subject of the community engagement.

Monitoring Evaluation and Review

Council has integrated monitoring, evaluation and review points into our community engagement processes, highlighted in our Community Engagement Planning Model, the Community Engagement Planning Guide and Community Engagement template. The domains for evaluation include but are not limited to the plan, process, relationships, and outcomes.

Closing the communication loop

Communicating the findings or results back to the participants is as integral to the process as the planning. Communication of the results and findings validates the authenticity of the process and is imperative for maintaining the integrity of the trust relationship between Council and community. Community have the right to be informed of the decision and of the way/s their involvement has influenced or impacted the decision which has been made. Council's Community Engagement Planning Guide supports the selection of tools and techniques appropriate to meet the needs of the stakeholders and the engagement participants.

8. Definitions

Community Engagement	A planned process that allows for people who will be affected by a decision to contribute to the outcome through participation and communication with Council in the decision making process.
Public Participation	The term used by IAP2 to describe community engagement.
Engagement	The defining elements of engagement: planned, purposeful, interrelationship between Council, community and stakeholders.
Consultation	Consultation is one of the levels on the IAP2 Spectrum and is the level of engagement generally used for legislative engagement to obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.
Community	Community can refer to people who live in the Mildura Rural City Council municipality or: <ul style="list-style-type: none">a) A Community of place based on a geographical location (residents of Merbein).b) Communities of practice based on common interests – gardening, bike riding.c) Communities of interest, i.e. Advisory to Council, ratepayers.d) Communities of identity – shared identity traditional owners of land in the municipal, age groups, language spoken, housing arrangements.e) People and bodies who conduct activities in the Mildura Rural City Council municipality (industry).

Stakeholder	<p>A person, group or organisation with a level of involvement in an engagement process based on impact, interest or responsibility for an outcome.</p> <p>Stakeholder may be internal (Elected Members and staff) or external (community, organisations, NGO's, state government, other levels of government involved in a decision)</p> <p>Always includes internal technical experts, decision makers and implementers of decision outcomes.</p>
Tools and Methods	<p>The activities or techniques that can be used to engage i.e. surveys virtual meetings, forums, geographic tools, ideas boards.</p> <p>Methods are the way it's delivered – i.e. Online or in person, public meetings and community panels, public competitions or deliberative budgeting for example.</p>
Engagement Planning	<p>The logical process to designing community engagement to ensure appropriate timing, resources, tools and methods according to a considered analysis of those affected, impacted or interested and the scope of any engagement project.</p>
Co-design	<p>A collaborative project undertaken with community to develop an agreed model or design of service delivery or public infrastructure.</p> <p>Can also refer to the co-design of the engagement process itself to ensure it is fully transparent and works for all parties.</p>
Deliberative Engagement	<p>Deliberative engagement is an approach to decision-making that allows inclusive representation of people from a community to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • consider relevant information from multiple points of view • discuss the issues and options to develop a common understanding and; • develop their thinking together to frame recommendations to inform the decision making of the elected officials.

9. Legislation and other references

9.1 Legislation

- *Local Government Act 2020*
- *Planning and Environment Act 1987*
- *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*
- *Defamation Act 2005*
- *Equal Opportunity Act 2010*
- *Freedom of Information Act 1982*
- *Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Act 1986*
- *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*
- *Public Administration Act 2004* - requires the use of community views to improve outcomes.
- *Information Privacy Act 2000*
- Local Government Performance Reporting Framework
- *Planning and Environment Act 1987*
- *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014*
- *Privacy Act 1988*
- *Road Management Act 2004*
- *Disability Act 2006*
- *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008.*

9.3 Documents

This policy is implemented in conjunction with the following documents:

- Mildura Rural City Council Plan 2017-2021
- Community Engagement Strategy 2020-2024
- Community Engagement Framework
- Community Engagement planning Guidelines including the Community Engagement Plan Template
- Customer Service Strategy
- Community Health and Wellbeing Plan
- Integrated Marketing and Communications Strategy
- Social Inclusion Policy CP019
- Financial Plan
- Asset Plan
- Local Laws
- Governance Rules
- Budget Policy Development.

9.4 Engagement Resources

- International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) *Core Values for the Practice of Public Participation.*
- The Victorian Auditor General's Office (VAGO) *Public Participation Principles.*
- *Victorian Local Government Act 2020.*

9.5 Risk Assessment Reference

Please tick the corporate governance risk(s) that this policy is addressing.

Risk Category	<i>Tick</i>	Risk Category	<i>Tick</i>
Asset Management	✓	Human Resource Management	
Committees		Leadership & Organisational Culture	✓
Compliance – Legal & Regulatory	✓	Occupational Health & Safety	
Contract Management		Organisational Risk Management	
Contract Tendering & Procurement		Project Management	
Corporate Governance	✓	Public Image and Reputation	✓
Environmental Sustainability			