COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT POLICY

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Responsible Officer:	Manager – Customer Engagement & Communications
Owner:	Manager – Customer Engagement & Communications
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Relevant Legislation/Authority:	Local Government Act 2020 (Vic)
DOCSETID:	NA

1. PURPOSE

This policy aims to demonstrate the City of Greater Bendigo's commitment to meaningful two-way engagement with the community by actively listening and communicating openly. It supports informed, evidence-based and long-term decision-making, ensures the community receives clear, timely and useful information, and promotes inclusive participation so everyone has a fair opportunity to be involved.

2. BACKGROUND

The City of Greater Bendigo is committed to delivering services that meet the needs and expectations of its community. We recognise that working in partnership with community members leads to stronger outcomes and better decisions, and we value hearing from people of all backgrounds to help guide our work. Community engagement provides important insights for Councillors and City staff about what matters most to the community and supports informed decision-making.

The Local Government Act 2020 requires councils to achieve the best outcomes for their communities now and into the future, involve the community in strategic planning and decision-making, and operate transparently.

In line with these requirements, all councils must adopt and maintain a *Community Engagement Policy*. This policy sets out the roles of Councillors and the organisation, establishes clear principles and expectations for engagement, promotes a consistent approach across City services, and outlines how engagement outcomes are reported back to the community. It also reinforces the City's commitment to inclusive participation across Greater Bendigo.

By engaging with the community, the City strengthens transparency and accountability, builds trust, and ensures decisions are informed by community needs, priorities and concerns.

Where external representatives are involved in engagement activities, they are required to comply with the Community Engagement Policy and associated framework.

Community engagement may be undertaken to:

- Inform Council decision-making
- Build relationships, trust and understanding between Council and the community
- Identify community needs, priorities and aspirations
- Co-design services, programs, projects and places
- Support community development and local capacity building
- Gather feedback to improve services and measure outcomes
- Foster collaboration and partnerships on shared community issues

3. SCOPE

This policy applies to Councillors and all employees, contractors, volunteers, consultants and any individuals or groups engaging with the community for or on behalf of the City.

4. DEFINITIONS

Act means the *Local Government Act 2020* (Vic).

City means the Greater Bendigo City Council, being a body corporate constituted as a municipal Council under the *Local Government Act 2020* (Vic).

Council means all Councillors collectively.

Councillor means the individual holding the office of a member of Greater Bendigo City Council.

Community Engagement is the process of building meaningful relationships and dialogue between Council, community members and stakeholders to inform decisions, shape services and places, foster understanding, and support collaborative action on issues that affect the community.

Deliberative Engagement means an engagement process with a select group of participants. The process focuses on a defined issue. It weighs up options and provides recommendations to decision-makers. Deliberative engagement in the Local Government Act must be applied to the development of the Community Vision, Council Plan, Financial Plan, and the Asset Plan. It is located on the collaborate-empower end of the IAP2 Spectrum of Participation.

International Association for Public Participation Australasia (IAP2)
IAP2 is a leading organisation in public engagement practice and has a series of tools which support the delivery of engagement, specifically core values, public participation spectrum, code of ethics for public participation practitioners, and quality assurance standards.

IAP2 Spectrum of Participation defines the level of participation and the publics role in an engagement process ranging from inform, consult, involve, collaborate and empower.

Community means:

- people who live in the City of Greater Bendigo;
- people and bodies who are ratepayers in the City of Greater Bendigo;
- traditional owners of the land in the City of Greater Bendigo; and
- people and bodies who conduct activities in the City of Greater Bendigo.

5. PRINCIPLES

The following six principles underpin this policy:

- **Transparency:** Clear, open and respectful communication that is honest, meaningful, and supports trust throughout the engagement process.
- **Clarity of purpose and scale:** The purpose, impact and complexity of the engagement is clearly communicated so community members understand why they are being engaged, what influence they can have, and what outcomes can realistically be achieved.
- **Inclusion:** Engagement is respectful, accessible and inclusive, reaching a diverse range of community members and ensuring appropriate information is provided so everyone can participate equitably.
- **Access and participation:** Remove barriers and provide appropriate support so community members can participate in a meaningful, respectful and culturally safe way.
- **Closing the loop:** Demonstrate accountability by sharing outcomes, communicating how community feedback was considered, and clearly showing where the community has influenced decisions.
- **Evaluation:** Assess and reflect on how community members were involved throughout the process, using feedback and lessons learned to strengthen accountability, improve future engagement and build community trust.

6. POLICY

The Council and City commit to:

- Take community engagement seriously and follow the principles in this policy
- Use a guide called the IAP2 Spectrum to help choose how much the community should be involved
- Make sure different groups of people are fairly represented when decisions affect them
- Think about cost, fairness, and the type of engagement that is needed, using the IAP2 guide
- Share information that is clear, easy to understand, and available to everyone, with help from the Communications and Engagement team
- Be honest about what parts of a decision the community can help shape, and what parts are already decided
- Use different ways to hear from the public so more people can take part, within a reasonable time
- Collect and use data that shows differences between genders and other groups to make sure everyone is included
- Let the community know how their feedback helped shape the final decision
- Review each engagement activity to learn what worked well and how to improve next time
- Flexibility in engagement: The City understands that one approach won't work for every situation. The way engagement is done will depend on the size or complexity of the issue, and what resources are available

7. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

All people as defined in the Policy scope must plan, design, and carry out Community Engagement that fits the size and needs of the issue, strategy, or plan. Their work must also follow the principles and commitments in this policy. If a certain type of engagement is required by law, like Deliberative Engagement, it must be done according to the legislation.

8. RELATED DOCUMENTS

Readers are encouraged to access relevant documents and/or resources which are available as per the below.

These include:

- Local Government Act 2020
- Planning and Environment Act 1987
- Essential Services Commission Act 2001
- Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008
- Road Management Act 2004
- Victorian Disability Act 2006
- Equal Opportunity Act 2010
- Gender Equality Act 2020
- Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006

- Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Amendment Act 2016
- Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010
- Multicultural Victoria Act 2011
- Department of Premier and Cabinet – Public Engagement Framework (2020)
- Greater Bendigo Council Plan
- Healthy Greater Bendigo 2021 2025
- Social Justice Framework 2022-2032

Further information or advice on this policy should be directed to the Customer Engagement & Communication Team.

9. HUMAN RIGHTS COMPATIBILITY

The implications of this policy have been assessed in accordance with the requirements of the Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities.

10. ADMINISTRATIVE UPDATES

It is recognised that, from time to time, circumstances may change leading to the need for minor administrative changes to this document. Where an update does not materially alter this, such a change may be made administratively. Examples include a change to the name of a City unit, a change to the name of a Federal or State Government department, and a minor update to legislation which does not have a material impact. However, any change or update which materially alters this document must be made through consultation with the staff Consultative Committee and with the approval of EMT or where required, resolution of Council.

11. DOCUMENT HISTORY

Date Approved	Responsible Officer	Unit	Change Type	Version	Next Review Date
Month, year	*Insert initials*	*Business Unit*	*Eg. Develop, Review (significant) Review (administrative), Update*	*Increase version number each time document is updated/changed*	*Month, year*
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