

Policy

Community Engagement Policy

Policy Number: 2007/10	Directorate: Customer and Performance
Approval by: Council	Responsible Officer: Head of Communications and Engagement
Approval Date: 22 July 2024	Version Number: 4
Review Date: July 2028	

1. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to outline Council's commitment to undertaking genuine community engagement to inform its decisions. Community engagement is one of many inputs when we make decisions and helps us to better understand the needs and priorities of our communities and stakeholders.

Well planned and purposeful community engagement creates greater transparency and trust and fosters stronger relationships with our community and stakeholders. It also helps the community to understand the range of perspectives and inputs that Council must consider when making decisions.

2. Policy Objectives

This Policy defines why and when Council will engage and the principles that will inform how we design and deliver community engagement processes. It recognises that every engagement plan is unique and needs to respond to the scope and scale of the decision being made; the level of influence the community can have on the outcome; and the people who are impacted.

3. Context

Statutory Requirements

The Local Government Act (Vic) 2020 requires all councils in Victoria to develop a community engagement policy (Section 55). The Act is principles based which means that while it is a local government requirement to produce a policy, each council's policy will look different to respond to local requirements.

There are a number of other state government acts that reference requirements for Council to undertake community engagement, in particular relating to management of assets and

infrastructure that may impact the community.

Land Use Planning

Strategic and Statutory Planning matters, particularly planning permit and planning scheme amendment processes are defined and controlled by separate legislative requirements and regulations set by the state government.

This Policy does however apply outside of the above statutory requirements, noting the community has greater influence over municipal and local plan and planning controls formulation through strategic planning processes. These set the strategic direction for statutory planning processes.

4. Scope

This policy applies to all community engagement processes initiated by Knox City Council.

For the purposes of this policy, community engagement is defined as:

The formal process to gather information from the community to inform a decision. It involves the development of a plan that outlines: level of influence; impacted and interested community members; activities to gather feedback; and a process for communicating the outcome to the community.

For the purposes of this policy, community engagement does not include stakeholder management which is considered part of everyday service design and delivery.

We will undertake community engagement when:

- The community can influence the outcome; and
- A policy, project or decision is likely to impact the community - the impacts may be economic, social, environmental, built form or governance related; and / or
- When we need information from the community to help make a decision or progress a project.

The Local Government Act requires the policy to be applied in the development of:

- The Community Vision, Council Plan, Financial Plan and Asset Plan, which must be developed using deliberative practices
- Local laws
- Budget and policy development

The Act requires the following property matters to be undertaken in line with this policy (in summary):

- Purchase or compulsory acquisition of land
- Sale or exchange of land

- Lease of land meeting one of the below criteria (which was not included in the Adopted Budget):
 - The rent is greater than \$100,000 for any one year of the lease;
 - The term is 10-years or more.

Decisions will be informed by other information in addition to community engagement. This information could include, but is not limited to:

- Population, demographics, and service usage data
- Technical
- Financial
- Environmental
- Research and previous community engagement data
- Legal, government and regulatory requirements.

5. Our approach

Our community engagement approach utilises the International Association of Public Participation Spectrum of Public Participation (IAP2 Spectrum). This model is recognised internationally as best practice for planning community engagement.






The IAP2 Spectrum, shown in Table 1, outlines five levels of engagement and what the goal is at each level. We have included a Knox promise to the community on what they can expect at each level when participating in a community engagement with us.

The level of engagement may change across different phases of a project or matter. For example, the development of a masterplan might start at *Involve* with in depth conversations to understand aspirations and discuss options, and then shift to *Consult* when we are seeking feedback on a draft to *Inform* when we communicate the outcome. There may also be different levels assigned to different members of the community, for example a football club president will *Collaborate* with us on the design for a new pavilion, while those that walk their dogs in the surrounding reserve might sit at *Consult*.

In the context of the Knox promise, *Inform* is assigned when a project may not be gathering feedback at that time or where identified community members do not have any influence on the decision. Where we do not intend to seek community feedback at any time, it is considered communications, not community engagement, and this policy does not apply.

The nature of Local Government, and the role of Councillors as a decision making body elected by the community, means the *Empower* level is only considered in rare situations. Use of this level of influence in the design of an engagement approach would require consideration by Council.

Table 1: IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation

IAP2 Level	IAP2 Public Participation Goal	Knox promise to you	
Inform	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities, and/or solutions		We will keep you informed.
Consult	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives, and/or decisions.		We will listen to what you say and consider it when we make a decision.
Involve	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.		We will work with you to ensure your feedback is reflected in the decision.
Collaborate	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.		We will work with you as we identify issues and opportunities and develop solutions. We will consider your advice as much as possible when we make the decision.
Empower	To place final decision making in the hands of the public.		We will implement what you decide.

Deliberative engagement

Deliberative engagement is where participants are provided with a high level of inclusion in the process and influence on a decision that affects them. Participants are representative of the community being impacted and are given the time to consider options and discuss an issue/s in depth before coming to a considered view. A deliberative process is designed in response to the scope and scale of the decision, available budget and can range in the number of participants. Deliberative practices can be incorporated into engagement at *Involve*, *Collaborate*, and *Empower* levels of engagement.

The Local Government Act (2020) requires Council to utilise deliberative engagement practices in the development of our long-term strategic plans: the Community Vision, Council plan, Financial Management Plans and Asset Management Plan. Council may also choose to undertake deliberative engagement on other matters when it is suitable to the scope, complexity, and impact of the decision.

6. Principles of Engagement

We will apply the following principles to each engagement process we undertake. These principles provide guidance on the qualities we strive to achieve when engaging with our community.

Community engagement at Knox is:

Meaningful: We provide our community with genuine opportunities to participate in decisions that affect them.

Transparent: We explain the level of influence the community can have on the outcome and detail what the community can and cannot influence and why. We will describe how the decision will be made and by who and share the outcomes of engagement processes with our community.

Respectful: We seek to understand the values, perspectives and needs of the community and communicate regularly throughout the life of the project. We actively seek out those who may be impacted by a decision to ensure their voices are heard.

Inclusive: We consider our diverse community members when designing our communications and engagement activities. We provide information in easy-to-understand accessible and culturally appropriate formats and provide support to those who need assistance to take part in our activities.

Informed: We provide relevant, accessible, and easy-to-understand information to support engagement and enough time to review the information and respond. We share information with the community at key milestones.

How these principles are applied and demonstrated will vary for each engagement process. For each engagement process we will share a summary of the engagement plan detailing:

- The decision being made
- What the community can and cannot influence
- Impacted and interested community members and their level of influence on the IAP2 Spectrum
- What other information will inform the decision
- Anticipated project timelines.

For projects that have multiple phases of engagement, it is likely the engagement approach will vary for each phase. A summary plan will be shared for each phase. It is also possible an engagement approach may need to be adapted during implementation. We will communicate any changes with stakeholders.

7. Planning Community Engagement

Each community engagement plan will be unique to the decision being made, relevant to:

- The scope, scale, and complexity of the decision
- Who in the community will be impacted or interested, and how much
- What the community will need to participate meaningfully, including the information they will need from us and what information we need from them
- Resourcing available to implement the engagement plan.

The community engagement plan will detail:

- What the decision to be made is
- What information we need from the community to inform that decision
- Who are the specific parts of our community that will be impacted by or interested in decision (stakeholders)
- What level of influence each stakeholder will have on the outcome
- What activities will we use to engage the different stakeholders
- How we will report back to participants
- How we will evaluate the engagement process.

Reporting back to participants

At completion of an engagement process, we will report back to participants what we have heard and the decision made. This will include an overview of engagement activities, who participated, what we heard and next steps. This report should be provided within a practical time of the engagement closing, considering the scope and scale of engagement and analysis required.

Depending on the situation, the decision may not be made straight away, in which case the outcome should be reported separately to the report on engagement.

8. Roles and Responsibilities

The specific roles and responsibilities will be confirmed within the engagement plan.

Responsible officer

The Council officer who is responsible for preparing the community engagement plan in line with this Policy.

Approver

The person responsible for approving the engagement plan, ensuring that:

- The requirements of this Policy are met, and the principles can be achieved

- The level of engagement assigned is appropriate
- The activities will gather the information required to make a decision
- There is adequate time and resources to implement the plan
- There is a plan for reporting back to the community the outcome of the engagement.

Decision maker

Depending on the decision to be made, the final decision maker could be:

- Council staff member
- A formal decision of Council.

9. References

Community & Council Plan 2021 -2025

- Provide opportunities for all people in Knox to have their say.

Relevant Legislation

- Local Government Act 2020
- Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014
- Equal Opportunity Act 2010
- Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008
- Planning and Environment Act 1987
- Road Management Act 2004

Human Rights and Gender Equity

- This policy has been assessed against the rights contained within the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 and is deemed compatible with the Charter
- An Equity Impact Assessment has been completed to guide the development of this Policy

Child Safe

- Child Safe Policy
- Child Safe Code of Conduct

Related Council Policies

- Councillor Code of Conduct
- Media Policy
- Complaints Policy

Related Council Procedures

- Community Engagement Process
- Communications Process

10. Definitions

Communication The act of providing information to the community or stakeholder. Communication could occur using one or more ‘channels’ or methods of communicating, including but not limited to; Knox News magazine, community papers, letters, fliers, signs, emails, website, social media. It can also include less formal channels such as conversations.

The selection of channel will be appropriate to the information to be communicated and the target audience.

Community Broadly, the Knox community includes those who live, work, study, visit or do business in the City of Knox.

For an engagement process we will define the specific community/s that are impacted or interested in the matter being considered. These could be groups or individuals within a specific location, of a certain demographic profile or with a certain interest. These may also be referred to as stakeholders.

Community Engagement The formal process to gather information from the community to inform a decision.

It involves the development of a plan that outlines: level of influence; impacted and interested community members; activities to gather feedback; and a process for communicating the outcome to the community.

Consult / consultation This term is commonly used interchangeably with ‘engagement’ when referring to the general practice of community engagement. ‘Consult’ is also a specific level of influence on the IAP2 Spectrum.

To avoid confusion we will only use this term when it relates to the level of influence.

Council (we) Knox City Council, whether constituted before or after the commencement of this Policy.

Councillor(s) An elected representative of the municipality.

Council officer **Employee** - Any permanent, part-time, temporary, or casual employee of Council. This includes roles in the management and executive positions.

Contractor/Agency/Labour Hire Worker - Any contractor/agency/labour hire worker who provides services or undertakes work on behalf of Council.

Volunteer/s - A member of the public when contributing directly to a Council program/service/event and who: is registered as a Council volunteer; or is part of any count with regard to volunteer hours contributed to Council programs/services/events. For the purposes of this Policy a volunteer also includes students on work/student placement.

Decision There are many types of decisions that Council makes. A decision could be a formal decision by Council at a Council meeting or made by Council officers through delegated responsibilities.

Decisions will be made:

- To endorse final documents such as strategies, plans and policies
- The development and drafting of those documents
- Service and program design.

Deliberative Engagement Deliberative engagement is where citizens are provided with a high level of inclusion in the process and influence on a decision that affects them. Participants are representative of the community being impacted and are given the time to consider options and discuss an issue/s in depth before coming to a considered view. A deliberative process is designed in response to the scope and scale of the project, available budget and can range in the number of participants. Deliberative practices can be incorporated into engagement at *Involve*, *Collaborate*, and *Empower* levels of engagement.

Participant/s Community members that provide feedback through an engagement process.

Stakeholder/s Identified member/s of the community that are impacted by or interested in the decision being made. These could be groups or individuals within a specific location, of a certain demographic profile or with a certain interest.

Stakeholder Management Interaction between Council and stakeholders such as working on everyday service design and delivery; and meetings or conversations with community members where they may provide feedback or comment on Council services.

This is not considered Community Engagement within this Policy.

11. Administrative Updates

From time to time, circumstances may change leading to the need for minor administrative changes to this policy. Where an update does not materially alter this policy, such a change may be made administratively. Examples of minor administrative changes include changes to names of Council departments or positions, change to names of Federal or State Government departments or a minor amendment to legislation that does not have material impact. Where any change or update may materially change the intent of this policy, it must be considered by Council.