



Community Engagement Policy

Policy Owner	Community Development Coordinator Community Strengthening
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1.0 PURPOSE

This policy outlines Mitchell Shire Council's (Council's) approach to Community Engagement and commitment to use appropriate, effective and inclusive engagement practices to support meaningful conversations with our diverse communities and stakeholders.

The Policy recognises the importance of designing and formalising community engagement methods to encourage maximum community participation and meet the specific outcomes of an initiative or project, deliver services or decision making. It aims to ensure that Council's Community Engagement is aligned with Mitchell Shire Council Community Vision, Council Plan and Community Engagement Framework.

2.0 DEFINITIONS

Community Engagement

A deliberate process with the specific purpose of working with individuals and groups across a community to encourage active involvement, open dialogue, feedback and participation and to align decision making processes appropriately to actions undertaken to a problem, opportunity or outcome.

Community Referring to residents, ratepayers, business and land owners and people who have an interest in decisions made by Council.

Council Mitchell Shire Council constituted as a municipal Council under the Local Government Act 1989.

Consultation Seeking feedback or advice on a select topic or project.

Deliberation Comprehensive and careful consideration or discussion.

Associated documents Refers to the Community Engagement Framework, Community Engagement Toolkit (to be actioned).

Deliberative Engagement Targeted engagement practices that encompass authenticity and transparency.

IAP2 Spectrum of Engagement Refers to the International Association of Public Participation engagement framework with its scale ranging from providing information (low level of engagement) to active participation (very high level of engagement). See 6.4

Stakeholders individuals or organisations which affect or can be affected by project decisions. Stakeholders can include interest groups, government departments/agencies, media, business and industry.

3.0 CONTEXT

Mitchell Shire Council's Community Engagement Policy fulfils the requirements as set out in the *Local Government Act 2020*. Council, through this policy acknowledges the importance in having regular conversations with the Mitchell Shire Community. These conversations can occur using a range of consultation and engagement techniques. The opportunities presented by using community engagement will support an open and transparent process that encourage community participation and seeks feedback on a range of Council service and planning based matters. The policy commits to authentic, transparent and meaningful community engagement to deliver long-term and sustainable outcomes in order for Council to meet the expectations of the community.

Council's community engagement policy will include strategies and processes that acknowledge the Mitchell Shire community context in which it occurs and recognise that, as the level of government closest to the community, Council has the ability and responsibility to enable and encourage strong community participation.

Community Engagement must involve deliberative engagement practices. Deliberative engagement practices can be broadly understood by the parameters listed in the *Local Government Act 2020* which are:

- > Authentic engagement with the community
- > Good representation of the community in engagement activities
- > Clear demonstration of how all views have been considered
- > Accessible and relevant information available to the community to ensure the decision-making process and the community's level of influence is clear in each instance and that participants are fully informed.

This policy outlines Council's role in providing opportunities which enhance community participation in order to share expectations, aspirations and ideas, which will ultimately build on the Community Engagement Framework of 2018. The policy should be applied to significant Council projects, activities, planning or processes which may directly have a direct or indirect impact on the community. It is acknowledged that consultation can provide a valuable contribution to inform better decision-making surrounding changes to services or infrastructure.

This policy has been developed to clarify Council's overall approach to community engagement by aligning with Council's values and ensuring that it is integrated into all aspects of council business. Strong and targeted community engagement is key towards ensuring that Council can support the interests of existing and emerging communities as Mitchell Shire's population grows.

4.0 SCOPE

The Community Engagement Policy is supported by the associated documents, which describe activities relating to the planning and conduct of community engagement activities, identification of stakeholders, tools and recording techniques and the roles and responsibilities of Councillors and staff in community engagement activities.

5.0 LEGISLATIVE CONTEXT

The *Local Government Act 2020* (the Act) identifies that Councils have a legitimate responsibility to partake in Community Engagement.

Part 3 Division 1 of the Act states:

- (1) A Council must adopt and maintain a community engagement policy.
- (2) A community engagement policy must—
 - (a) be developed in consultation with the municipal community; and
 - (b) give effect to the community engagement principles; and
 - (c) be capable of being applied to the making of the Council's local laws; and
 - (d) be capable of being applied in relation to the Council's budget and policy development; and
 - (e) describe the type and form of community engagement proposed, having regard to the significance and complexity of the matter and the level of resourcing required; and
 - (f) specify a process for informing the municipal community of the outcome of the community engagement; and
 - (g) include deliberative engagement practices which must include and address any matters prescribed by the regulations for the purposes of this paragraph and be capable of being applied to the development of the Community Vision, Council Plan, Financial Plan and Asset Plan and
 - (h) include any other matters prescribed by the regulations.

5.1 Informing Documents

This policy has linkages to a range of codes, charters, legislation and Council documents. This document has been informed by the following:

- o Mitchell Shire Community Engagement Framework 2018
- o Mitchell Shire Council Plan 2017-21
- o *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*
- o *Freedom of Information Act 1982*
- o *Local Government Act 2020*
- o *Local Government Act 1989*
- o *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014*
- o *Equal Opportunity Act 2010*
- o Public Transparency Policy

6.0 POLICY

6.1 Policy Statement

Mitchell Shire Council is committed to ensuring that the Community Engagement policy has three objectives, that is;

- To build capacity
- To strengthen relationships
- Inform decision making

All with the intent to promote efficient and effective community engagement and participation methods that ensure better community outcomes.

6.2 Principles

This Community Engagement Policy is informed by the Mitchell Shire Council Community Engagement Principles as outlined in the Community Engagement Framework for which Council will have regard to the following when undertaking community engagement:

- Engagement will be targeted, timely, open and easily understood.
- Engagement activities are inclusive, accessible and actively seek a diverse range of perspectives.
- Be upfront about how much opportunity there is to influence a decision.
- Define the community's role in any community engagement process using the IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum (Inform, Consult, Involve, Collaborate and Empower) (6.4).
- Provides information to support meaningful community participation.
- Use a variety of engagement techniques that meet the needs, interests and diversity of our communities.
- Let the community know how their input has influenced our decision and the outcomes (close the loop).
- Learn from each experience to review and improve our practice

6.3 Why We Engage

We utilise deliberative engagement and underpin all council processes in its pillars to:

- Strengthen decision making by Council that reflects the interests and needs of all sections of community.
- Increase the involvement and participation of all community groups in engagement activities and mitigate any barriers to engagement.
- Be deliberate inclusive and intentional with targeted engagement practices to ensure that hard to reach individuals and communities are heard to provide access and equity.
- Centre the importance of the need of all populations in the community within the context that they live.
- Elevate and encourage new voices and ideas to welcome differing lived experience and perspective.
- Reinforce community understanding and confidence in Council.
- Create and maintain opportunities for Council to collaborate with its stakeholders.

6.4 IAP2 Spectrum

To determine the required level of engagement and activities to be applied, officers should review the project against the engagement spectrum. The spectrum has five levels of engagement:

	Level 1 Inform	Level 2 Consult	Level 3 Involve	Level 4 Collaborate	Level 5 Empower
Goal	Targeted communication to provide balanced and objective information to assist understanding about something that is going to happen or has happened	Two-way communications designed to obtain feedback on ideas, alternatives and proposals to inform our decision making	Participatory process designed to help identify issues and views	Working together to develop an understanding of all issues and interests to work out alternatives and identify preferred solutions for joint decision making	Final decision making placed in the hands of the community
Council's Approach	We will share information about a decision or direction	We will explore options, gain feedback and an understanding of your concerns and preferences	We will involve you in the process so your ideas, concerns and aspirations are reflected in the alternative developed or the final decision	We collaborate with you so your advice, innovation and recommendations are included in the final decision that we make together	We will empower the community by placing the final decision with them and encourage community to lead initiatives
Role of Stakeholder/Community	Listen	Contribute	Participate	Partner	Lead
Examples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Fact sheets > Websites > Open days > Signs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Public comment > Focus groups > Surveys 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Workshops > Drop in sessions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Community Advisory Committees 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Ballots > Delegated decisions > Community plans

6.5 When We Do Engage

When we participate and encourage community engagement, we ensure that we engage the fundamentals of council understanding of engagement (6.1). That is, ensuring all engagement is;

- **Building Capacity** - educating the community on a specific theme or issue to increase knowledge or change behaviors
- **Strengthening Relationships** - building new relationships and/or improving relationships with the community.

- **Informing Decisions** - allowing the opportunity for community to contribute to decision making processes

The key drivers of community participation in areas such as engagement are:

- Having a clear understanding of the potential impact from a decision,
- Being aware of the amount and form of influence that participation can have on a decision
- Being conscious of a closed loop of participation where participants are aware of the outcomes.

This is important to create meaningful, transparent and accountable engagement.

Council will achieve this transparency and accountability through:

- Empowering stakeholders with relevant, accessible language, information and resources to allow informed participation and using engagement processes that are inclusive. As well as recognizing the right of all community members to be part of engagement and being transparent about which factors the community can practically influence, to what level and how we will use our community's input.
- Communicating the objectives of the engagement process and provide community members with all available and relevant information as part of the consultation engagement process to ensure informed discussion; and
- Reporting back to the community, clearly explaining what the procedure was, what the results were and the progress of the process going forward.

7.0 ENGAGEMENT RESOURCES FOR STAFF

A Community Engagement Toolkit will be made available to all Council officers to assist in processes to drive transparent and deliberative engagement.

8.0 MONITORING AND EVALUATION

This policy will be reviewed three years after its adoption by Council to ascertain its effectiveness by working towards the Purpose (1.0)

There should also be an annual evaluation of Council's Community Engagement.

9.0 HUMAN RIGHTS

This policy has considered and complies with the Human Rights and Responsibilities contained in the *Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*.