

Community Engagement Policy

July 2024

Purpose

Mitchell Shire Council's Community Engagement Policy guides and promotes meaningful, inclusive and transparent engagement with our community.

Scope

This policy is applied to Council's decision-making processes, projects, programs and initiatives. It establishes a transparent framework for engagement, ensuring our community have avenues to impact decisions, share their viewpoints and collaborate with Council to shape the future of Mitchell.

It's important to note that while this policy provides a framework for community engagement, it does not override any legal obligations or requirements specified in relevant legislation or regulations. The policy is designed to work alongside and align with these legal obligations.

Policy

Council is committed to fostering a culture of meaningful community engagement, ensuring that the voices and perspectives of our community are not only heard, but valued and integrated into our decision-making processes. This policy serves as a reflection of our commitment to open and inclusive governance, where transparency and accountability are paramount.

We are dedicated to forming and maintaining strong relationships with our community, inviting them to actively participate in shaping the future of Mitchell.

Policy Number

MSC 019

Directorate

Advocacy and
Communities

Owner

Manager, Customer
Communications and
Engagement

Date Endorsed

July 2024

Next Renewal Date

July 2028

Authorised

Council

Transparency is key, and we are committed to providing clear and accessible information about Council decisions, projects and services. Our aim is to foster an understanding of the factors influencing our decisions, as well as how community input is considered and incorporated into the decision-making process.

We embrace continuous improvement and acknowledge the importance of learning from our community's insights and experiences. We actively seek feedback to refine our engagement approaches, ensuring they are responsive, effective and aligned with community expectations.

We are committed to evaluating our engagement efforts and openly sharing the outcomes and progress with our community.

We value benchmarking our engagement practices against recognised standards. We adopt the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) framework, which provides a robust foundation for our engagement principles and methodologies. This framework guides our efforts to achieve authentic and meaningful community participation.

Objectives

This policy is designed to create a sense of community ownership, elevate the quality of decision-making, champion inclusivity and diversity, establish trust and transparency, facilitate collaborative problem-solving, empower the community and encourage ongoing improvement.

Community engagement principles

Council is committed to the community engagement principles outlined in the *Local Government Act 2020* that emphasise the importance of accessibility, inclusivity, transparency, timeliness, accountability, and continuous improvement.

Community engagement principles	Council's commitments
A community engagement process must have a clearly defined objective and scope.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ We'll set clear objectives and scope for each project or decision. ■ We'll ensure real chances for community participation in decisions. ■ We'll be transparent about the community's influence, explaining both their role in participation and the extent of their impact on decisions.
Participants in community engagement must have access to objective, relevant and timely information to inform their participation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ We'll offer clear, timely and relevant information, giving participants a chance to express their views.
Participants in community engagement must be representative of the persons and groups affected by the matter that is the subject of the community engagement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ We'll recognise key participants and groups, ensuring all affected by a decision or project are invited to join. ■ We'll utilise diverse ways — from communication to outreach — ensuring everyone impacted is both informed and empowered to participate.

Community engagement principles	Council's commitments
Participants in community engagement are entitled to reasonable support to enable meaningful and informed engagement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ We'll craft engagement activities that are both inclusive and accessible, making needed adjustments to eliminate any participation barriers. ■ We'll allocate enough time, ensuring all affected individuals have a genuine opportunity to contribute.
Participants in community engagement are informed of the ways in which the community engagement process will influence Council decision-making.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ We'll let participants know how their feedback influences decisions, and we'll share straightforward, timely reports with the community on how their input shaped our choices.

Applicable Legislation and Regulation

The *Local Government Act 2020* identifies that Councils have a responsibility to partake in community engagement. The Act states that:

- A Council must adopt and maintain a community engagement policy.

A community engagement policy must—

- Be developed in consultation with the municipal community; and
- Give effect to the community engagement principles; and
- Be capable of being applied to the making of the Council's local laws; and
- Be capable of being applied in relation to the Council's budget and policy development; and
- 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
- Specify a process for informing the municipal community of the outcome of the community engagement; and
- 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
- Include any other matters prescribed by the regulations.

IAP2 Spectrum

The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) spectrum provides a valuable guide for community engagement. The spectrum encompasses a range of engagement levels, from informing the public to empowering them with decision-making abilities.

Council recognises the significance of tailoring our engagement approaches based on the specific needs and objectives of each project or initiative and will utilise the IAP2 spectrum to guide our community engagement efforts, to ensure the most appropriate engagement for each situation.

Whether it involves simply providing information and keeping the community informed or actively involving them in collaborative decision-making processes, Council strives to find the right balance that fosters meaningful participation and reflects the desired outcomes of our engagement efforts.

	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	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
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 ■ Online and social media ■ Open days ■ Signage 	<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"> ■ Advisory Committees 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Ballots ■ Delegated decisions ■ Community plans

How and when we will engage

Council will engage the community when:

- A decision will impact on the community.
- An issue will have a long-term impact on the community.
- There is an action or commitment in a Council strategic document, decision or policy to undertake community engagement.
- There is a legislated or statutory requirement.

For when deliberative engagement is required, this will involve bringing the community together for meaningful discussions on important decisions for the community.

Council will create spaces where residents can share their views openly and honestly, ensuring every voice is heard and valued. This approach aims to deepen understanding of diverse perspectives and foster consensus, leading to decisions that truly reflect the community's needs and expectations. By integrating this method, Council is committed to making more informed and inclusive choices that benefit everyone in the community.

For legislated and high or medium impact projects, a community engagement strategy should be developed, which outlines the scope of influence, key stakeholders and methods of engagement.

In some instances, community engagement may not be possible or appropriate prior to deciding, especially where Council needs to respond quickly to avoid an immediate threat to the health, safety or wellbeing of the community.

Prior to adopting a strategy, plan, policy or local law, the final stage of consultation may include the right to make a written submission to Council. Those who make a submission have the right to speak in support of their submission to a meeting of the Council.

Participants in community engagement activities and the wider Mitchell community will be informed of the outcomes of community engagement projects.

An integral aspect of community engagement will be our focus on evaluation and continuous improvement to ensure our engagement efforts are both effective and responsive to the needs of our community.

Measuring the success of our engagement activities will be embedded into all engagement activities, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative metrics. This will include feedback from participants, the extent of community participation, and the impact of engagement on decision-making processes.

Additionally, the policy ensures regular reviews and updates to reflect evolving best practices and community expectations. This will enable Council to adapt and refine our engagement strategies, ensuring they remain relevant and impactful, and an inclusive approach that is truly reflective of our community's voice.

Project type	Form of engagement	Minimum level of engagement
Community Vision	Deliberative	Collaborate
Council Plan		
Financial Plan		Involve
Asset Plan		
Council Budget	Participatory	Consult or involve
Governance Rules		Consult
Health and Wellbeing Plan		Involve
Lease of Land		Inform
Purchase or compulsory acquisition of land		
Sale or exchange of land		
Local Laws		
Council plans, policies, planning permits, planning scheme amendments, strategies, major and critical local projects and services		Participatory

Roles and responsibilities

This policy applies to our Councillors, all Council officers, contractors, volunteers or any other persons engaged by Council's business to deliver community engagement services. It also serves as a guide for external organisations that deliver infrastructure and services in Mitchell Shire.

High-priority projects will be identified in an Annual Community Engagement Plan.

Priorities will be established in alignment with available resources and Council will work within these parameters to optimise resource allocation and deliver high-quality engagement experiences for our community. This approach reinforces our commitment to transparency, inclusivity and meaningful participation in decision-making processes.

Through coordinated ownership and resource-conscious coordination, we will strengthen community engagement efforts and collectively shape the future of Mitchell Shire.

This policy does not apply to projects where there is no decision to be made that may impact our community.

Community engagement is part of Council's core business and is the responsibility of all Council service areas, teams and employees. Our roles and responsibilities are shown in the table below.

Role	Responsibilities
Mayor	The Mayor has a unique role in community engagement as the designated spokesperson for Council.
Councillors	Demonstrate commitment to community engagement principles through leadership, modelling good practice, and having regard to community input as part of decision making.
Chief Executive Officer and Executive Leadership Team	Ensure that good quality and timely reporting is provided to Councillors on community engagement processes and outcomes. Ensure reputational and other risks of community engagement are managed.
Managers	Approve Community Engagement Plans developed by Council officers for high impact/risk projects. Ensure community engagement will be carried out at the appropriate level given the likely impact to the community; the level of risk, and the extent to which the community is able to influence the final outcome or decision.
Coordinators	Approve Community Engagement Plans for medium impact/risk projects. Oversee the implementation of Community Engagement Plans. Ensure reputational and other risks are managed. Ensure community engagement practices are carried out in accordance with Community Engagement Plans and this policy.
Council Officers	Community engagement is the responsibility of all Council employees as part of core business. It is the responsibility of Council officers to ensure quality and timely community engagement and reporting is delivered in accordance with this policy.

Training and development

Enhancing the skills of Council staff in community engagement is pivotal to effectively executing the Community Engagement Policy. This involves equipping staff with the necessary training to navigate and apply the policy's core principles, including inclusivity, transparency and effective communication.

Staff training will focus on the practical application of the IAP2 framework, ensuring they can effectively involve the community in decision-making processes. By improving staff capabilities in key areas such as digital engagement and feedback analysis, the council can better meet community expectations and strengthen the trust between the council and the community it serves.

Definitions

Topic	Definition
Engagement	Engagement is a deliberate process designed to foster collaboration among individuals and groups, motivating their active participation in a project. The concept of engagement is multifaceted, and its intent should be clearly outlined for

	each distinct project and its stages. Engagement encompasses a variety of avenues for stakeholders and the community to engage in a project. This encompasses activities such as informing individuals or groups about a project, soliciting community feedback during significant project stages or milestones, or collaborating with stakeholders to tackle local concerns.
Community	A community is a group of people who share a relationship or a common interest. A community of place consists of individuals connected by the area they live, work and/or visit. This can include communities living in the same street, neighbourhood, or suburb, as well as those working in the same building or businesses located in a particular activity centre. A community of interest refers to a group of people with shared interests, such as the natural environment, local history, or contemporary art. Lastly, a community of affiliation comprises individuals who are members of the same group or club, including sporting clubs or faith groups.
Council	Mitchell Shire Council constituted as a municipal Council under the <i>Local Government Act 2020</i> .
Consultation	Seeking feedback or advice on a select topic or project.
Deliberation	Comprehensive and careful consideration or discussion.
Deliberative Engagement	Deliberative engagement will involve bringing the community together for meaningful discussions on important decisions for the community.
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).
Stakeholders	Stakeholders are individuals or organisations affected by project decisions or who can affect them. Stakeholders can include interest groups, government departments/agencies, media, businesses and industry.

Applicable Legislation and Regulation

Legislative requirements

- *Local Government Act 2020*
- *Planning and Environment Act 1987*
- *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014*
- *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008*
- *Gender Equality Act 2020*
- *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005*
- *Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*

Mitchell Shire Council policies and procedures

- *Public Transparency Policy*
- *Governance Rules*
- *Information Privacy Policy*
- *Code of Conduct*

Overarching Governance Principles

The development of this Policy considered the *Local Government Act 2020*'s Overarching Governance Principles and the following were applied:

- | | | |
|--|--|--|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Lawful | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Community engagement | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Financially viable |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Best community outcome | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Innovation and improvement | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Consistent with government plans |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Sustainable | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Collaboration with government bodies | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Transparent |

Climate Change, Gender Equality, Human Rights and Child Safe Compliance

This Policy has considered and complies with the human rights and responsibilities contained in the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (Vic)*, *Gender Equality Act 2020*, *Climate Change Act 2017* and the Commission for Children and Young People Child Safe Standards.

Related Documents

Community Vision

- *Vibrant communities*

Council Plan

- *Council is accountable to, engaged with, and respected by our community*
- *Our communities are welcoming, engaged, prosperous, safe and healthy*