

Policy type	Council
Adopted by	Moirá Shire Council
Responsible General Manager	General Manager Corporate
Responsible Officer	General Manager Corporate
Date adopted	<i>February 2021</i>
Scheduled for review	4 years from the date of adoption

PURPOSE

This policy will reinforce councils commitment to provide opportunities for the community to influence the decisions, policies and plans of Council by actively participating in engagement programs and processes, lending us their experiences and expertise.

It will formalise our community engagement practices and provide the tools to conduct effective and consistent engagement with the community to better inform future planning of services, setting budgets and developing policies and strategies.

SCOPE

This policy provides direction on formal (including legislated) and informal community engagement activities undertaken by, or on behalf of, Council, including, but not limited to, the:

- Development or review of the Community Vision
- Preparation and adoption of the Council Plan
- Development, adoption and review of the Financial Plan
- Development, adoption and review of the Asset Plan
- Electoral structure review
- Governance rules
- Municipal Health and Wellbeing Plan and Road Management Plan
- Proposing and making a Local Law
- Budget or Revised budget
- Compulsory acquisition of land
- Selling, exchange or lease of land
- Development of Council policies that directly impact the community
- Planning and delivery of projects that create or change assets and service levels

This policy applies to all community engagement activities undertaken by Council, including work undertaken by consultants and volunteers.

The policy does not apply to community engagement processes that are subject to prescribed processes imposed by other Victorian legislation such as land-use planning applications or other Council processes such as service requests or complaints.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this Policy are to:

- articulate Council's commitment to engage with the community on decisions and development of plans and policies that affect them;
- improve understanding of community and stakeholder engagement;
- outline how community engagement is integrated into Council activities in order to support decision making and strengthen relationships and partnerships.

Council is committed to:

- promote the development of Moira Shire;
- educate and inform communities on the services Council delivers; and
- engage with communities in order to develop better relationships, premised upon informed decision-making and a relationship of trust.

DEFINITIONS

Community: A group of people who reside in the same geographical area or have a common interest, background, affiliation or membership.

Stakeholder: an individual or group with a strong interest in the decisions of Council and are directly impacted by their outcome. They can also be part of the community.

Communication: Imparting or exchanging of information or ideas by speaking, writing or other channels or mediums.

Participation: The act of taking part in something or being involved in activities.

Deliberation: A long and careful consideration or discussion and involves a group of representative community members considering relevant facts from multiple points of view, identifying options.

Engagement: An open accountable process where individuals and groups of the community are given the opportunity to exchange views and information to help inform and enhance the final decision making process of Council.

Consultation: The activity of seeking input on a number of options or a pre-determined recommendation to assist Council to make informed decisions.

Partnership: This occurs when two or more people or organisations work together to realise or achieve a goal.

ENGAGEMENT PRINCIPLES

Council's principles for good consultation are to:

- actively seek the input/opinion of relevant stakeholders to plans and changes, before they are put into effect;
- use consultation to assist Council to make informed decisions;
- demonstrate strong leadership with decision-making, reflecting what is best for the municipality in the 'big picture';
- prioritise engagement with those stakeholders who are directly affected by any plans or changes;
- seek the input of a range of stakeholders that reflects the make-up of the municipality.

Section 56 of the *Local Government Act 2020* establishes five community engagement principles applicable to Council. As required by *Section 55* of the Act, this policy gives effect to these principles.

Principle
Principle 1: A community engagement process must have a clearly defined objective and scope.
Principle 2: Participants in community engagement must have access to objective, relevant and timely information to inform their participation.
Principle 3: Participants in community engagement must be representative of the persons and groups affected by the matter that is the subject of the community engagement.
Principle 4: Participants in community engagement are entitled to reasonable support to enable meaningful and informed engagement.
Principle 5: Participants in community engagement are informed of the ways in which the community engagement process will influence Council decision making.

LEVEL OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

This policy draws upon the International Association for Public Participation's (IAP2) Public Participation Spectrum to guide the range and extent of participation at each of the five levels.

The five levels of engagement outlined on the spectrum may be utilised to meet our commitment to the community:

Level	Goal	Promise
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 keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the 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 that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.
Collaborate	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and identification of the preferred solution.	We will look to you for direct advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decision to the maximum extent possible.
Empower	To place final decision-making in the hands of the public.	We will implement what you decide.

TYPE AND FORM OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Council will consider the need to engage the community when a proposed change or decision is likely to:

- have significant impact on quality of life in the region;
- impact on services or facilities for residents and ratepayers;
- have a significant budgetary impact;
- involve a level of conflict, controversy or sensitivity; and
- when it is a legislated requirement to do so.

Consultation techniques, processes and timeframes

Council will use different community engagement techniques and communication mechanisms depending upon the issue or project, its particular circumstance and the audience it needs to target.

Council's decision to engage the community will consider:

- the legislative, cultural, social and economic factors that may constrain meaningful public participation;
- the cost of engagement (including the demand it makes on community and staff time) should represent good value for ratepayers, given the scope and scale of the decision.
- whether or not Council can obtain the community information it requires from another source, or previous engagement activity in order to maximise the use of limited resources and minimise the likelihood of consultation fatigue developing within the community.

Deliberative Engagement

This form of engagement involves bringing together a group of representative community members to consider evidence and diverse perspectives to weigh up the various options and come to a judgement on the way forward and develop a set of recommendations.

Council will undertake deliberative engagement in the following circumstances:

1. Where it has a legislated obligation (including Community Vision, Council Plan, Financial Plan and Asset Plan); or
2. Where it resolves that it wants its decision-making on a matter or initiative to be informed by this model of community engagement.

Deliberative practices are conducted in the 'Involve', 'Collaborate' and 'Empower' levels of influence on the IAP2 spectrum. It does not replace or take away from the decision-making powers of elected representatives.

Examples of deliberative engagement practices are:

- Working with Advisory Panels
- Online proposals and ideas, discussed by a panel or community members
- Participants asked to consider and prioritise ideas and options
- A representative group participates in a series of sessions of information exchange

Participatory Engagement

Participatory practices take place at the first two levels of influence on the spectrum, 'Inform' and 'Consult' and involve one-way information exchange either from Council to community or community to Council. This engagement typically occurs when feedback is invited on previously prepared ideas, alternatives or draft documents.

Examples of participatory practices are

- Surveys
- Polls, ideas gathering
- Submissions

Participation at this level can be very broad.

Submissions process

Where the community is invited to make submissions Council may decide to use section 223 of the *Local Government Act 1989*, which establishes a formal process for considering community input to Council decisions.

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

Some elements of community engagement are directed by statutory requirements. Under the *Local Government Act 2020* Council has a statutory obligation to develop a long-term Community Vision, Financial Plan and Asset Plan, as well as a four-year Council Plan. Under the Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008 Council has a statutory requirement to develop a four-year Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan. Council will meet its statutory obligations by ensuring the community will have an opportunity to participate in the development of these plans.

As a guide, the type of community engagement to be implemented is set out below:

Matter	Community Engagement Approach
Community Vision (s88)	Deliberative
Council Plan (s90)	Deliberative
Financial Plan (s91)	Deliberative
Asset Plan (s92)	Deliberative
Budget (s95 & s96)	Participatory
Making of a Local Law (s73)	Participatory
Acquiring or selling land (s112)	Participatory
Other statutory and non-statutory plans, strategies or policies, service planning and capital works projects	Type to be selected depending on the complexity of the matter.

RESPONSIBILITIES

Responsibilities for implementing this policy are shared as follows:

Party/parties	Roles and Responsibilities
Councillors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have a good understanding of the Community Engagement Policy and Framework • Help identify issues that would benefit from community engagement • Promote participation in engagement activities • Review the findings of engagement programs and consider the results as part of the decision making process • Balance the range of stakeholder views and concerns on an issue when making a decision
Corporate Management Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have a good understanding of the Community Engagement Policy and Framework • Champion better practice community engagement through policy, process and leadership • Monitor implementation and compliance with this policy
Managers/Supervisors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manage areas of responsibility to ensure community engagement is consistent with this policy.
Staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undertake actions which make community engagement activities consistent with this policy • Allow enough time to properly develop and implement the engagement process • Ensure participants have the information they need to participate effectively • Encourage discussion and understanding of all viewpoints • Uphold the principles of the Community Engagement Policy
Community Members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be respectful of our engagement processes, our Councillors & staff and other community members and stakeholders • Participate constructively in engagement programs and activities • Share local knowledge, experience and expertise
Representative Bodies and Advisory Committees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bring a representative voice to Council processes • Strengthen relationships between community members and council. • Encourage and promote community engagement opportunities among networks • Share information among networks

PLANNING, IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION

Employing good community consultation principles and practices will:

- develop local community-based decision-making, citizenship and social responsibility;
- empower local communities by facilitating citizens' direct input into decisions that affect their lives; and
- provide a means for citizens to participate in public life beyond the election of Council representatives.

Council will facilitate this by developing and maintaining a Community Engagement Framework that provides simple rules and strong incentives for community input into Council decisions, supported by monitoring, evaluation, information provision and feedback.

PROCESS FOR INFORMING THE COMMUNITY OF THE OUTCOME

In determining the methods for informing the community of the outcome of engagement processes, Council will consider:

- the relevant community engagement plan
- the stakeholders involved
- the relevance to, and the interest level of, the broader community.

The methods used to inform the community of the outcome of engagement processes will be outlined in specific community engagement plans, and will include, but not be limited to:

- Publication on Council's website
- Posts on Council's social media sites
- Print media
- Direct communication with individuals or groups that have participated in the process or requested to be notified of the outcomes (e.g. phone, email or post)
- Formal in-person announcements (e.g. community meeting).

RELATED POLICIES

Complaints Handling Policy
Advertising Protocol

RELATED LEGISLATION

Local Government Act 1989
Local Government Act 2020
Local Government (Planning and Reporting) regulations 2014
Disability Act 2006 (Part 2 – Section 5 Principles)
Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (Part 2 – Section 15 Freedom of expression & Section 18 Taking part in public life)
Equal Opportunity Act 2010 (Part 4 – Section 45 Service Provision)
Road Management Act 2004

REFERENCES

Customer Focus Strategy – 2019/2021
Moirá Shire Council – Governance Rules – 28 August 2020
Moirá Shire Council - Project Management Framework
Disability Access and Inclusion Plan
Gender Equity Plan/Policy

REVIEW

This policy will be reviewed three years from the date of adoption, with operational amendments as required, in accordance with Council's approval.