

Community Engagement Strategy

Version: 1.0
 Date adopted: 6 September 2016
 Responsible Department: Communications
 Related policies: Nil

1. Purpose

The *Community Engagement Strategy* details Council's commitment to consulting with the community to guide and inform decision-making.

The strategy provides a framework for Council to guide the delivery of community engagement processes across the organisation to better inform decisions in the planning of services, setting budgets and developing policies and strategies.

This strategy is based on the principle that community engagement is beneficial to the community and Council. Community engagement benefits the community by providing opportunities to participate in decision-making.

Community engagement is beneficial to Council as it ensures community priorities and service expectations are understood, provides an evidence base for good decision-making and strengthens democratic governance.

2. Definitions

Community	Means individuals and groups of people, stakeholders, interest groups and citizen groups. A community may be a geographic location (community of place), a community of similar interest (community of practice) or a community of affiliation or identity (such as industry or sporting club).
Community engagement	Means a planned process that aims to work with customers, stakeholders and/or communities to shape decisions and actions in relation to a problem, opportunity or outcome (<i>IAP2 2015</i>). Community engagement may also be referred to as public participation, consultation and stakeholder engagement.
Council	Means Casey City Council, being a body corporate

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	constituted as a municipal Council under the <i>Local Government Act 1989</i> .
Councillors	Means the individuals holding the office of a member of Casey City Council.
Council officer	Means the Chief Executive Officer and staff of Council appointed by the Chief Executive Officer.
Customer/s	Means an individual, business or organisation that uses Council services.
Decision	Means a conclusion or resolution reached after consideration. Decisions can take many forms and in this strategy it is used to include activities such as projects, service design/delivery, and policy development.
Project	Means a planned undertaking that builds, enhances and/or maintains Council assets or enhances Council services in order to achieve a desired outcome, within a defined scope.
Stakeholder/s	Defined as individuals, group of individuals, organisations or political entities with a specific stake in the outcome of a decision or the impact of a strategy, project or proposition.
IAP2	The International Association for Public Participation.
Inform	A level of community engagement in the IAP2 Spectrum for Public Participation in which an organisation provides the community with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.
Consult	A level of community engagement in the IAP2 Spectrum for Public Participation in which an organisation seeks community feedback on alternatives, drafts or proposals.
Involve	A level of community engagement in the IAP2 Spectrum for Public Participation in which an organisation works with the community to ensure that their concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed.
Collaborate	A level of community engagement in the IAP2 Spectrum for Public Participation in which an organisation partners with the community through the whole process of making a decision.
Empower	A level of community engagement in the IAP2 Spectrum for Public Participation in which an organisation shares some or all of its authority to make decisions with the community.

3. Scope

This strategy applies to all City of Casey employees, Councillors, volunteers, consultants and contractors associated with Council.

The strategy provides direction for practice through the lifecycle of community engagement from designing, to planning, managing, reporting and learning (including monitoring and evaluating) and is supported by an operational manual for staff.

4. Context

Community engagement at the City of Casey is influenced by the following factors:

- » A growing expectation by stakeholders, communities and customers that they will have an opportunity to influence government decisions that affect their lives.
- » Continuous improvement of services is important to local government, and this is enabled through high quality information gained through consistent community engagement.
- » Better decision-making outcomes as a result of adopting a standard for community engagement in which it is a usual way of working, undertaken consistently across the organisation to provide quality information.
- » Approaches to leadership, governance and decision-making that require greater public participation, including:
 - » The Victorian Auditor-General's Office Better Practice Guide for Public Participation in Government Decision-Making (2015).
 - » Local Government Rate Capping and Variation Framework (Victorian Essential Services Commission) requirements for community engagement for rate increases above the CPI cap.
 - » An industry-recognised Quality Assurance Standard for Community and Stakeholder Engagement developed by the IAP2 (2015) which provides a reference point for government organisations.
- » Contemporary communication channels, including digital and social media, audience diversity and expectations.

In some instances, the City of Casey is legislatively and/or legally required to engage with the community. In these cases, the City of Casey will treat the legally required level of community engagement as the minimum standard. The organisation will endeavour to meet the interests of the community to be involved in specific decisions and projects.

Delivery of community engagement beyond legally required levels will depend on the decision to be made (or project/service to be delivered), the community's interest to participate, the need to understand the community's view, and the opportunity for the community to influence the decision.

Community engagement is required under the following relevant legislation:

- » *Local Government Act 1989*
- » *Road Management Act 2004*
- » *Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*

- » *Planning and Environment Act 2007*
- » *Health and Wellbeing Act 2008*

5. Strategy

5.1. Commitment to community engagement

The City of Casey is committed to engaging communities in a meaningful way on decisions that impact and/or interest them. When Council actively engages with its communities, it will:

- » Provide opportunities that are accessible and support participation of the entire community, including children, youth, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, people with a disability, culturally and linguistically diverse communities and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI) communities.
- » Undertake initiatives to enable the participation of people potentially affected by a decision and endeavour to reduce any barriers that prevent their participation.
- » Implement flexible processes with a variety of community engagement tools and techniques to ensure maximum participation relevant to the project.
- » Resource and allocate time to develop community engagement processes.
- » Be transparent with the community about how their participation influenced the decision or project.
- » Undertake efficient community engagement by working together across the organisation to reduce the duplication of community engagement activities.
- » Monitor and evaluate the City of Casey's community engagement processes to continuously improve community engagement practice.
- » Inform the community about how their contributions influenced the final decision or project.
- » Evaluate this strategy and Council's community engagement practice.
- » Measure community satisfaction by undertaking market research especially if the engagement activity requires a representative sample of the community.

The City of Casey commits to adhering to the IAP2 *Code of Ethics* for community engagement practitioners, which provides the following set of researched and tested principles:

- » **Purpose:** we support community engagement as a process to make better decisions that incorporate the interests and concerns of all affected stakeholders and meet the needs of the City of Casey.
- » **Role of community engagement practitioners:** we will enhance the community's participation in the decision-making process and assist decision-makers in being responsive to the community's concerns and suggestions.
- » **Trust:** we will undertake and encourage actions that build trust and credibility for the process and among all the participants.
- » **Defining the community's role:** we will carefully consider and accurately portray the community's role in the decision-making process.
- » **Openness:** we will encourage the disclosure of all information relevant to the community's understanding and evaluation of a decision.

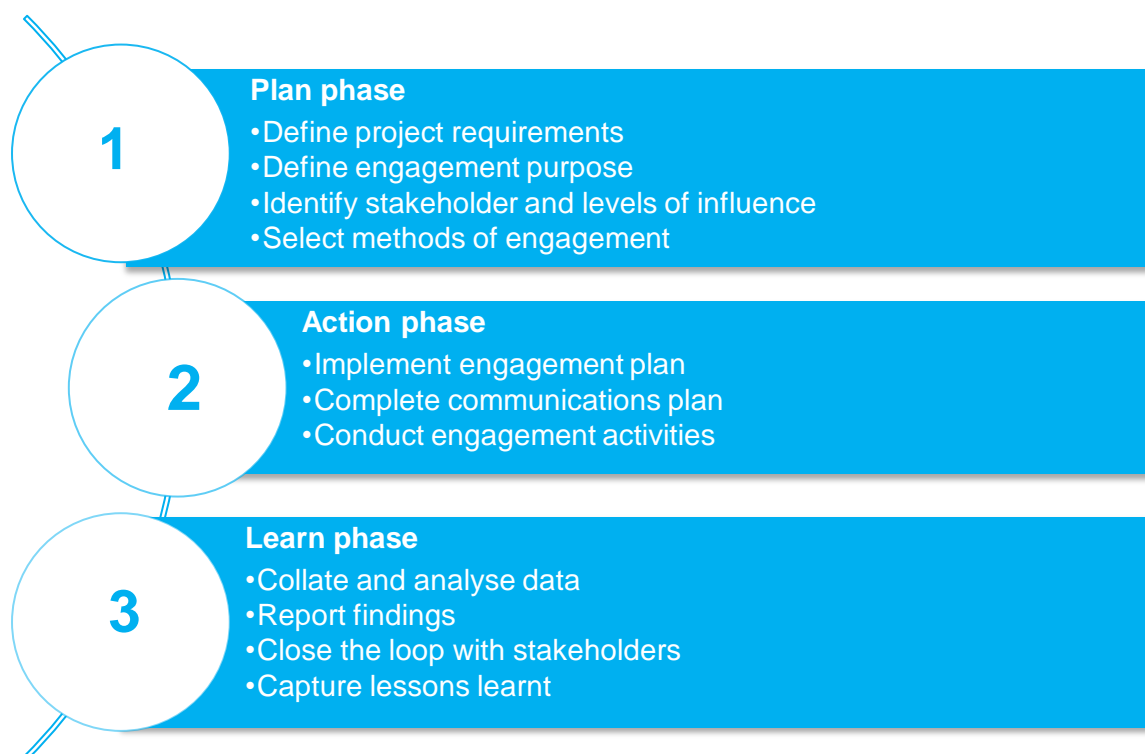
- » **Access to the process:** we will ensure that stakeholders have fair and equal access to the community engagement process and the opportunity to influence decisions.
- » **Respect for communities:** we will avoid strategies that risk polarising community interest or that appear to 'divide and conquer'.
- » **Advocacy:** we will advocate for the community engagement process and will not advocate for a particular interest, party or project outcome.
- » **Commitments:** we will ensure that all commitments made to the community, including those by decision-makers, are made in good faith.
- » **Support of the practice:** we will mentor new practitioners in the field and educate decision-makers and the community about the value and use of community engagement.

5.2. Approach to community engagement

Community engagement at the City of Casey is a purposeful and planned process.

An operational manual has been developed and Council departments undertaking community engagement will create engagement plans in-line with this manual in consultation with the Communications Department.

The design of community engagement is undertaken early in a project to allow for a timely and well planned process. Community engagement plans address the full life-cycle of practice including the phases and steps shown in the diagram below (adapted from the *Design, Plan, Manage* model, IAP2 2015):



5.3. When Council will engage the community

The City of Casey will engage with the community when:

- » Council resolves formally to engage
- » There is a requirement to understand the communities' expectations, needs and priorities
- » Planning services and in the development of Council's Annual Budget and Council Plan
- » There is the potential that a decision or plan will substantially impact the community
- » Community advocates have expressed an interest or could be interested
- » Community input can enhance decision-making, project outcomes or future opportunities
- » There is legislation, policy or agreement requiring community engagement.

Determining the level/s of community engagement is complex. The operational manual provides advice for Council staff on how to determine the appropriate level/s of engagement. The extent of Council's engagement will be communicated to the community early in the engagement process.

5.4. Community engagement tools

Council will utilise the following tools and channels when engaging with the community.

The tools used will vary dependent on the engagement topic and IAP2 spectrum;

<p>Inform - Council will keep the community informed.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Website » Social media » Publications » Media releases » Exhibits and displays » Direct communications such as letter, email and phone.
<p>Consult - Council will keep the community informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Surveys » Online forums on Council's engagement platform, Casey Conversations » Face to face at community engagement events » Drop-in information sessions » Pop-up stands at community spaces » Feedback and submission forms
<p>Involve - Council will work with the community to ensure that</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Workshops » Focus groups » Community panels

their concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	
Collaborate - Council will work together with the community to formulate solutions and incorporate their advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	» Participatory decision-making
Empower - Council will implement what the community decide.	» Citizens' jury

* Source: Adapted from International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) *Public Participation Spectrum 2014*

5.5. Evaluation

Evaluation and learning is part of community engagement practice at the City of Casey.

Evaluation is an integral part of any project lifecycle. An evaluation framework enables the City of Casey to monitor community engagement practice and allows for improvements to the organisation's approach to community engagement. The evaluation framework will be guided by the IAP2 *Quality Assurance Standard for Community and Stakeholder Engagement* and Victorian Auditor-General's Office *Better Practice Guide for Public Participation in Government Decision-Making*.

Evaluation is the responsibility of departments undertaking community engagement and will adhere to the evaluation framework. The operational manual provides advice on how staff can evaluate individual processes.

6. Strategic Themes

Based on consultation, research and expert advice; four key strategic themes have been developed to assist the City of Casey to create a culture of leading practice in community engagement.

These themes are supported by strategic actions aimed at enhancing the way the City of Casey undertakes community engagement.

Strategic Theme 1: Staff have the capacity and skills to undertake community engagement in-line with the strategy

Strategic Theme 2: Systems and tools to support leading practice in community engagement

Strategic Theme 3: Community engagement findings and processes are a standard part of decision-making at the City of Casey

Strategic Theme 4: Community engagement effectively results in better decisions and service provision to the community

7. Relationship with other Council policies

The Council's *Project Management Framework* identifies trigger points for the design and planning of community engagement at the City of Casey.

The community engagement principles outlined in this strategy are aligned with the *Customer Focus Strategy* and *Diversity, Access and Inclusion Policy*.

8. 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 document, such a change may be made administratively. Examples include a change to the name of a Council department, 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 by resolution of Council.

9. Review

The strategy will be reviewed annually with the next review scheduled for 30 September 2017.