

Community Engagement Policy

2025-29

Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners

The City of Boroondara acknowledges the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people as the Traditional Owners and original custodians of this land, and we pay our respects to their Elders past and present.

Responsible Directorate: Customer and Transformation
Authorised By: Council
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Table of contents

Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners.....	2
Table of contents.....	3
1 Introduction.....	5
1.1 Purpose.....	5
1.2 Scope.....	5
2 Background.....	5
2.1 Policy environment.....	5
2.2. Corporate framework.....	6
3 Methodology.....	6
3.1 Consultation.....	6
3.2 Desktop research.....	7
3.3 Internal consultation.....	7
4 Policy statement.....	7
4.1 What is community engagement?.....	7
4.2 Types of community engagement.....	9
4.3 When to engage.....	12
4.4 When not to engage.....	13
4.5 Who we engage with.....	14
4.6 Reporting to keep the community up to date.....	14
5 Implementation and monitoring.....	15
5.1 Revision.....	15

5.2	Accountabilities	15
6	References	15
6.1	Relevant legislation and standards	15
6.2	Complementary policies and strategies	16
6.3	Definitions.....	17

1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose

This policy outlines how Council will fulfil its commitment to create genuine and transparent opportunities for community members to have their say in Council's decision-making. Council encourages participation in civic life as it's central to good health, developing strong and supportive networks and creating a positive community spirit.

Further to this policy, internal guidelines have been developed to assist Council officers with engagement activities, including:

- deliberative engagement as defined on page 17, and
- how to consult children in a manner consistent with Victoria's Child Safe Standards.

The guidelines are updated regularly.

1.2 Scope

This policy applies to all employees, contractors, agents and volunteers of Council who are involved in engaging with the Boroondara community. This policy will also apply to agencies and individuals who provide services to Council.

2 Background

2.1 Policy environment

The City of Boroondara continues its long-standing commitment to engaging with its local communities and stakeholders using best practice. Our community expects they will be active participants in Council's decision-making.

Local Government Act 2020

The *Local Government Act 2020* states a Council's role is to provide governance and leadership for the local community. This is delivered through advocacy, decision making and action to achieve the best outcomes for the local community. When making decisions, Council considers the community's diverse needs.

Under the *Local Government Act 2020*, the 'local community' includes:

- people who live in the City of Boroondara
- people and bodies who are ratepayers
- people and bodies who conduct activities in the City of Boroondara.

Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006

The *Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* enshrines the human right to take part in public life. It states, “every person has the right to take part in public life, such as the right to vote or run for public office”.

2.2 Corporate framework

Boroondara Community Plan

The Boroondara Community Plan 2025–35 is our 10-year vision for the City of Boroondara. It was developed through extensive consultation with our community and reflects our community’s aspirations, based on 5,632 contributions from people who told us what’s important to them.

The plan sets out how we will achieve our community’s vision of a healthy, connected and sustainable Boroondara by shaping the type of community, places and environments we want to live and participate in. It prioritises the liveability of the City of Boroondara and puts community health and wellbeing at the centre of everything we do.

The principles of the Boroondara Community Plan are reflected in this policy, namely:

- We actively seek community feedback to understand what is important and how we can continue to improve.
- We make fair, transparent and ethical decisions based on what our community tells us is important.
- We remove barriers to participation and work closely with groups facing greater challenges to support their full inclusion.

3 Methodology

3.1 Consultation

Community members were invited to help Council improve community consultations and engagement in July and early August 2025. People could provide their feedback and suggestions via a survey or submit a comment online, by email, letters or over the phone.

Updates to this policy reflect the community's evolving needs, communication preferences and expectations for public participation.

3.2 Desktop research

- Quality Assurance Standard for Community and Stakeholder Engagement produced by the Engagement Institute (formerly IAP2 Australasia)¹.
- Community engagement policies and reviews by other Australian municipalities and the Australian Public Service.

3.3 Internal consultation

The policy has been updated in consultation with leaders and stakeholders within Council.

4 Policy statement

4.1 What is community engagement?

Community engagement is a process in which the community has a role in Council's decision-making. For Council decision-making to be an effective, transparent and accountable process, decisions are made by weighing and balancing community expectations with other factors such as:

- financial responsibility
- economic considerations
- health and safety considerations
- equity and diversity considerations
- environmental impacts and opportunities
- social and cultural considerations.

This policy is guided by the engagement principles in the *Local Government Act 2020*.

- Engagement processes are clearly defined and scoped.
- Participants should:
 - have access to information to inform their participation
 - represent those affected by the engagement topic
 - be supported

¹ [Quality Assurance Standard 2015, IAP2 Federation](#)

- be informed about how the process will influence Council's decision-making.

This policy supports open and honest expectations about roles and responsibilities, limitations, objectives and engagement processes. In many instances, the decisions made by Council will satisfy some participants and not others who may hold a different position. Good engagement will deliver a process that is fair and balanced by:

- identifying those who are likely to be affected and involve them in the decision-making process
- explaining the decision-making process
- offering methods that enable and encourage participation by all including groups in our community who may experience barriers to engaging
- enabling participants to express their views
- summarising the differing views shared with Council during the engagement to enable Council to make a well-informed decision
- keeping the community informed about the progress of the engagement and the decision made.

The IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum

To reflect international best practice, Council uses the Public Participation Spectrum developed by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2)². The spectrum outlines the 5 different levels of public participation in decision-making processes. Council staff will be supported by Strategic Communications in selecting an appropriate level for their community engagement.

² The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) is an international member association which seeks to promote and improve the practice of public participation. Members include governments, institutions and other entities that affect the public interest throughout the world.

Table 1: IAP2 Spectrum for Public Participation as used by the City of Boroondara

	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Public participation goal	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problems, alternatives and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in aspects of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place decision-making elements in the hands of the public with a final decision made by those elected. <i>See note below.</i>
Example tools	• Factsheet • Website	• Survey • Call for submissions • Focus group • Pop-up Council • Workshop	• Workshop • Online wiki • Working group • Community advisory group	• Reference group • Working group • Community advisory group	• People's panel
Role of community	Listen	Contribute	Participate	Partner	Partner
Council's commitment to the community	We will keep you informed.	We will listen and acknowledge concerns and aspirations. We will report back on how the community feedback influenced the decision.	We will work with you to ensure your concerns and aspirations are reflected in the alternatives developed.	We will work with you to innovate, seek your advice and incorporate your comments to the maximum extent possible.	We will attach significant weight to what is recommended.

Note: At the 'Empower' level, significant weight will be given to recommendations from groups formally established by Council for the purpose of providing recommendations on a particular matter. However, final decisions will be made by councillors, as they are elected to make decisions on behalf of the community. This ensures balanced representation and the necessary accountability between councillors as decision-makers and those impacted by the decisions.

4.2 Types of community engagement

Broadly speaking there are 3 types of community engagement within the IAP2 spectrum:

1. informational
2. participatory
3. deliberative.

Some Council matters will use different types of engagement at different stages.

4.2.1 Informational engagement

If a matter cannot be influenced by the community, it falls within the *Inform* level of the IAP2 Spectrum. Informing is a one-way transfer of information. In these cases, Council will notify the community of the matter and provide balanced and objective information to help people understand Council's decisions or intentions.

4.2.2 Participatory engagement

Participatory engagement occurs within the *Consult* level of the spectrum and is a two-way exchange of information. Participatory engagement is typical when Council is seeking feedback on ideas and concepts, draft documents or as an insight into a people's views on a particular subject.

Boroondara hosts a consultation website listing participatory consultations. Community members are encouraged to sign up for email alerts about consultations that match their interests.

Participatory practices include:

- surveys
- polls, including polls on hyperlocal matters
- interactive activities designed to allow people to share their views, ideas or preferences
- submissions in the form of emails or letters or presenting to councillors at a public meeting
- discussions with Council staff at pop-up displays or drop-in sessions
- workshops.

Awareness campaigns

Each participatory engagement is supported by an awareness campaign to alert community members to their right to participate. Awareness campaigns typically include emails, newsletters, letters/postcards, signs and social media. Awareness campaigns for hyperlocal consultations (for example, choosing a street tree) may consist of letters only.

4.2.3 Deliberative engagement

Deliberative engagement is more common in the *Involve*, *Collaborate* and *Empower* levels of the IAP2 spectrum.

Council will use deliberative engagement for:

- maintenance of the Community Vision
- preparation of a Council Plan, referred to as the Boroondara Community Plan
- development of a 10-year Financial Plan
- development of a 10-year Asset Plan.

Boroondara's deliberative engagement can take various forms but should consider these elements:

- a representative sample of the community who are going to be impacted
- clear scope and remit for the deliberation, including a commitment to participants on the level of influence their recommendations or decisions hold
- provision of timely, impartial information
- adequate time for deliberation by participants
- an independent facilitator to lead the deliberative activities.

Council is committed to supporting inclusive participation in deliberative engagement through accessibility, assistance with transport, childcare, translators and potentially reimbursement.

Both deliberative engagement activities and deliberative engagement processes are appropriate when developing the Boroondara Community Plan.

- Deliberative engagement activities allow members of the impacted group or community to consider all information and prioritise solutions. The group's priorities provide the basis for decision-making.
- A deliberative engagement process allows members of the impacted group or community to reach a consensus after considering all information and prioritising solutions. The group's consensus/decision is likely to be accepted to the maximum extent possible.

4.2.4 Other engagement processes

Verbal submissions at Delegated Committee meetings or Council meetings

Community members can also speak or present to councillors about an engagement matter.

At the City of Boroondara, this generally happens at a Council delegated committee meeting. A delegated committee meeting is a public meeting of all councillors where decisions are made.

Community members can register to present by arriving shortly before the meeting starts and completing a short form.

Community members can speak for up to 3 minutes when the report about the engagement matter is presented to Council. Councillors can also ask community members questions about their presentation.

Submissions under the *Local Government Act 1989*

Section 223 of the *Local Government Act 1989* is still in force alongside the *Local Government Act 2020* for matters including:

- council decisions to change the valuation system - Section 157(5)
- special rates - Sections 163A and 166(4)
- rebates and concessions - Section 169(1C)
- concentration or diversion of drainage - Section 199
- drainage of land - Section 200
- a range of traffic and road related matters - Section 207A.

In situations where Section 223 applies, the only form of community participation may be through a submission in writing or a verbal presentation to councillors.

4.3 When to engage

Good engagement starts early in a project's lifecycle when there is more than one potential solution to be explored. It takes time, preparation and resources. Planning for community engagement at the beginning of a project results in better managed timeframes, cost and resources.

Council commits to applying this policy in relation to:

- the community vision
- the council plan (the Boroondara Community Plan)
- the long-term financial plan
- budgeting

- the asset plan
- proposing and/or amending a local law
- proposing to discontinue a road or remove reservation status
- proposing to permanently close a road
- selling or exchanging land
- leasing land, when Section 115 of the *Local Government Act* applies
- buying land, with careful consideration of appropriate timing for engagement.

While not specifically directed by the *Local Government Act 2020*, Council may engage the community when:

- reviewing existing strategies and proposing a change in strategic direction
- substantially changing or reviewing a service, program or project
- proposing a new policy or strategy
- proposing a change to the way a public space looks, or is used
- making rules or regulations that govern the use and enjoyment of public space
- proposing urban redevelopment that may significantly change the existing amenity or characteristic of an area
- planning capital works including public buildings or other infrastructure
- considering new place names.

Opportunities for community engagement may also arise when:

- the community raises an issue with Council for a decision or outcome and there are likely to be competing community interests
- a proposed change is likely to generate strong and mixed views
- Council needs more information to make an informed decision
- an issue may significantly affect the community in terms of economy, environment, lifestyle or amenity of the municipality.

The specific methods for engagement will be designed to reflect the scope, intent and audience of each matter.

The minimum consultation period is 2 weeks.

4.4 When not to engage

There may be times when engagement is not appropriate, such as:

- when it has potential to conflict with Council's other engagement activities.
Engagement may be deferred until a more appropriate time

- during an election/caretaker period as governed by the *Local Government Act 2020* and/or Council's Election Period Policy
- when it conflicts with statutory processes such as those identified in Section 4.2.4.

4.5 Who we engage with

Engagement should be designed to invite participation from the persons and groups affected by the matter. This means tailoring engagement to reach diverse groups and individuals in the community, including those whose views are less often heard, such as:

- children and young people
- people in the early stages of building their career and/or family
- people aged 85+
- people from multicultural backgrounds
- people who live with a disability and their carers
- Traditional Owners (Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung) and First Peoples.

Council should encourage and empower children to participate in community engagement on matters impacting them. This is in line with Victoria's compulsory Child Safe Standards.

4.6 Reporting to keep the community up to date

Capturing and reporting feedback demonstrates Council listens to its community, and community members' input and lived experience is valued. Reporting back demonstrates:

- the purpose of the consultation
- that community feedback was heard and acknowledged
- how community feedback influenced and informed the final decision made
- who made the final decision (for example, Council staff or Councillors).

A report may take the format of:

- a letter to the stakeholders involved
- a consultation summary outlining the awareness campaign and summarising details of who participated and what they said (suitable for the consultation website)
- a full consultation report outlining the awareness campaign and detailing who participated, what they said, the views of specific cohorts, detailed analysis of responses to open questions and next steps (suitable for the consultation website)
- a video
- a Council report for presentation to Councillors at a public meeting.

5 Implementation and monitoring

5.1 Revision

The *Local Government Act 2020* requires Councils to maintain a Community Engagement Policy. This policy will be reviewed in 2029, or as required.

5.2 Accountabilities

The Head of Strategic Communications coordinates the implementation, maintenance and review of this policy, ensuring stakeholders are aware of their accountabilities.

The Strategic Communications branch:

- is an active participant in the Council's community engagement culture and practice
- brings expertise, influence and resources such as the consultation website to support departments in their community engagement, as required.

All staff will be supported by Strategic Communications in being accountable for this policy.

Position title	Contact number	Contact department email
Head of Strategic Communications	(03) 9278 4444	ecomms@boroondara.vic.gov.au

6 References

6.1 Relevant legislation and standards

Community engagement is required under:

- *Age Discrimination Act 2004*
- *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*
- *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*
- *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008*
- *Equal Opportunity Act 2010*
- *Health Act 1958*

- *Information Privacy Act 2000*
- *Local Government Act 2020*
- *Local Government Act 1989*
- *Planning and Environment Act 1987*
- *Road Management Act 2004*
- *Child Safe Standards.*

6.2 Complementary policies and strategies

Related Council policies and strategies include, but are not limited to:

- *Advisory Committees and Appointments Policy 2024*
- *Boroondara Community Plan 2025-35*
- *Discontinuance of Roads and Reserves Policy 2022*
- *Election Period Policy 2024*
- *Governance Rules 2024*
- *Parking Management Policy 2017*
- *Public Transparency Policy 2020*
- *Reconciliation Strategy 2022-26*
- *Traffic Management Policy 2018.*

6.3 Definitions

Glossary	Definition
Community	People who live in the City of Boroondara, people and bodies who are ratepayers, and people and bodies who conduct activities in Boroondara, such as people who work or study in Boroondara.
Engagement	‘Engagement’, as used in this policy, is a practice, specifically through the development and delivery of a community engagement program. ‘Engagement’ may also describe the broad range of interactions between people, including approaches such as one-way communication or information delivery, consultation, involvement and collaboration in decision-making, and empowered action in informal groups or formal partnerships.
Stakeholder	The term ‘stakeholder’ represents a broader definition than a group with a special or particular interest in an issue. It is extended to include the broader community and Council staff as stakeholders.
Deliberative engagement	The key characteristics of deliberative engagement 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 • participants are fully informed. Transparency is key to an effective process.
Representative sample	A representative sample is a subset of Boroondara community members whose demographic characteristics mirror Boroondara’s whole population. The key characteristics of relevance to this policy include gender, age group, suburb of residence and cultural diversity. Engaging with a representative sample is appropriate during deliberative engagement, as the views of the representative sample can be relied upon to represent the views of the whole community.