

## Community Engagement Policy 2021

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

The Community Engagement Policy 2021 replaces Council’s 2018 Policy and has been updated to comply with the new *Victorian Local Government Act 2020*. The intent of the legislation is to assist Councils to build capacity in community engagement and for deliberative engagement to become usual practice, rather than an exceptional exercise.

This policy confirms Council’s commitment to the community on the principles and values that guide our community engagement.

### 2. OBJECTIVES

Community engagement at Indigo Shire Council will be developed in accordance with the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) framework, which outlines a wide variety of engagement methods, tools and channels for engagement activities.

Activities will be implemented to ensure that all members of our community have genuine opportunities to participate in community engagement activities about matters that affect them, and to provide feedback where there is an opportunity to influence the outcome of a matter being considered.

The objectives of the policy are to:

- Promote a consistent approach to community engagement that is integrated into Council activities to inform decision making, build relationships and strengthen communities
- Strengthen relationships and trust between Council, the community and stakeholders through collaborations, partnerships, and new ways to involve the community
- Meet legislative requirements under the *Local Government Act 2020*

### 3. SCOPE

This policy provides direction on formal (including legislated) and informal community consultation and engagement activities undertaken by, or on behalf of Council.

This policy applies to Councillors, Council officers, volunteers, consultants and contractors associated with Council and should be used to inform all stages of a community engagement process.

Community engagement relating to planning permit applications and planning scheme amendments is outside of the scope of this policy, as these processes are governed by the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* and associated regulations.

### 4. POLICY STATEMENT

*‘We will take the time to understand the needs, aspirations, concerns and ideas of the community to improve our planning and delivery of services across Indigo Shire.’*

### 5. POLICY PRINCIPLES

The community engagement principles set out in Section 56 of the *Victorian Local Government Act 2020* outline a method of engagement that is defined, informed, representative, supported and democratic.

The following principles and commitments will inform community engagement processes undertaken by Indigo Shire Council.

Principle (as per the Local Government Act 2020)	Our commitment
<p>1. The community engagement process has a clearly defined objective and scope.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We will develop community engagement plans in accordance with this policy.</li> <li>• We will communicate the reasons for engagement with participants.</li> <li>• We will allocate appropriate funding and time to engagement planning and implementation.</li> </ul>
<p>2. Participants in community engagement will have access to objective, relevant and timely information to inform their participation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We will ensure the community has the information necessary to participate meaningfully in the engagement activities.</li> <li>• We will endeavour to provide information that is objective, relevant, timely and easy to understand.</li> </ul>
<p>3. Participants in community engagement will be representative of the persons and groups affected by the matter.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We will identify the people, communities and stakeholders who are affected by and interested in the topic of engagement.</li> <li>• We will reach out to our community to involve and hear from participants that represent the affected and interested groups.</li> </ul>

<p>4. Participants in community engagement are entitled to reasonable support to enable meaningful and informed engagement.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We will reduce physical, social and cultural barriers to participation.</li> <li>• We will seek at all times to provide the opportunity for anyone affected by a Council decision to provide their view</li> <li>• We will seek to obtain the views of a broad cross section of the community, especially when there is a quiet majority.</li> <li>• We will allow sufficient time for review of information and participation in varied engagement activities.</li> </ul>
<p>5. Participants in community engagement are informed of the ways in which the community engagement process will influence Council decision making.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify the appropriate level of engagement according to the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) Framework.</li> <li>• Articulate how community perspectives will be incorporated into decision making and the nature of decisions to be made.</li> <li>• Share what has been learned and what actions or decisions have resulted from the engagement process.</li> </ul>

## 6. HOW WE WILL ENGAGE THE COMMUNITY

Where possible, community engagement should happen early in the planning stage for any changes to, or introduction of new services, facilities, policies or local laws that impact our community.

Further, under section 60(2)(b) of the *Local Government Act 2020*, any person whose rights will be directly affected by a decision of the Council is entitled to communicate their views and have their interests considered.

Engagement may need to occur at several stages in the lead up to final plans or decisions. The greater the impact on the community, the more interactive the consultation should be. Where necessary we will conduct technical research and feasibility of options before seeking community input to ensure the community is appropriately informed.

In some instances, community engagement may be as simple as keeping the community informed and communicating what's going on, or to asking for feedback after an event. At other times, it may involve in-depth discussions to help develop and decide on solutions to challenging issues.

### 6.1 Who we engage

When planning for community engagement, we will identify the people and groups (including our Committees of Council and Advisory Groups) interested in, or affected by the issue that is the focus of the community engagement and offer a range of methods to ensure they can participate if they choose to.

### 6.2 Our engagement approach

Our approach is guided by the IAP2 Spectrum of Engagement which describes five levels of engagement,

from ‘inform’ through to ‘empower’. It matches the role of the community with the level of influence they should expect.

Many projects will involve more than one level of engagement. This is because the community can have different levels of influence at different stages of the project and different groups within the community may be more directly impacted than others.

The five levels of engagement outlined on the IAP2 spectrum will be used in every instance to meet our commitment to the community.

	<b>Inform</b>	<b>Consult</b>	<b>Involve</b>	<b>Collaborate</b>	<b>Empower</b>
<b>Public participation goal</b>	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure concerns and aspirations are understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of a preferred solution.	To place the final decision making in the hands of the public.
<b>Promise to the public</b>	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	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.	We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.
<b>The role of our community</b>	Receive information	Contribute opinions and ideas	Participate in making plans and decisions	Actively partner for an agreed outcome	Carry out a community-led initiative
<b>Examples of Techniques</b>	Website Social media Media release Advertising/public notices Newsletter Fact sheets Signs/posters/fliers Community forums Project meetings	Focus groups Public exhibition Surveys (online and hard copy) Ideas boards Social pin point Opinion polls Face-to-face interviews and discussions Public meetings	Workshops Community panels Advisory groups steering committees reference groups Online forums Co designing Detailed online mapping, ranking and prioritising tools (eg Social Pinpoint) Regularly reporting back to the community		Independently governed reference groups Citizens juries Representative deliberative panels

## 7. TYPE OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PRACTICES

The type or form of engagement practices undertaken can be broadly described as either deliberative or participatory. Many of our community engagement activities are likely to include both types of practice.

### 7.1 Deliberative engagement practices

Deliberative engagement is a careful and in-depth attempt to consider together evidence, impacts and views before reaching a decision.

Deliberative practices take place at the highest three levels of influence on the IAP2 spectrum, 'Involve', 'Collaborate' or 'Empower'.

The key characteristics of deliberative engagement are considered to be:

- 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.

Projects most suited to a deliberative approach include those where the outcome will have a far-reaching or long-term effect, and issues where there is considerable community concern or division about the alternatives.

### 7.2 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. Participatory engagement typically occurs when feedback is invited on ideas, alternatives or draft documents.

### 7.3 Formal Process

Council's approach to deliberative and participatory engagement is purposefully flexible and adaptable to each circumstance. In some cases, the process may be broad-ranging and lengthy, whilst in other circumstances it may be short and targeted. Each process will be assessed and customised to achieve the appropriate level of consultation.

There are however some Council decisions that warrant a minimum level of formal process (in addition to the deliberative or participatory consultation described above). These processes were previously governed by s.223 of the 1989 Local Government Act.

In these circumstances Council will;

1. Advertise the item for a minimum of 14 to 28 days to allow for members of the community to make a written submission.
2. Provide an opportunity for submitters to speak to Councillors in support of their submission
3. Ensure that submissions are provided to all Councillors before any decision is made.

Engagement Examples	Type of engagement Practice	Level of influence (IAP2)
Developing a community vision	Deliberative	Involve, collaborate, empower
Four-Year Council Plan	Deliberative	Involve, collaborate, empower
Long-term Financial Plan	Deliberative	Involve, collaborate, empower
Asset Plan	Deliberative	Involve, collaborate, empower
Budget	Participatory	Inform, consult, involve
Making of a Local Law	Participatory	Inform, consult, involve
Sale of Council Land	Participatory	Inform, consult, involve
Development of Council plans, policies, strategies	Participatory	Inform, consult, involve
Review of Council plans, policies, strategies	Participatory	Inform, consult, involve
Major Projects	Participatory	Inform, consult, involve

Keeping the community informed and updated on Council activities, programs, projects and initiatives is a hugely important part of our commitment to open and transparent governance.

Not all business that comes before the council will result in community engagement. This may be when another level of government has within their authority determined the timeframe or methodology for a project, or when the consultation surrounding an issue is led by another level of government.

## 8. ENGAGEMENT PLANS AND COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

As a minimum, all engagement plans will include the following:

- The purpose and objectives of the exercise (why and how)
- The proposed methods of engagement (what and how)
- The intended outcomes (what will be achieved)
- The scope of the engagement (level of influence – IAP2)
- The people who should be involved (specialists, decision-makers and community participants)
- The methods for informing the community of the outcome of engagement (How we will close the loop)

We will promote, deliver and report on our engagement through a wide range of communication channels and engagement methods, including the Have a Say section on the Council website, the Indigo Shire Weekly Update e-newsletter, Indigo Connection newspaper advertising, face-to-face, updates to stakeholders and participants and social media.

The selection of these channels and methods will be fit for purpose, considering the scale and size of the engagement, the level of the engagement and the needs and preferences of impacted and interested community members.

We will report outcomes directly to those who participated in any way to the engagement process as well as to the Council and the community at large.

## 9. RESPONSIBILITIES

Responsibilities for implementing this policy are shared as follows:

PARTY	ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES
Councillors	Champion engagement opportunities and balance the range of stakeholder views and concerns on an issue when making a decision.
Executive Management Team (EMT)	Consult with councillors to establish the engagement process to be used. Champion better practice community engagement through policy, process and leadership. Monitor implementation and compliance with this policy.
Managers	Manage areas of responsibility to ensure community engagement is consistent with this policy. Ensure delegated decisions are carried out with consistent levels and processes of engagement.
Staff	Undertake to make community engagement activities consistent with this policy.

## 10. DEFINITIONS

Community engagement	A process that facilitates communication, interaction, involvement and exchange between an organisation and a community.
Community	Means residents, ratepayers, business owners and people who work in Indigo Shire and who have an interest in decisions made by Council.
Stakeholders	Sections of the community involved in engagement because of impact, interest or responsibility to deliver on an outcome. Can also refer to external organisations, and other levels of government involved in a decision. Always includes internal decision makers and those responsible for implementing a decision
Associated documents	Refers to the Community Engagement Strategy, Community Engagement Toolkit and the Social Media Procedural Guidelines documents.
Communication	Includes all written, verbal, electronic and personal interactions by all staff and Councillors with any member of the community, visitors, all levels of government and other agencies, including social media.

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).
Participation processes	Refers to the methods by which engagement takes place and includes, but is not limited by, those outlined in the IAP2 Spectrum of Engagement

## RELATED POLICIES

- Community Engagement Strategy 2018 (to be updated)
- Councillors' Code of Conduct
- Governance Rules
- Public Transparency Policy