



# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT POLICY

## DOCUMENT CONTROL

<b>Managed by:</b>	Community and Strategic Development
<b>Status:</b>	Approved
<b>Responsible position:</b>	Director Community and Strategic Development
<b>Contact number:</b>	03 5153 9500
<b>Date approved:</b>	12/12/17
<b>Version:</b>	3
<b>File number:</b>	7425948
<b>Approved by:</b>	Council
<b>Next review date:</b>	December 2021
<b>Security classification:</b>	Public

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### REVISION HISTORY *(Completed by Governance Officer)*

<b>Revision Ref. No.</b>	<b>Approved/ Amended/ Rescinded</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Council / Management</b>	<b>ECM Document Reference</b>
Original	Approved	03/11/2011	Council	4480728
2	Approved	19/11/2013	Council	5523289
3	Approved	12/12/17	Council	7425948

## 1. PURPOSE

This Community Engagement Policy outlines and guides Council's commitment to engaging with East Gippsland's many communities and stakeholders using appropriate, effective and inclusive engagement practices.

Council is committed to engaging effectively with its community in a meaningful, accountable, responsive and equitable way. This policy outlines Council's position, role and commitments to ensure community engagement is integrated into Council activities to support decision making, build relationships and strengthen communities.

The Policy also recognises Council's desire to have a consistent approach to engagement which will support effective engagement throughout the organisation and assists Council to develop and encourage this consistency.

The community engagement policy should be applied at the planning stage of any project or initiative, when a change in service, activities or infrastructure is considered, when an issue is raised and requires a decision or when more information or evidence is required. Engagement may be required at multiple stages within a project, program or development.

Community engagement is the responsibility of all Council officers and contractors working on specific projects or services for Council.

## 2. SCOPE OF POLICY

Community engagement is defined as *the range of opportunities for public involvement in Council decision-making, relationship building and community capacity building*. Community engagement is achieved when the community is and feels part of a process.

Some community engagement processes are undertaken to support decision making, some are about relationship building whilst others are focused on community capacity building.

Council follows the model of engagement developed by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) known as the Public Participation Spectrum. This spectrum outlines the types of engagement that can be undertaken with stakeholders and communities. The spectrum is shown over page and has been amended from IAP2.

The model identifies each of these five levels of engagement and clearly outlines the amount of involvement from both the Council and stakeholders/community within each level. The table also identifies the role of community members and/or stakeholders.

	<b>Inform</b> <small>Low level of public engagement</small>		<b>Involve</b> <small>Mid level of public engagement</small>		<b>Empower</b> <small>High level of public engagement</small>
	<b>Inform</b> 	<b>Consult</b> 	<b>Involve</b> 	<b>Collaborate</b> 	<b>Empower</b> 
<b>Goal</b>	One way communication to provide balanced and objective information to assist understanding about something that is going to happen or has already happened.	Two way communication process aimed at obtaining feedback on ideas, alternatives and proposals to inform our decision making.	Participatory process designed to help identify issues and views to ensure that concerns and aspirations are understood and considered.	Working together to develop an understanding of all issues and interests to work out alternatives and identify preferred collective solutions.	To build the capacity of the community to lead their own plans for change.
<b>Role of community and/or stakeholders</b>	Listen	Contribute	Participate	Partner	Lead
<b>Examples when this engagement level may be appropriate</b>	E.g. In the event of an emergency	E.g. Undertaking a survey on playground redevelopment	E.g. Seeking input from the Maroondah Environment Advisory Committee on sustainability initiatives and plans	E.g. Stakeholder led discussions on developing community vision key directions	E.g. Building capacity skills of small business employees through skills-based training
<b>Possible methods</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advertisements</li> <li>• Fact sheets</li> <li>• Newsletter</li> <li>• Public Notices</li> <li>• Social media</li> <li>• Websites</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus groups</li> <li>• Public exhibition</li> <li>• Surveys</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Workshops</li> <li>• Deliberate voting on options</li> <li>• Advisory committees</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consensus building</li> <li>• Participatory decision making</li> <li>• Participant led workshops</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitation of networks</li> <li>• Practical skills workshops</li> <li>• Training events</li> </ul>

Adapted from: Bang the Table (2014). What is community engagement, exactly? Available at: <http://bangthetable.com/what-is-community-engagement/>,

Council, key stakeholders and the wider community engage with each other at different levels along a spectrum of increasing involvement. The process of community engagement is a

dynamic one which means there is likely to be movement back and forth through the different levels as an engagement process is implemented.

### **3. POLICY STATEMENT**

East Gippsland Shire Council is committed to undertaking and continuously improving its various forms of community engagement to:

- Inform the community on matters of community interest;
- Encourage informed discussion and input into decision making; and
- Assist open and transparent decision making.

Council will work with communities and our partner agencies to identify the most appropriate, timely and effective engagement methods to continually improve public participation processes and outcomes.

When engaging the community and stakeholders Council commits to being open and accountable in our process. Council commits that it aspires to:

Ensuring that the purpose of our engagement is clear and relevant.

Endeavouring to use engagement methods and processes that are well suited to the purpose of the engagement and the target audience.

Providing information that is clear, easy to understand and accessible to all people.

Proactively engage with our community and seek to provide everyone with the opportunity to have a voice on matters of importance to them.

Undertaking engagement in a mutually respectful manner and seek to ensure that the timeframes used are reasonable;

Sharing the outcomes of specific engagement processes back with the community 'closing the loop' so that community members are aware of the outcome of the engagement and how it was used to inform a decision or outcome.

Valuing all participants' and respect the views knowledge, expertise and experiences of those engaged with, acknowledging that everyone has different views and needs.

Using information gathered through community engagement to advocate on behalf of our community to relevant parties.

#### **3.1 Why we engage**

Community engagement is a collaborative process that connects Council with the community in a mutually beneficial sharing of new ideas, skills, knowledge, expertise and experience. Effective community engagement has real benefits for both Council and the community.

Better identifying the priorities, needs and aspirations of our community will assist Council to improve its planning and service delivery. A regular two-way conversation ensures Council is

transparent, accountable and informed in its decision making which will demonstrate integrity and build trust within the community.

Where appropriate, engagement should go above and beyond legislative requirements. The information and knowledge gained through hearing a range of community perspectives assists Council to make informed decisions; develop strong partnerships and create sustainable outcomes.

The community also benefit from participating in engagement activities. Participating in engagement on matters that impact them can create a sense of belonging and connection; increase community involvement; unite and empower individuals and communities; and lead to a greater community ownership and resilience.

The knowledge, expertise and experience gained also provides Council with a foundation to advocate to other relevant parties, including Federal and State Government bodies, on issues of community importance which are out of its direct control.

Community engagement at East Gippsland Shire Council is influenced by the following factors:

- A growing expectation by stakeholders, the community and customers that they will have an opportunity to influence government decisions that affect their lives;
- Our commitment to continuously improve the services, infrastructure and programs we provide so that East Gippsland is the most liveable region in Australia;
- Best practice industry standards as outlined by IAP2 in the Spectrum of Public Participation, and exhibited by government bodies, authorities and private enterprise;
- Contemporary communication channels, including digital and social media, audience diversity and expectations;
- Our commitment to be a leading local government that works together with our communities and provides excellent customer service; and
- 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; and
  - An industry-recognised Quality Assurance Standard for Community and Stakeholder Engagement developed by the IAP2 (2015) which provides a reference point for government organisations.

### 3.2 Who we engage

East Gippsland has over 40 communities that are spread over a vast geographic area. It also has many differing communities of interest and differing demographic groups, each with differing

views, needs, experiences and interests. Given this diversity it is important that our engagement methods are accessible and broad reaching.

Stakeholders bring value to an issue such as: expertise, local knowledge, diverse perspectives or potential support. They also have a varying level of interest or influence, and this variation needs to be identified in the scoping phase of engagement planning

In East Gippsland, some of the stakeholder groups that will be engaged with include:

Internal Stakeholders	External Stakeholders
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Councillors;</li> <li>• Committees;</li> <li>• Chief Executive Officer and Executive Group; and</li> <li>• Other Business Units or Directorates.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• General community;</li> <li>• Older people;</li> <li>• Children and youth;</li> <li>• People with a disability;</li> <li>• Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People (including Traditional Owners);</li> <li>• Culturally and linguistically diverse groups;</li> <li>• Victorian and Australian government agencies;</li> <li>• Members of Parliament;</li> <li>• Private enterprise;</li> <li>• Industry groups and chambers;</li> <li>• Peak bodies;</li> <li>• Community organisations;</li> <li>• Unincorporated associations and clubs; or</li> <li>• Schools.</li> <li>• Locality groups</li> <li>• Communities of interest groups</li> </ul>
•	•

### 3.3 When we engage

At a minimum, community engagement should take place when:

- Council resolves formally to engage;
- There is a requirement to understand the expectations, needs and priorities of the community;
- Planning for the development of Council’s Annual Budget and Council Plan;
- A decision or plan will substantially impact the community and there is some part of the decision or plan that is negotiable;
- Community members have expressed an interest or could be interested in a plan or decision that is negotiable;
- Community input can enhance decision-making, project outcomes or future opportunities; or
- There is legislation, policy or agreement requiring community engagement.

In some instances, Council is legislatively and/or legally required to engage with the community. In these cases, we will treat the legally required level of community engagement as the minimum standard.

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.

**Mandatory engagement**

Whilst the *Local Government Act 1989* and a range of other legislation set out minimum requirements for some specific consultations, each engagement process needs to be considered on its individual basis and merits. In many instances Council will go above and beyond the minimum requirements to gain a strong understanding of our community’s wants and needs to ensure we are achieving the best possible outcomes for our community.

Some of our engagement is required by statutory acts are outlined in section 5.

The community engagement activities of East Gippsland Shire Council are not limited to these matters.

**Circumstances where Council’s engagement with the community will be limited**

There are times when Council’s level of engagement with the community and key stakeholders will be limited. In certain circumstances, Council may only be able to inform the community and stakeholders of Council’s decisions and actions.

This includes times when an immediate resolution is required; technical or other expertise is required; an initiative involves confidential or commercial information; there are clear and defined legislative responsibilities that must be met; when council is developing or reviewing internal policies and procedures; when responding to an emergency; and where there is a risk to public safety.

**Influencing Council decision making**

When community engagement will lead to decision making, the engagement process is used to inform the decision. However, the final decision rests with East Gippsland Shire Council.

**3.4 How we engage**

There is no one-size fits all approach to community engagement activities. A variety of methods and tools will be required to cater for the different purposes of engagement as well as the broad range of groups and individuals in the community.

Public Participation Goal	Engagement tool or channels	East Gippsland Shire Council example
Inform: Council will keep you informed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fact sheets</li> <li>• Websites</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Road closure</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Displays</li> <li>• Media (social and print)</li> <li>• Public meetings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rubbish collection dates</li> <li>• Display of water wise garden techniques</li> </ul>
<p><b>Consult:</b> 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"> <li>• Surveys</li> <li>• Online forums on Council's engagement website,</li> <li>• Face-to-face at community engagement events</li> <li>• Drop-in information sessions</li> <li>• Pop-up stands at community spaces</li> <li>• Feedback and submission forms</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Annual Budget</li> <li>• Local Laws</li> <li>• Planning Permit Applications</li> <li>• Development Plans</li> <li>• Council Plan</li> </ul>
<p><b>Involve -</b> Council will work with the community to ensure that their concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus groups</li> <li>• Workshops</li> <li>• Public meetings</li> <li>• Some reference groups</li> <li>• Hearings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New or upgraded Recreation Facilities</li> <li>• Master planning and concept design work Master Plan</li> <li>• PCP Meetings</li> </ul>
<p><b>Collaborate -</b> Council will work together with the community to formulate solutions and incorporate their advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community panels</li> <li>• Focus groups</li> <li>• Workshops</li> <li>• Some reference groups</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bright Futures Renewable Energy Project</li> <li>• Council Plan</li> <li>• Community Plans</li> <li>• Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Strategy development and implementation;</li> </ul>
<p><b>Empower -</b> Council will implement what the community / consulted group advise.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Council Advisory Groups</li> <li>• Ambassador groups</li> <li>• Citizens' jury</li> <li>• Community Panels</li> <li>• Some reference groups</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regional Youth Plan</li> <li>• Allocation of grants or specific funds</li> </ul>

(Source: Adapted from IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum, 2014)

## Tools of Engagement

This policy does not attempt to prescribe which engagement practice or tool should be used for each type of engagement event, recognising that engagement will differ from community to community, and issue to issue; and should be flexible enough to meet the specific needs and characteristics of the target audience and the issue being considered. Many of the tools available to Council staff are described in the table above.

East Gippsland will over time develop more tools, processes and guidelines to assist officers with the design and implementation of specific engagement activity.

## 4. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Community engagement is the responsibility of all Council business areas, teams and employees as appropriate to their role and function.

These management positions are responsible for implementation and compliance monitoring of the policy in their work areas:

<b>Party / Parties:</b>	<b>Roles and responsibilities:</b>
Executive Group	To ensure all Managers are aware of their responsibilities and comply with the Policy.
Managers	To ensure all staff, contractors, volunteers and service providers / service partners are aware of their responsibilities and comply with this Policy.
Coordinators	To support staff with the implementation of the community engagement plans for relevant projects.
All staff	To ensure engagement they are responsible for (including engagement undertaken by third parties on Council's behalf) complies with this policy.

## 5. RELATED LEGISLATION

*The* objectives, roles and functions of local government in Victoria are governed by the Local Government Act 1989 (Vic.). Section 3C(3) of this Act states six core roles of a Council, being:

- acting as a representative government by taking into account the diverse needs of the local community in decision making
- providing leadership by establishing strategic objectives and monitoring their achievement
- maintaining the viability of the Council by ensuring that resources are managed in a responsible and accountable manner
- advocating the interests of the local community to other communities and governments
- acting as a responsible partner in government by taking into account the needs of other communities
- fostering community cohesion and encouraging active participation in civic life.

Engagement of the community is clearly linked to all six of these roles.

Local councils in Victoria are legally required to conduct public consultation through a prescribed process on a range of specific matters as outlined under the 'When we engage' section of this policy.

Providing information to and seeking feedback from the community about key local issues will also ensure that Council complies with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities 2006 (Vic.), particularly section 15 (Freedom of Expression) and section 18 (Taking Part in Public Life) of the Charter.

As a public authority, Council has an obligation to act in a way that is compatible with the human rights enshrined in the Charter.

Community engagement is required under the following relevant Victorian Government legislation:

- *Local Government Act 1989*
- *Road Management Act 2004*
- *Planning and Environment Act 2007*
- *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008*
- *Commission for Children and Young People Child Safe Standards*

## **6. RELATED POLICIES, STRATEGIES, PROCEDURES AND GUIDELINES**

### **6.1 East Gippsland Council Plan 2017 – 2021**

This Policy reflects East Gippsland Shire Council's Council Plan 2017-2021, Strategic Objectives:

*Strong Communities: East Gippsland has strong communities that are inclusive, healthy, safe and resilient. We treasure and celebrate the unique character and identity of the places we live and are proud to call East Gippsland home.*

*Goal 1: East Gippsland has connected, inclusive and vibrant communities:*

- *Strategic Objective 1: Increase people's skills and capabilities to participate in their community and make a difference.*

*Goal 2: East Gippsland communities plan for their future:*

- *Strategic Objective 6 and 7: Increase community participation in engagement activities to plan for their future by 10 percent by 2019.*
- *Strategic Objective 8: Continue to partner with other agencies to work with communities in a coordinated way to minimise duplication and increase outcomes.*

*Good Governance: East Gippsland Shire Council is inclusive, engagement and open. We provide leadership on issues affecting East Gippsland. Our relationships with other levels of government and partners deliver great outcomes for East Gippsland.*

*Goal 1: East Gippsland Shire Council is inclusive, engaged and open:*

- *Strategic Objective 43 and 44: Increase transparency and awareness about council decisions, services and activities by 2021.*

*Goal 2: Our relationships with other levels of government and partners deliver great outcomes for East Gippslanders:*

- *Strategic Objective 45 and 46: Increase funding to address critical regional issues by 5 percent by 2021.*

## 6.2 Other East Gippsland Policies and Strategies:

The following Council policies and guidelines must also be followed during the planning and execution of community engagement:

- Social Media and Media Relations policy
- policies for email, internet, digital equipment, electronic communications
- Code of Conduct
- Information Services and Communications policies
- Privacy and Personal Information Policy
- Customer Response Policy
- Information Privacy Policy

## 7. DEFINITIONS AND ABBREVIATIONS

<b>Term:</b>	<b>Meaning:</b>
<b><i>Community</i></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- People who live in East Gippsland;</li> <li>- People and organisations who are ratepayers in East Gippsland; and</li> <li>- People and organisations who conduct activities in East Gippsland.</li> </ul>
<b><i>Community engagement</i></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Any process that involves the public in problem solving or decision making and uses public input to make decisions</li> </ul>
<b><i>Partner</i></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- An individual or agency who has shared management responsibility for an asset /infrastructure or provides a monetary/in-kind contribution in partnership with Council.</li> </ul>
<b><i>Stakeholder</i></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 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.</li> </ul>
<b><i>IAP2</i></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The International Association for Public Participation.</li> </ul>
<b><i>Inform</i></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 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</li> </ul>

	in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.
<b>Consult</b>	- A level of community engagement in the IAP2 Spectrum for Public Participation in which an organisation seeks community feedback on alternatives, drafts or proposals.
<b>Involve</b>	- 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.
<b>Collaborate</b>	- 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.
<b>Empower</b>	- 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.