



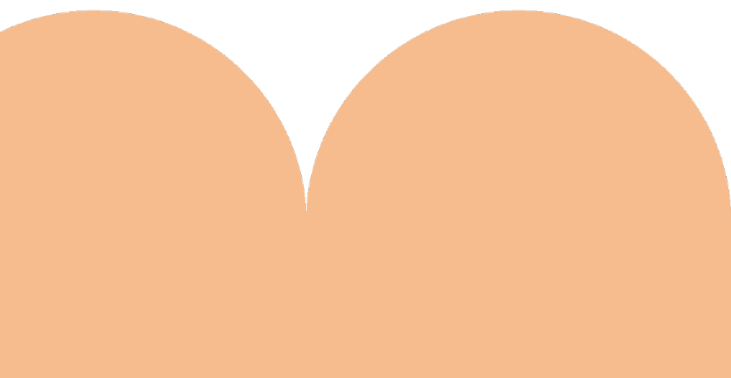
Community Engagement

A guide to community engagement
in rural and regional Victoria

Published 2020

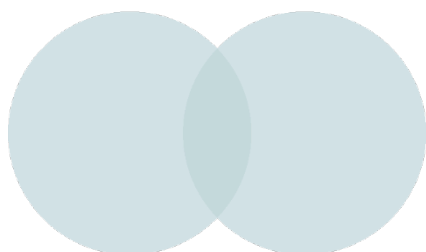


projectura



Community Engagement Toolkit

Prepared for	Rural Councils Victoria
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About this toolkit

The publication of this toolkit is an initiative of Rural Councils Victoria, an organisation representing and working alongside Victoria's rural councils to support and promote sustainable, liveable and prosperous rural communities.

Rural Councils Victoria (RCV) is an organisation that represents the network of 38 rural councils across Victoria. RCV represents the 1 in 9 Victorians who live in rural communities by working to strengthen shared efforts to better understand, articulate and address the issues that affect them.

Community engagement and consultation in rural Councils is inherently different to approaches used in metropolitan and regional cities. Populations in rural communities are diverse and often dispersed over large geographical areas. Community priorities, interests and challenges are also different and unique to each Council area. Engagement approaches need to be tailored to meet the needs of rural Councils and the communities they represent.

Rural Councils also face the added pressure of having fewer resources, that are spread across a broad range of practice areas.

This Community Engagement Toolkit has been developed to support rural councils as they adapt to changes initiated in the [Local Government Act 2020](#).

The development of this Toolkit has identified gaps in skills, resourcing or community expectations that may impact community engagement approaches, outlined necessary community engagement steps and considerations for member Councils when delivering successful community engagement projects, and

explored and analysed best practice project examples and shared them in case studies.

Following the development of this Toolkit, RCV will deliver training to member Councils to help unpack the expectations of their communities and other levels of Government in order to bring their communities into the local planning and decision-making process.

This Toolkit and Training program have been developed in unprecedented times. The impact of COVID 19 has provided us with the opportunity to be creative and deliver training in a new digital format.

Acknowledgements

Information for this document was sourced from a number of organisations, which have a host of helpful information.

- **International Association of Public Participation:** The community engagement peak body which aims to teach and communicate the principles of public participation and how to achieve effective community and stakeholder engagement.
- **Local Government Victoria:** The Victorian State Government department responsible for implementing the Local Government Act 2020.

Thanks to those councils and organisations who provided information for these documents – your advice and knowledge will be extremely beneficial to others.



Local Government Act 2020

The Victorian Government commenced a comprehensive review of the Local Government Act 1989 in 2015. The product of this review was the passage of the Local Government Act 2020 ('the Act'). The Act is the catalyst for this project.

The Act has introduced new requirements for Victorian Councils. Among these reforms is the focus on embedding community and deliberative engagement into the strategic planning and decision making of Councils. The new Act addresses five themes: improved service delivery, strong local democracies, improved conduct, increasing community confidence, and building a new relationship.

Councils are expected to adopt a Community Engagement Policy ('the Policy') by 1 March 2021. It is expected that the Policy will be developed in consultation with the community and be underpinned by the principles outlined in the Act.

The Act stipulates that the Policy must be applied to the development of the Community Vision, Council Plan, Financial Plan, and Asset Plan, and planning and financial management including revenue and rate planning. The Policy must also be able to be applied to the development of local laws and policy development. The increased expectation of community input into strategic planning is seeking to increase participatory democracy at a local level.

Principles of community engagement

The community engagement principles contained in the Act outline a method of engagement that is defined, informed, representative, supported and democratic. The principles are outlined below.

1. Provide clearly **defined** objectives and scope.
2. Provide objective, relevant, and timely **information** to inform participants.
3. Ensure participation is **representative** of affected persons and groups.
4. Provide reasonable **support** to enable meaningful and informed engagement.
5. Inform participants about how the process will **influence** Council decision making.

Deliberative engagement

Deliberative engagement is not defined in the Act or supporting documents. Guidance from Local Government Victoria (LGV) tells us that deliberative engagement is not a fixed notion. Rather it is grounded in the principles above, is authentic and transparent.

Deliberative engagement places a greater expectation on Council to collaborate with the community. However, this is balanced by the greater responsibility the community bears in the co-design of the strategies, plans and projects.

Embedding community engagement principles into practice



Defined

- Understand the subject matter, purpose and context of the subject matter of your engagement.
- Consider the desired level of community participation, and what your promise is to them regarding the influence their input has on decision making.
- Clearly identify your negotiables and non-negotiables. Seek the community's input on matters where they can have influence in decision making.



Informed

- To enable the community to participate in engagement they must be informed about the subject matter, the local context and choices they will weigh up.
- It is important to ensure the information you provide the community is accessible and appropriate for the section of the community whose views you are seeking.
- Communicate information to your community through channels they regularly use. This could be social media, your website, direct mail, email, or harnessing the support of community groups to promote engagement through their communication channels.



Representative

- Analyse stakeholders to determine the key people affected by your strategy, plan, or project.
- Consider the systems, organisations and structures that are already in place within your community that could assist you to reach key stakeholders.
- Communicate through channels that are familiar, easy to access, and widely used by your key stakeholders.
- Consider the nuances and preferences of each geographic location to reach a broad cross section of representation.



Supported

- Each community engagement plan should ensure that participation is inclusive and accessible.
- Use a mix of engagement methods to seek feedback from key stakeholder to provide choice.
- A contact name and number should be provided on all communications material. This humanises the process and makes it more likely for people to reach out for assistance.
- In person engagements should be held at venues that are accessible for people with disability.



Democratic


- The decision making process should take into account the views of a person, group or stakeholder that it will affect.
- Inform participants how decisions under consideration during engagement will be made.
- Be transparent regarding the influence community input will have over planning and decision making.

Community engagement best practice

The IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation

IAP2's Public Participation Spectrum is designed to assist with the selection of the level of participation that defined the public's role in any community engagement program. It clarifies the role of the public (or community) in planning and decision-making, and how much influence the community has over planning or decision-making processes.

The IAP2 Spectrum is the industry standard matrix for determining what level of engagement is required to achieve the identified level of impact community engagement will have on decision making. Deliberative engagement requires a higher level of participation

INCREASING IMPACT ON THE DECISION 					
	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GOAL	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 that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision making in the hands of the public.
PROMISE TO THE PUBLIC	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.

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Figure: IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation. Reproduced with permission from IAP2 Australasia.

Case studies

Many rural Councils have developed community engagement practices which demonstrate best practice. The case studies included in this toolkit are recent examples of rural Councils working closely with their communities to build community capacity, bring

their community into the decision making process and using innovative ways to consult and engage. Each Council has provided learnings to assist other Councils in their community engagement practice.

Case study

Building Buloke 2030, visioning engagement

Project overview

In 2018, Buloke Shire Council received funding under the Federal Government's Building Better Regions Fund to create long term strategic plans for their ten communities.

Buloke Shire had previously developed community plans in the early 2000's. Since the plans were originally developed, the Buloke Shire area experienced a significant change in demographics and the plans were out of date and required updating.

Local Logic Place was engaged to work with Council and the community to develop ten town-based plans, and one integrated whole-of-Council plan. The project resulted in Building Buloke 2030, which had four themes that feature in each community plan, and drive Council's direction. The themes are our built and natural environment, our community wellbeing, our economy and our council and community leadership.

Objective

The objective of Building Buloke 2030 was to develop visionary and community-driven plans to articulate the priorities of the Buloke Shire population and build the framework for meeting the community's aspirations.

Promise to the community/Level of input

Council was committed to ensuring community plans were led and owned by the community to achieve a level of buy-in and ownership, and ultimately a dedication to achieving the priorities.

Engagement design

The key features of the project design:

- Different engagement techniques were used to reach as many people as possible. Using different techniques reached past the 'usual suspects' to the broader community. Engagement tools used

included an online survey, postcards, door knocking, drop-in sessions, school visits, focus groups, street pop-ups, community workshops and draft plan feedback processes.

- Buloke Shire Council has an active and engaged Facebook page with over 2,000 followers, and use this as a key communication tool to inform the community and drive engagement.
- Building Buloke 2030 identifies stakeholders who have a role in the achievement of each priority. Stakeholders included State and Federal governments, health services and businesses.
- The plans also articulated Council's role in relation to each priority or project. The different roles included facilitator, partner, provider, supporter, regulator, or leader.
- Each Buloke community has a town forum. These forums play an important role in the stewardship and review of the community plans.

Outcomes

Over 825 residents participated in the Buloke 2030 community engagement process.

Buloke 2030 and the community plans demonstrate community support of projects and add weight to funding applications.

Local forums continue to play a vital role in the achievement of the community plans. Forums use the plans as a framework for the development of their town. They also play an important role in capacity building for the broader Buloke community. Good practices demonstrated by one forum are used as examples to upskill other forums. Council use the forums to feedback and report on the progress of the plans.

Case study

Review of Community Plans, Corangamite Shire Council

Project overview

Corangamite Shire Council began developing town-based plans 10 years ago. The Council area has 12 diverse towns with different goals, values, and priorities. Council worked with the communities to assist them in developing 10-year plans which identified projects and prioritised them in order of importance.

A Council staff position was resourced and dedicated to assisting communities develop and review their plans. This position built the capacity of the community to explore different projects, understand their issues and opportunities, and identify partners to achieve them. Ownership of the community plans sits with the communities. Community plans are recognised by Council as a basis for advocacy. In some cases community proposals identified in community plans are funded through Councils recurrent budget. Council has a rolling review program for each community plan, with four reviews being conducted each year. It provides each community with seed-funding to assist them to leverage external grant funding.

Objective

Build each community's capacity and empower them to plan for their long-term future and direction.

Engagement design

Council was committed to empowering the community to design their own plans, and shape their own future.

A Council staff member helped communities understand the scope of the projects, consider the benefits and issues attached to them, and whether projects were realistic or not. This resource is still available and plays an active part in the review of the plans.

The second round of reviews saw an increase in the level of digital engagement from 2017-18 onwards. Council used an Open Cities online community planning module which facilitated online engagement through their website.

Projects in community plans were not limited to those projects which are within the responsibility of Council.

Training for Council officers was provided to increase their skills and understanding of the benefits of community engagement.

Outcomes

Applications to fund projects prioritised in community plans have been positively received by funding bodies as they demonstrate community support.

Community capacity has grown. One community identified an indoor pool as a priority. Council assisted the community explore the financial, recreational, and long-term viability of the project through a feasibility study. Although the project was not viable, the community was able to understand how and why the decision was made and were part of the process.

The Plan belongs to the community and includes projects outside of Councils remit. The Port Campbell suspension bridge was identified in their community plan. The project was within the remit of Parks Victoria. Council advocated for its inclusion in the Shipwreck Coast Master Plan. The bridge has now received \$3.2 million in funding and commenced construction in 2019.

Since the original community plans were developed Corangamite consistently scores well in community satisfaction surveys and has built a strong relationship of trust with the community.

Case study

CBD Revitalisation: Stage 1, Southern Grampians Shire Council

Project overview

The Southern Grampians Shire Council commenced their CBD revitalisation project in 2019. The project sought to create a landmark entry into the Hamilton CBD area, complemented by a strong, active urban edge to Cox Street. The project had been identified in the Hamilton Structure Plan 2011.

The CBD held untapped potential to link the large sports arena located within the town centre and look at infilling development of blocks immediately behind the main street whilst improving active frontages and retail potential. The overall design was aimed at improving walkability and safety, and harnessing design to meet the needs of local residents, business and potential investors.

Objective

The objective of this project was to attract new residents, create a fit for purpose design for the community over a long period of time, and ensure the community had their say.

Promise to the community/Level of input

Council promoted a strong level of collaboration from the outset drawing in a broad range of stakeholders including residents, community groups, sporting groups and businesses.

Engagement design

Council provided a comprehensive brief to design consultants Jensen Plus at the beginning of the project regarding to increase their knowledge about the community, the current environment, demographics and objectives of the project.

The project used drop-in spaces, renderings and prepared 3D visualisations with virtual reality and web application tours to allow many participants to

visualise changes and have input into the concept and design of the project.

Designers worked out of a shopfront for a period of time to allow stakeholders to come in and collaborate with them while designing to have 'real time' input and discussions.

A public art project in an underutilised laneway was run using a local artist to complement the project. The project engaged young people and by extension their parents. The project was able to demonstrate to the community what activation was possible through use of arts and culture.

A key aspect of the project was the organisation of a bus tour for Council Staff, Councillors and business, community and sport leaders. These leaders were identified through early consultations as having a stake in the project and valuable insight. The tour visited several locations from Hamilton to Adelaide to learn about other revitalisation projects and what had worked and what didn't. The tour was able to demonstrate new ideas, build capacity to deliberately engage in the development of the design and assist in reaching consensus of direction.

Council used the 'social pin point' platform as the central tool for feedback and information to be shared. Notifications from Council's website and Facebook directed the community to this platform, and consultation feedback was uploaded to the site.

Outcomes:

The Hamilton Central Business Area Activation Master Plan has now been completed and was endorsed and adopted by Council at their May 2020 meeting.

Since completion of the masterplan Council has secured a \$2.8 million Federal Government grant for the upgrade of Melville Oval.

Case studies

Indigo Shire Council, Central Enrolment Scheme

Project overview

The Victorian State Government was promoting the adoption of a Central Enrolment Scheme that would track enrolment rates, priority admissions and create a single point of entrance for parents. There was no evidence of low enrolment rates or waiting lists in the Indigo Shire Council area.

Indigo Shire Council engaged Community Vibe to conduct a three-part project to consider the adoption of a Central Enrolment Scheme, the schemes design and implementation.

Indigo Shire Council does not have operational oversight of kindergartens in their area. Kindergarten services are delivered by private providers and community providers. Councils role in relation to early years services is as an advocate and owner of early years facilities.

Council designed a collaborative approach to ensure that service providers and the community were included in the decision-making process.

Objective

To determine if there was an appetite for the introduction of a Central Enrolment Scheme to manage kindergarten admissions.

Engagement design

Council was conscious that it did not have an operational role or oversight in the delivery of kindergarten services. In light of this Council wanted to ensure that providers and early years stakeholders had the opportunity to have input into the decision-making process.

The project was designed in three stages. The first stage was stakeholder and community engagement.

This engagement was critical to determining if the project would lead to the implementation of a Central Enrolment Scheme. If it was determined after stage 1 that Council would not proceed with the implementation of a central enrolment system parts 2 (service design) and party 3 (service delivery) would not be required.

Council created a steering committee made up of early years providers and stakeholders (eg health services) to discuss the issues and opportunities associated with the introduction of a Central Enrolment Scheme.

Council briefed the steering committee on the policy objectives and background required for them to make a decision regarding whether or not to adopt the scheme.

The consultant then assisted Council to facilitate a discussion with the steering group about whether the preferred option was to adopt the system.

Community engagement, which was targeted towards parents was undertaken by survey and face to face engagement.

The survey was available in hard copy and online. Pop ups were conducted at kindergartens at pick up and drop off times to capture as many parents views as possible.

Outcomes

The findings of the facilitated discussions with the steering group and community consultation did not show support for the implementation of a Central Enrolment Scheme.

Council chose not to proceed with the implementation of a Central Enrolment Scheme based on the findings of the consultation.

Case study

Climate Change Emergency Declaration, Mt Alexander Shire Council

Project overview

Mt Alexander Shire Council has a long history of climate change action. Its first Greenhouse Gas plan was developed in 2000. Climate change, its mitigation and climate protection have historically been a very high priority for the community.

In 2019 Council hosted a Climate Change Forum to inform its future action on climate change. The forum was designed to help Councillors better understand what declaring a climate change emergency would mean for the shire (that followed a petition with over two thousand names being presented and calling for Council to make the declaration) and other ways to tackle climate change as a Council and community.

In considering the petition, Council wanted to make sure that they facilitated an educated debate and ensure that their decision on the requested declaration had strong community support.

Objective

To provide the community with a Forum to express their views regarding the declaration of a climate change emergency. These views would educate and inform the Councillors decision making when considering whether to make the declaration.

Engagement design

Council wanted to be responsive to the request from community so designed and delivered the Forum in a short period of time. The Forum allowed for verbal presentations. Written submissions were also called for from community, business and stakeholders.

The Forum occurred over three sessions on one day. There was a morning, afternoon, and evening session. Verbal submissions were received by Councillors.

The framework for the Forum was very important. The Forum was an open community event. Each participant was given 5 minutes to present their submissions and take questions from Councillors. Audience members could not directly questions people who were providing submissions to Councillors.

A communications plan was designed to ensure that the Forum was known to the community. Advertisements were strategically placed to ensure the widest distribution. Distribution channels included the local paper, interviews on local radio, posters on local notice boards, information on the Council website and social media.

Participation was promoted and supported.

A background flyer was developed to explain the purpose of the Forum, educate the community on actions already taken by Council and inform them how they could make a verbal or written submission.

Outcomes

Councillors received 49 verbal submissions on the day of the Forum.

A total of 91 written submissions were received by residents, ratepayers, businesses and organisations.

Council resolved to declare a Climate Change emergency on 17 December 2019.

Case study

Cohuna Skate Park, Gannawarra Shire Council

Project overview

Gannawarra Shire Council were approached by a passionate and engaged community group to explore the upgrade of the Cohuna Skate Park. The skate park was a decade old and used frequently by young people in the Council area.

In addition to the push from young residents, Northern District Community Health ('the service') was a strong proponent for the project. The service had worked with young people in the FReeZA program for some years and developed a level of trust and cooperation through supporting skate events previously.

The Cohuna Skate Park upgrade was not listed as a strategic project prior to the group approaching Council. However, Council responded to the calls for action from this group and developed a project for the design and development of an upgraded skate park.

Objective

The objective of the engagement was to create a space that would suit the needs and wants of people who use it every day.

Promise to the community/Level of input

Council promoted a clear and open process from the inception of the project. Council engaged with stakeholders at a collaborative level to co-design the skate park upgrade in partnership with youth participants, Council, the designer and the service.

Engagement design

Features of the project included:

- Framing the project and informing the stakeholders of the negotiables and non negotiables up front.

- Participants were advised of the cost of options which allowed them to participate in a deliberative way to formulate the design which fit the budget and had the broadest consensus.
- Council harnessed their partnership with the service and the designer to engage directly with the target cohort of the project. Feedback was heard directly from decision makers and could be commented on and explored in a timely manner.
- Using communication methods that would enable strong engagement by the target cohort:
 - Cohuna Skatepark 2.0 Facebook page. This was a central communication tool. It allowed the team to provide information, feedback results of consultation and check in to see if interpretation was correct.
 - In-person engagement on site at the Cohuna Skate Park. This assisted in visualising scale and space available for the project.
 - Images and renders assisted the community with co-designing the project. Costed options were presented, allowing stakeholders to make decisions based on budget and design.

Outcomes

Adoption by Council as a strategic project.

A piece of work that clearly demonstrates community support and prioritisation that assists with funding applications.

Council has now applied for funding and is awaiting the results.

Learnings

Building Buloke 2030, visioning engagement

Approach visioning projects with an open mind. Council sought a high level of participation and input from the community. Communities are invested in the achievement of the plan, as they have ownership over the priorities outlined in them.

Face to face engagement remains the preferred method of engagement. It significantly outranked remote engagement by online survey, website platform and postcards.

Use multiple engagement tools to get the broadest reach.

Review of Community Plans, Corangamite Shire Council

When using digital engagement focus on the platform that people use most regularly. Using too many splits attention and may lead to engagement leakage.

Use a variety of tools, suited to the community you are working in. If you cannot reach out to someone in a way they are comfortable engaging, it is less likely they will engage.

Quick wins for projects will build momentum and buy in to the community planning process.

Ensure that the value of community engagement is led from the top down of the organisation. This way it will filter through all practice areas and be more likely to be embraced as part of Council's culture and business as usual over time.

Do not seek to shape the vision of the community, work with them to understand the environment and context.

Community engagement is an investment that will take time to embed. But you will reap the rewards once you have done so.

CBD Revitalisation: Stage 1, Southern Grampians Shire Council

Virtual tours and 3D renderings were a great tool. They created a lot of conversation and allowed Council to tap into another demographic who were not usually involved in engagement.

Openness to all feedback and willingness to consider all input. It is important that even if you don't reach consensus on a critical point, you are able to logically explain your position and how you reached it.

Uploading all information to social pin point meant that people could be actively and passively involved. Even if people were not contributing with ideas or comments, they were more informed.

Targeted stakeholder meetings were invaluable in the development of the project.

DRAFT: Central Enrolment Scheme, Indigo Shire Council

Involving service providers, key stakeholders and the community in the decision making process for the commissioning of services ensured the decision met the expectations and needs of the community.

By bringing service providers and stakeholders with a common interest together Council was able to form a community of practice that provided peer support in the area.

The formation of the community of practice has strengthened Council's relationship with key early years providers and stakeholders, giving them greater insight and enhancing their advocacy strategies.

Change Emergency Declaration, Mt Alexander Shire Council

Councillors were excited by the project and viewed the Forum as a powerful tool to explore topics and have differing opinions presented in a constructive and informative way.

It is important to have a strong framework for the Forum. By setting expectations regarding inclusion, transparency, process, and behaviour you will achieve better outcomes.

The communications plan must be well balanced to ensure the community knows that all points of view will be considered.

It is important that the promise to the community is defined at the inception of the project. Ensuring that submitters, both verbal and written, know how their submissions will be used will instil confidence in the process.

Resourcing associated with an event like this is significant, and it can mean that a lot of other activities are delayed. Gaining an understanding from Councillors about this from the start is valuable.

Cohuna Skate Park, Gannawarra Shire Council

Council was able to achieve broad consensus through the co-design process.

By engaging with the youth cohort on design Council was able to manage expectations regarding timeframes and design.

A good engagement process has strengthened the relationship between Council and their young population.

Engagement Checklist

This checklist has been developed to promote and assist Councils to implement good community engagement practice.

It is based on the *IAP2 Quality Assurance Standard*.

The actions are divided into six stages including prepare, frame, design, execute, report and evaluate.





Stage 1: Prepare

Preparation is integral to developing a relevant, targeted, and successful engagement program that is tailored to the expectations and needs of persons and groups affected by the subject matter. A thorough understanding of the subject matter will set a strong basis for framing and design.

- ☐ Research and understand the context, scope and purpose of the Plan, Strategy or Project. Also conduct research into industry trends, best practice examples and drivers.
- ☐ Be aware of any legislative compliance matters including reporting and deadlines for the completion of the project.
- ☐ Review the Council community engagement policy to understand the underlying approach, principles, and governance structures.
- ☐ Identify Council resources including human, equipment and technology that will be required to take part in the project.
- ☐ Research current Council plans, strategies and projects that are interlinked to your project to ensure consistency.



Stage 2: Frame

Your engagement should have a robust framework, identifying key issues, internal and external stakeholders, and performance measures. Building your framework will increase transparency and the level of participation as you will have clarity of scope when discussing the engagement with participants.

- ☐ Convene a project control group including Council officers you have identified through your resources review and allocate responsibilities.
- ☐ Collaborate with the project control group to define the problem and articulate:
 - Issues that need to be addressed/answered/resolved.
 - Negotiables and non-negotiables.
 - Who the final decision maker is.
 - The decision makers ideal outcome.
- ☐ Prepare a stakeholder analysis to identify internal and external stakeholders with an interest in the subject matter. Identify issues and the best communication channels for stakeholder groups.
- ☐ Conduct a risk assessment including identification of internal and external parameters.
- ☐ Determine the desired level of public participation, and the weighting their input will have on decision making (you may choose to use the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation as a guide).
- ☐ Set key performance indicators regarding level of engagement, satisfaction with engagement methods and outcomes of engagement.
- ☐ Confirm your engagement budget for the project.



Stage 3. Design

The design of your engagement plan brings together the key decisions you make in Stages 1 and 2. How you design your engagement will impact the evaluation and reporting elements of the project.

- ☐ Extend the problem definition work already conducted. Consider the best way to seek input from the public including:
 - What is the purpose of the question? Am I seeking data or more in-depth feedback?
 - What engagement tools will be most effective for the stakeholders I am seeking to engage?
 - How will I record the feedback? (Survey link? Post its? Written form?)
 - Is this question understandable and free of jargon?
 - Is the question relevant and related to an aspect of the project that the community will influence through their feedback?

- ☐ Develop an engagement plan that is tailored to promote the inclusion, participation, and accessibility of stakeholder groups by:
 - Identifying engagement tools and techniques that will be used to maximise participation.
 - Considering a design thinking approach that outlines the phases and timeframes for key milestones including,
 - The release of information in a format that is easily accessible to stakeholders,
 - The rollout of engagement activities.

- Providing feedback to the project control group, engagement participants and the community.
- Dates for submission and approval of key documents.
- Reporting requirements for key performance indicators.
- Identify the resources that will need to be used at each stage of the engagement.

- ☐ Your engagement plan should be complemented by a communications strategy which outlines:
 - Deadlines for the provision of information to engagement participants, the project control group and decisionmakers.
 - Channels to communicate with potential participants (social media, newspaper advertisements, media releases, mailing lists, engagement platforms, webinars, seeking the assistance of stakeholder groups to distribute information).
 - How you are going to measure the reach and effectiveness of communication channels.
- ☐ Reach out to stakeholder groups and leaders to seek their input into the engagement design.



Stage 4: Execute

The execution of your engagement plan relies on your planning and preparation.

- ☐ Test any platform you will be using, particularly for online engagement. Develop comfort with its functionality and be sure to provide basic trouble shooting advice to participants.
- ☐ Consider occupational health and safety when you are packing, transporting, and setting up engagement activities. Also check if there are any permit or site-specific requirements to address.
- ☐ Conduct a pre engagement brief with your engagement representatives. It is important that participants know that representatives are informed and understand the key issues that are affecting them. The briefing should also identify any potential 'hot topics' and provide representatives with the tools to discuss them in a constructive manner with the community.
- ☐ When talking with participants:
 - Acknowledge the scope of the engagement and any limitations or constraints.
 - Be clear about participants level of influence decision making.
 - Be open to new ideas, connections and partnerships that may be established through engagement – exciting!
 - Ask questions that extend the thoughts and ideas of participants to test robustness. Don't be afraid to ask the 'what if' or 'have you considered' questions. And don't be afraid of answers that don't meet your own values
- If you are unsure you have understood the input, check back in by rephrasing the participants thoughts to make sure you understood them correctly.
- Remember, you do not have to provide a solution to every issue that is raised on the day. The important thing is to hear what a participant is saying and respond with authenticity and an open mind.
- Have a mechanism for referring issues that do not relate to the engagement that participants raise on the day. It is important to bring participants back to the subject at hand while giving them concrete pathways to follow up their other concerns.
- ☐ Take the time to pack down neatly. Trust us – you will thank us later!
- ☐ Conduct a debrief straight after the engagement to ensure you are able to identify key learnings and areas for further exploration or follow up.



Stage 5: Report

The purpose of this stage is to advise participants, stakeholders and decision makers about the findings of the engagement and how the input has been used to make decisions. This part of the engagement plan is often referred to as 'closing the loop'.

- ☐ Examine the findings of your engagement and determine:
 - Major themes from feedback.
 - Any data trends that are evident.
 - Any contrary views, what level of support they have, and how can they be compared to the support of major themes.
 - What projects, propositions or idea have strong or weak support.
 - Areas for further investigation.
 - Difference in feedback between demographics (gender, age, income, education).
 - Difference in the feedback offered by different townships and regions.
- ☐ Feedback the findings to participants, stakeholders and decision makers through mechanisms identified in your communications plan. Present the analysis in a format that is understandable to a broad audience, and provide an avenue for participants, stakeholders and decision makers to offer clarification if required.
- ☐ Record the analysis of engagement and articulate how it has been used in determining scope, content and direction of the piece of work.



Stage 6: Evaluate

Reflective practice allows us to refine and continually improve our practices. Evaluation is an important element of any engagement activity.

- ☐ Seek feedback from participants, stakeholders and decision makers about the process.
- ☐ Measure your progress against the KPI's you set during stage 2 regarding level of engagement, satisfaction with engagement methods and outcomes of engagement.
- ☐ Ensure any changes in practice align with your Councils continuous improvement mechanisms.



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