

POLICY TITLE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT POLICY

POLICY NUMBER CPOL/GOV025

1. PURPOSE

Swan Hill Rural City Council is committed to providing genuine and transparent opportunities for the community to participate in purposeful and planned community engagement processes to inform Council’s planning and decision-making processes that affect, impact or interest them.

The purpose of this policy is to outline Councils approach to:

- create a consistent best practice approach to engagement;
- facilitate informed and sustainable decision making;
- improve information delivery and sharing; and
- promote a consistent inclusive and accessible approach to engagement.

2. SCOPE

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

3. DEFINITIONS

Community: Includes individuals, groups of people, stakeholders, special interest groups, business groups, community groups and community organisations. A community can refer to a geographic location (community of place), a community of similar interest (community of practice) or a community of affiliation or identity (such as an industry or sporting club).

Community engagement: Community engagement is a planned process that supports public decision-making. It includes:

- Sharing information and providing updates
- Seeking feedback and gathering input
- Dialogue and deliberation

It is also sometimes referred to as public participation.

Council: Can refer to the Swan Hill Rural City Council as an organisation as well as the Mayor, Councillors, Administrators, Council staff, Executive Council Officers, consultants, and contractors working on behalf of the Swan Hill Rural City Council.

International Association for Public Participation (IAP2):

The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) is an international organisation dedicated to advancing the practice of public participation.

4. POLICY

Community engagement enables the public to participate in decisions that impact on their lives. Councillors will make decisions based on legislative requirements, the expert advice of Council officers and community inputs gathered through formal and informal engagement.

Council will:

- ensure that the purpose of community engagement is genuine and adheres to the principles of this policy;
- use the IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum to assist with selecting the level of participation;
- ensure there is consideration given to value for money, principles and scale of engagement required, in line with the IAP2 spectrum;
- ensure the information provided to the community is clear, easy to understand and accessible to all people;
- clearly communicate which aspects of the engagement are negotiable, and which are not negotiable;
- use various techniques and approaches to maximise public participation within reasonable timeframes;
- inform the community about how their input has influenced the final outcome or decision; and
- undertake evaluation processes to learn from each community engagement experience to ensure continuous improvement of our consultation practices.

5. PRINCIPLES

Council’s community and stakeholder engagement approach is guided by the five community engagement principles set out under Local Government Act 2020, including:

- a community engagement process must have a clearly defined objective and scope;
- participants in community engagement must have access to objective, relevant and timely information to inform their participation;
- participants in community engagement must be representative of the persons and groups affected by the matter that is the subject of the community engagement;
- participants in community engagement are entitled to reasonable support to enable meaningful and informed engagement; and
- participants in community engagement are informed of the ways in which the community engagement process will influence Council decision making.

6. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Councillors and all staff are responsible for the planning, design and delivery of community engagement suitable to the scope and scale of the issues, strategy or plan and in line with principles and commitments in this policy.

Strategies such as the Council Plan and Municipal Strategic Statement engagement may require establishing or use of advisory groups and steering committees or special one-off forums/conferences to be a part of appropriate engagement. Local issues including site specific master plans or specific issues such as emergency awareness may require specific engagement plans this may include community forums, working groups, surveys or other engagement tools.

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.

We will identify and manage community engagement activities associated with core business and projects approved in Council's budget. We will only consult on those aspects of core business that are negotiable and where the community can have meaningful input.

7. RELATED POLICIES/PROCEDURES/DOCUMENTS

POL/GOV017 Social Media Policy
CPOL/GOV026 Councillor Code of Conduct
CPOL/GOV003 Media Policy
POL/CORP211 Privacy Policy
POL/STAFF127 Staff Code of Conduct
PRO/GOV025 Community Engagement Guidelines
Customer Service Charter
Communication and Engagement Strategy

8. RELATED LEGISLATION

Local Government Act 2020
Local Government Act 1989
Equal Opportunity Act 2010
Disability Act 2006
Privacy and Data Protection Act 2004
Planning and Environment Act 1987
Road Management Act 2004
Multicultural Victoria Act 2011
Subordinate Legislation Act 1994
Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008
Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006
Gender Equality Act 2020
Public Administration Act 2004
Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005

9. DOCUMENT HISTORY

Version Number	Issue Date	Description of Change
1.0	February 2021	Initial release

Signed: Bill Moar

Mayor

Date: 24/02/2021