



Ararat Rural City

Community Engagement Policy

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Responsible Officer: Manager Organisational Transformation

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Stakeholder Engagement:

Councillors

Chief Executive Officer

Manager Organisational Transformation

SUMMARY

Council recognises that decision making is enhanced, that services are better delivered and that strategies and policies are likely to result in better outcomes for the community, when community members are involved in decisions which affect them.

This policy will promote good governance and guide effective community engagement practices to support good decision making in the public interest. It will provide community members with a clear understanding of Council's role and the avenues for meaningful public participation in Ararat Rural City Council decision making.

POLICY

This policy applies to Councillors, Council employees, Council contractors, Council Engagement Forums, Reference Groups and Networks as well as short term engagement bodies such as steering groups and advisory committees.

The policy articulates Ararat Rural City Council's commitment to engaging the community as a matter of principle. The application of the policy is intended to support Council deliberation and decisions around issues affecting the municipality now and into the future.

The policy will be supported by community engagement guidelines in the form of a toolkit that will provide clarity on when it is appropriate to engage, and at what level. Community engagement guidelines and supporting documents will address:

- All activities relating to the planning of community engagement activities,
- Stakeholder management,
- Identification of appropriate tools and recording techniques, and
- Evaluation of community engagement activities

This process can enhance the democratic process by increasing the likelihood that Council's decisions are understood and supported by the community and reflect broader community needs and aspirations.

Ararat Rural City Council recognises that residents and other members of the community have the right to have a say in decisions that affect them. The engagement of the community is an essential component in responsible governance and key to the development of a vibrant local democracy.

Council is committed to strengthening and engaging the Ararat Rural City community in democratic governance. The Community Engagement Policy is a formal expression of Council's commitment to engaging the community in decision making processes through the use of appropriate, effective and inclusive practices.

The Policy also seeks to improve Council's engagement processes and outcomes through encouraging a consistent approach and continual learning through evaluation, and through expanding the range of engagement methods used.

The policy will guide the delivery of engagement processes across the organisation to better inform decisions about policy, service planning and delivery.

PRINCIPLES

Ararat Rural City Council believes that the community should have the opportunity to participate in decision making activities about issues that affect their lives. In giving effect to this Council makes a commitment to:

- Clearly articulate the issue under consideration,
- Clearly identify the level of community influence and limitations if appropriate,
- Seek out those potentially affected by the decision,
- Offer a range of accessible opportunities to participate,
- Recognise and make provision for the Ararat Rural City municipality's diverse community,

- Consider the needs and values of those involved in the process including decision makers,
- Consider the community input in the decision-making process,
- Provide feedback to the participant on how their input influenced the decision,
- Evaluate the engagement process and outcomes, and
- Provide adequate resourcing to the community engagement process.

OUTCOMES

The outcomes sought through this Community Engagement Policy include;

- Improved civic governance through assisting elected representatives and Ararat Rural City Council employees to understand, and be informed by, the views of Ararat Rural City's communities when making decisions on their behalf.
- Improved decision-making, by ensuring decisions are soundly based on evidence of informed community opinion and take account of the views and experience of those affected by them.
- Improved community ownership of the decisions made by Ararat Rural City Council, particularly in relation those directly affected by council developments.
- Community members feel they have had adequate opportunity to express their views and feel their interests have been considered in the planning, decision making and implementation of those activities.
- Feedback to the community on how their input affected Ararat Rural City Council's decision-making.
- Appropriate tools and techniques are used to plan, carry out and evaluate community engagement.
- Ararat Rural City Council has a reputation for being open and transparent through following an accessible, clear and systematic participatory process.
- Ararat Rural City Council officers are trained, resourced, and confident in undertaking community engagement activities.
- Ararat Rural City Council directorates actively collaborate with each other to develop robust and inclusive engagement processes.
- The skills and capacity of community members to participate in decision making processes are enhanced.

STATUTORY COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

While community engagement is not mandated in all cases, in some matters Council is bound by legislation to engage with the community. In these cases, Ararat Rural City Council will adhere to the legislative requirement as a minimum standard. Community engagement is required under the following legislation:

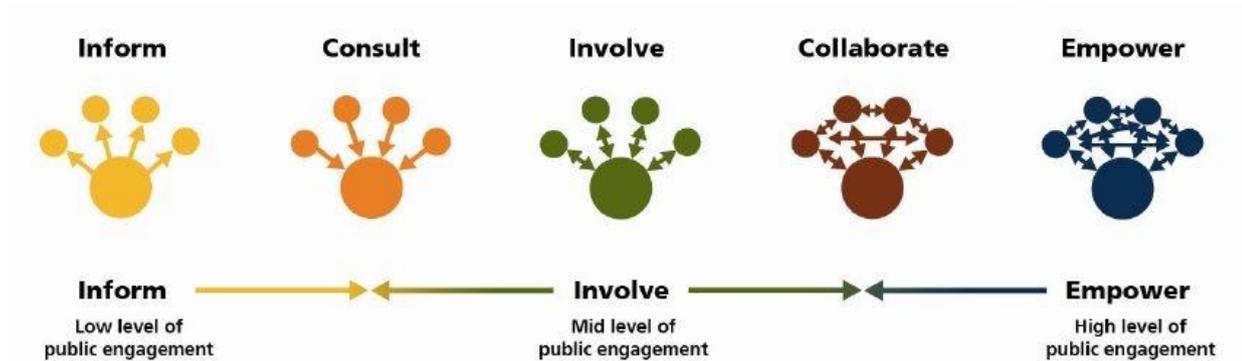
- Local Government Act 1989
- Planning and Environment Act 1987
- Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008
- Road Management Act 2004

While these Acts stipulate required community engagement in certain circumstances, Council is not prevented from carrying out further community engagement where local sensitivities or project complexities merit additional effort.

BEST PRACTISE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Council recognises the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) as the leading authority in community engagement practice. The IAP2 spectrum demonstrates a continuum of community engagement and participation in decision making. It acknowledges that all levels of engagement are appropriate and legitimate, and no level is necessarily 'better' than another.

In order to decide how to most effectively engage a community around a particular issue or project, Council needs to consider and make a conscious decision about what level of influence the community should have on the final decision.



The IAP2 Spectrum requires that the level of engagement must be determined by considering the issue, problem or opportunity requiring community engagement, the objectives to be achieved by engaging and the extent that the community can assist Council to make decisions.

The IAP2 Spectrum is an internationally recognised model providing guidance to the public service, not for profit sector, private industry and communities.

MONITORING, EVALUATION & REVIEW

Compliance with the policy will be measured through evaluation of community engagement plans and outcome reports submitted by the officer leading the engagement activity.

Monitoring will focus on the engagement objectives and include questions such as:

- Were the objectives of the Community Engagement exercise clear to all involved? Who was consulted?
- Did we get responses from the intended target group(s)?
- Did we provide feedback to those consulted?
- Did the people we engaged with feel that the consultation was worthwhile?
- How are we aware of this? Consultation methods?
- Were the methods used the right ones for our objectives?
- If we used more than one method, which method worked better than others and why? Did we get the required information?
- Quantitative and/or qualitative information?
- Response rate? Representative sample? Timeframe?
- Was the timeframe clear? Was the time frame kept to? If not, why not?

Information provided

- If information was provided as part of the consultation process, eg draft documents for comment, was the information easy to access?
- Was the information available in the appropriate format?

Resources

- Did we budget adequately? Were there any unexpected expenses?
- Did we have appropriate skilled staff for the exercise?
- Were we able to use the knowledge and/or expertise of all appropriate Council departments?

Outcome of the community engagement

- Has the process been of benefit to the stakeholders? What was changed as a result of the consultation process?
- Did we use the views generated by the process?

Follow through

- Who will provide the follow up? How will we monitor the outcomes of the exercise?

POLICY IMPLEMENTATION / RESPONSIBILITY

A Community Engagement Review Committee will review all engagement activities annually and a report will be developed and presented to Council to provide feedback and recommendations for improvement.

The Executive Leadership Group is responsible for ensuring policy implementation, compliance, monitoring, evaluation and review. The Manager Community Development & Client Services is responsible for providing advice in relation to this policy, monitoring and continuous improvement of the framework.

ADMINISTRATIVE UPDATES

It is recognised that, from time to time, circumstances may change leading to the need for minor administrative changes to this document. Where an update does not materially alter this document, such a change may be made administratively, Examples include a change to the name of a Council department, a change to the name of a Federal or State department, and a minor update to legislation which does not have a material impact. However, any change or update which materially alters this document must be by resolution of Council.

TERMS/DEFINITIONS

Term	Definition
Council	Ararat Rural City Council
IAP2	International Association of Public Participation

REFERENCES

IAP2 Framework

APPENDICES

Nil.