# Ararat Rural City Council

# Community Engagement Toolkit

## WHAT IS COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT?

Depending on the situation, 'engagement' can cover consultation, communication, education, public participation, participative democracy or working in partnership. For this purpose, 'engagement' is used as a generic, inclusive term to describe the broad range of interactions between people.

It can include a variety of approaches, such as one-way communication or information delivery consultation involvement and collaboration in decision-making, and empowered action in informal groups or formal partnerships.

The word 'community' is also a very broad term used to define groups of people; whether they are stakeholders, interest groups, citizen groups, etc. A community may be a geographic location (community or place), a community of similar interest (community or practice), or a community of affiliation or identity (such as industry or sporting club). 'Community engagement' is therefore a planned process with the specific purpose of working with identified groups of people, whether they are connected by geographic location, special interest, or affiliation or identify to address issues affecting their well-being.

The linking of the term 'community' to 'engagement' serves to broaden the scope, shifting the focus from the individual to the collective, with the associated implications for inclusiveness to ensure consideration is made of the diversity that exists within any community.

## WHY DO WE DO IT?

Some benefits from undertaking community consultation include better decision making, identifying the (real) problem, improved partnerships and collaboration with community and empowering the community to make decisions and to implement and manage change. The community has a legitimate right to have an interest in local government activities.

## CONSISTENCY ACROSS THE ORGANISATION

The focus of this toolkit is on getting the basics right. This involves planning effectively for community engagement and fostering community involvement in decision making. A planned approach will provide a strong foundation for the Ararat Rural City to build on and drive community engagement initiatives and ensure that community engagement is undertaken consistently across the organisation.

With effective communication, dialogue and increased involvement, the Council will be better positioned to make informed decisions about issues that affect the local community. Community engagement processes are open, two way and ongoing. As such the results of all community engagement processes initiated by the Ararat Rural City Council will be available to the public except in those cases where confidentiality must be applied.

## SEEKING SOLUTIONS

It is important to remember that community engagement is not a magic wand that can be waved to ensure that all parties are happy. Ineffective or tokenistic community engagement can be detrimental to the good faith of the community in the long term. The development of this toolkit is

based on the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2), best practice case studies, programs across Australia. This toolkit outlines the tasks that should be undertaken and provides suggested approaches that encourage community involvement in the decision making process.

## WHAT WILL COUNCIL ENGAGE THE COMMUNITY ON?

Council will undertake community engagement for the following broad reasons;

- Site specific matters about a particular site, such as a change in use.
- Area improvement matters that affect people in a neighbourhood or townships e.g. traffic management.
- Service planning to develop, review or improve a service. The service could have an impact across the whole municipality.
- Policy development to develop or improve policies for Council's position on particular matters.
- Key strategic issues/Major projects of such a size that they impact on the future of the whole municipality.
- Strategic plan reviews and development establishing the decision-making framework for Council and future long term planning for the Ararat Rural City.
- Legislative requirement where required under the Local Government Act, Planning and Development Act and Town Planning Scheme or relates to changes to legislation, where Council is responsible for administering the legislation.

## FOLLOW THE AGREED PRINCIPLES

### Commitment

Leadership and strong commitment to information, consultation and active participation in policy-making is needed at all levels.

### Inclusiveness

Consultation will be planned and undertaken with the aim of engaging all people affected by the activity, giving consideration to the Ararat Rural City Council's policies, eg. Access and Inclusion Policy. Affected and interested parties will be given opportunities to participate. Consultation will be sensitive to the needs of particular groups to maximize their ability to contribute.

### Clarity

Objectives for and limits to information, consultation and active participation should be well defined from the outset. The respective roles and responsibilities of each stakeholder must be clear to all. 'Plain English' will be used wherever practical, with all technical terms explained using simple explanations.

### Timing

Community engagement and active participation should be undertaken as early in the process as possible to allow a greater range of solutions to emerge and to raise the chances of best practice outcomes. Adequate time must be available for engagement and consultation to be effective. Communication is needed at all stages of the project cycle.

**Transparency**

The stakeholders in any consultation process should be clear about why and how the consultation will be undertaken and how much influence the consultation can have in the decision making process and outcomes. Stakeholders should be made aware of any limitations in the process and if options are restricted. Stakeholders should be updated regularly on the progress and outcomes of the consultation.

**Resources**

Adequate financial, human and technical resources are needed if public information, consultation and active participation in planning and/or assessment of major planning projects are to be effective.

**Accountability**

The Ararat Rural City Council has an obligation to account for the use they make of community and stakeholder inputs received through feedback, public consultation and active participation. Measures to ensure the process is open, transparent and amenable to external scrutiny and review are crucial to increasing accountability overall.

### UNDERSTANDING THE LEVELS OF ENGAGEMENT

The IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum is the widely adopted framework for engagement.  Further understanding on this model can be gained at  https://www.iap2.org.au/
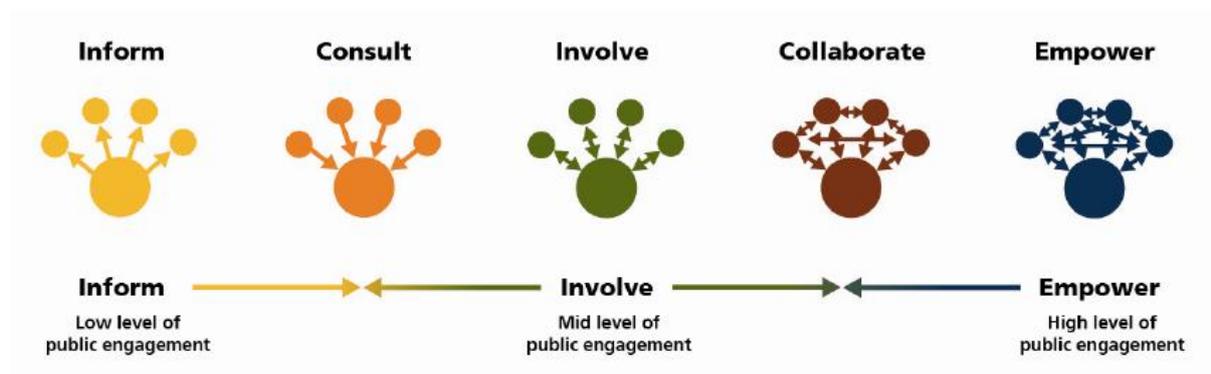
## IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum
### Developed by the International Association for Public Participation

**INCREASING LEVEL OF PUBLIC IMPACT**

| INFORM | CONSULT | INVOLVE | COLLABORATE | EMPOWER |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Public Participation Goal: | Public Participation Goal: | Public Participation Goal: | Public Participation Goal: | Public Participation Goal: |
| To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problems, 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: | Promise to the Public: | Promise to the Public: | Promise to the Public: | Promise to the Public: |
| We will keep You informed. | We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns 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 direct 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. |
| Example Techniques to Consider: | Example Techniques to Consider: | Example Techniques to Consider: | Example Techniques to Consider: | Example Techniques to Consider: |
| • Fact sheets<br>• Web Sites<br>• Open houses | • Public comment<br>• Focus groups<br>• Surveys<br>• Public meetings | • Workshops<br>• Deliberate polling | • Citizen Advisory<br>• Committees<br>• Consensus building<br>• Participatory decision-making | • Citizen juries<br>• Ballots<br>• Delegated decisions |

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## RULES FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

For any community engagement process identify what you require from the community and how you will deliver what you provide in exchange.

1. Establish what you are promising as part of the engagement process. This could include provision of information or feedback on how contributions will influence decisions, through to implementation of stakeholder decisions.

2. It is important to consider the implications and risks associated with your proposed level of participation when designing your engagement approach.

3. Avoid promising a level of participation and power that is never intended to be given, or designing processes that claim to be empowering, but merely offer 'token' levels of participation. All community engagement plans must be endorsed by the Executive Leadership Group.

4. An annual program such as notification of works, can identify community engagement planning, which will then identify community engagement consultations required. Start planning the consultation once your program is set, at the beginning of the budget year.

5. If the project meets any of the following criteria then the community engagement plan will need to be endorsed by the Executive Leadership Group, unless previously approved as part of a yearly program.

• Projects over $100,000;

• Projects with medium to high political sensitivity;

• Projects with high complexity; and

• Projects that require legislative changes.

Before undertaking any community engagement project it is important to scope the project and ask, what are we trying to achieve and how are we going to do it? In scoping the project, consider the following:

- Objectives – what are you trying to achieve
- Timeframe - be aware of school holidays, public holidays, festivals or other Council activities that may have an impact on your project
- Available resources, staff, materials etc
- Budget - including costs of consultation methods, e.g. public notices, marketing materials, officer hours
- What background information is already available
- Issues – identify any community concerns or expectations you may already be aware of and any research or history
- Identify the key stakeholders (target audience)
  A stakeholder is defined as someone who may be affected by or have a specific interest in the decision or issue under consideration;

  Primary Stakeholders are those who have a direct interest in an outcome such as;
    o Mayor and Councillors
    o key community members, groups, agencies, organisations and businesses who live/operate in the near location of a project or who will be directly affected by a project or decision (this may include "absent owners" of leased/rented premises or residential properties).

  Secondary Stakeholders are those who have a general interest in a project or issue such as;
    o City staff working on a project
    o People who live and work in the broader area
    o Business owners
    o Community groups
    o Consultants involved in a project

  Tertiary Stakeholders may also need to be considered depending on the type of community engagement and can include;

    o State and Federal Government agencies and organisations
    o Surrounding local government authorities
    o Non-government agencies and organisations
    o Media interest

- Review community profiles and databases to assist with identifying people/groups to be consulted
- Consider engagement options with other areas
- Other internal staff may be able to provide specialist advice and practical support to assist staff with the engagement project.
- Consider establishing a facilitator database to call on when needed.
- Decide what the decision to be made is
  An effective decision statement is about a clear statement of the problem to be solved, a reflection of the needs of decision makers and the community, something that stakeholders

want to solve or explore, a challenge or a dilemma that is clear and expressed in common language, something that can be accepted by the majority of stakeholders, keeping the statement simple and straightforward.
- Consider what the legislation requirements for engagement are.

## STEP 2: DECIDE ON YOUR LEVEL OF ENGAGEMENT

The level of community engagement will be driven by the expectations of internal and external stakeholders. Consideration should be given to the following;

- Level of interest from the community as perceived by internal stakeholders (Council and staff)
- Level of interest being shown by the community; •Degree of complexity – is there a single issue or multiple issues?
- Degree of potential community impact and/ or outrage – what is the general community perception of the issue/s;
- Degree of political sensitivity – is there potential for individuals/groups to use the situation to make political gains?
- Availability of resources; and media Interest.

To determine the consultation approach may require initial discussions with the Executive Leadership Group and or key stakeholders if the issue is politically sensitive or is high on the complexity scale.

The choice of the community involvement process depends on your assessment of two factors;

- The risk inherent in the situation e.g. the potential for negative environmental/social impact, or community conflict.

- The complexity of information which needs to be digested before informed participation is possible.

### INHERENT RISK

**Low:  little affect on community involved.**

**Medium: community will be affected and some outrage to Council.**

**High: could result in major consequences for the project.**

1) How do you rate the potential for conflict with the community over this decision?

Low             Medium          High

2) How do you rate the potential for social damage if the wrong decision is made?

Low             Medium          High

3) How do you rate the potential for environmental damage if the wrong decision is made?

 Low            Medium          High

4) How do you rate the potential for political damage if the wrong decision is made?

 Low            Medium          High

5) How do you rate the potential financial damage if the wrong decision is made?

 Low                Medium            High

6) How many unknowns are there in the current decision-making equation?

 None               A few              Many

7) How much information needs to be communicated to the community for them to participate?
Simple facts       Detailed proposal        Significant technical data

8) How much learning is required by the participants before they can be expected to make an informed decision?

 Low                Medium             High

9) How many abstract or technical concepts need to digested before an informed decision can be made?

None               A few              Many

If you rate mostly low then inform or consult would likely be appropriate.  If you rate a combination then consult may be sufficient.  If you mostly rate high then you should consider using involve or collaborate.

## STEP 3: DETERMINE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES

When looking at the strategies available it is important to consider the following;

- Being clear about the community engagement objectives to be achieved.
- What techniques are most suited to the level or levels of community engagement already selected?
- What will maximise participation in the community engagement process?
- What will be the most effective ways to reach out to different groups of stakeholders?
- What will be most suited to the three key areas that techniques can be divided into, namely, information sharing, collecting information, and bringing people together

## STEP 4: DEVELOP THE PLAN

Develop a Plan for the chosen type of consultation. This includes allocating resources, setting timeframes and developing a feedback mechanism to monitor the consultation process. The Plan should also include an outline of how decisions will be fed back to participants and note any opportunities for "hands-on" community involvement in the implementation of the policy/program/plan.

## STEP 5: SUBMIT AN APPLICATION FOR APPROVAL

All community engagement plans require endorsement by the Executive Management Team.  If the project meets any of the following criteria then the community engagement plan may need to be endorsed by Council;

• Projects over $100 000
• Projects with medium to high political sensitivity
• Projects with High complexity
• Projects that require legislative changes

Community engagement plans are generally not required to go to Council, but often become part of a paper submitted to Council.

## STEP 6 : IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PLAN

Undertake the consultation approach developed. Be aware of timelines, budget implications and managing expectations during the process. The officer responsible for the community engagement implementation will ensure that a community engagement record has been created, which is to include the following information:

• Links to relevant Council reports
• Projects briefs and proposal
• Project team meeting notes
• Communication materials
• Public participation registrations
• Survey feedback and responses
• Project plans and drawings
• Feedback and outcome reports
• Media releases.

## STEP 7: MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Monitor and modify the approach taken throughout the consultation as required. For example, the type of consultation may need to change if the level of impact of the issue changes, eg. if an issue that was considered to be low impact becomes high impact, the level of consultation should increase or vary accordingly.

An evaluation of every community engagement program should be undertaken at the conclusion. Stakeholders and relevant community members should be informed of the outcomes as per the action plan. The final evaluation report may include:

• An introduction and description of the community engagement process;
• Summaries of the evaluation of each phase of the process;
• Commentary on what worked and added value, what did not work and detracted from the process, areas for improvement, lessons learned, the sustainable nature of the decision; and
• Recommendations for future community engagement projects.

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT CHECKLIST

When undertaking a community engagement exercise, ensure you have covered the following checklist;

- What is the purpose of the consultation exercise?
- Does information already exist on the issue?
- Have you set a clear consultation timeframe?
- Have you considered the best time to consult and the timeframes required especially if Council approval is required?
- Have you identified all relevant stakeholders and who need to be targeted including hard to reach stakeholders?
- What is the best consultation method(s) to use?
- Should the consultation be undertaken in-house or externally?
- Have you determined a budget for the project, including possible consultation costs eg. advertising, mail outs, advertising, publications, facilitators, catering, childcare, staging, hire fees
- Have you considered what information is available to support community engagement?
- Is there any legal requirement to consult with the community?
- Have you considered the in-house skills available in other City departments?
- Have you consulted with other relevant City departments?
- Do you need to consider any sensitive or cultural issues?
- Are there any opportunities for "hands on" community involvement in the implementation of the project/plan?
- How will decisions be fed back to participants involved in the consultation/ engagement exercise?
- Have you considered how Council will be involved and briefed during the process?
- Consider sending "Thank You's" to the people that helped with the consultation exercise.

# Community Engagement Toolkit

## Section A: Project Scope
[REFER to STEP 2]

**Project Name:** ...........................................................
...........................................................

**Issue Statement:** ...........................................................
...........................................................
...........................................................
...........................................................

**Negotiables:**
- ...........................................................
- ...........................................................
- ...........................................................
- ...........................................................
- ...........................................................

**Non-Negotiable:**
- ...........................................................
- ...........................................................
- ...........................................................
- ...........................................................
- ...........................................................

**Engagement Risks:**
- ...........................................................
- ...........................................................
- ...........................................................
- ...........................................................
- ...........................................................

## Section B: Stakeholder Identification & Analysis

### *Stakeholder Identification* [REFER to STEP 3]

### Stakeholder Analysis
[REFER to STEP 4]

**HIGH INTEREST IN THE OUTCOME**

**High Interest / Low Influence**
Suggested Engagement Level:
- Involve
- Consult

**High Interest / High Influence**
Suggested Engagement Levels:
- Empower
- Collaborate

**LOW ABILITY TO INFLUENCE OUTCOME**

**HIGH ABILITY TO INFLUENCE OUTCOME**

**Low Interest / Low Influence**
Suggested Engagement Levels:
- Consult
- Inform

**Low Interest / High Influence**
Suggested Engagement Level:
- Inform

**LOW INTEREST IN THE OUTCOME**

# Community Engagement Toolkit

**Engagement Method (s):**

**Engagement timelines:**

**Tools Required:**

**Budget Required:**

**Action Items and details : (insert gantt chart or other tool if desired)**

This checklist can be used as a de-briefing tool to assist in the evaluation of community engagement exercises.

## OBJECTIVES

- Were the objectives of the Community Engagement exercise clear to all involved? Who was consulted?

- Did you get responses from the intended target group(s)?

- Did you provide feedback to those consulted?

- Did the people you engaged with feel that the consultation was worthwhile?

- How are you aware of this? Consultation Methods

- Were the methods used the right ones for your objectives?

- If you used more than one method, which method worked better than others and why? Did you 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 you budget adequately? Were there any unexpected expenses?

- Did you have appropriately skilled staff for the exercise?
- Were you able to use the knowledge and/or expertise of other Council departments?
- Outcome of the community engagement

- Has the process been of benefit to stakeholders? What has changed as a result of the consultation process?

- Did you use the views generated by the process? Follow through

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

**FINAL CHECK – HAVE YOU CLOSED THE LOOP?  HAVE YOU PROVIDED FEEDBACK TO EVERYONE INVOLVED, THANKED THEM FOR THEIR INVOLVEMENT AND TOLD THEM WHAT IS BEING DONE OR HAS BEEN DONE WITH THE INFORMATION THEY PROVIDED AND WHAT THE OUTCOME OF THE CONSULTATION HAS BEEN.**