

Community Engagement Policy

NOVEMBER 2018

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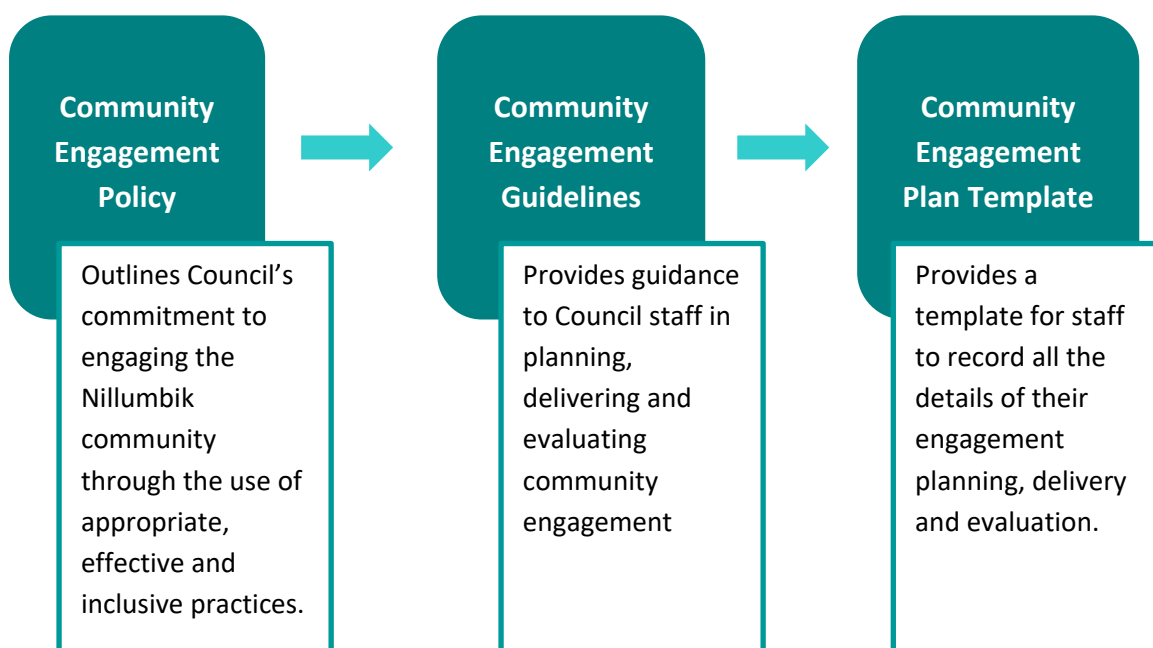
Purpose of this policy

This Community Engagement Policy is a formal expression of Council's commitment to engaging the Nillumbik community through the use of appropriate, effective and inclusive practices.

This policy:

- Articulates Council's commitment to engaging effectively with its community in a meaningful, accountable, responsive and equitable way
- Outlines how Council will ensure that community engagement is integrated into Council activities to support decision making, build relationships and strengthen communities
- Should be applied at the planning stage of any project or initiative, when a change in service, activities or infrastructure is considered, when a decision is to be made, and when a change in government policy or legislation impacts on Council services/business
- Seeks to improve Council's engagement processes and outcomes through encouraging a consistent and transparent approach and continual learning through evaluation, and through expanding the range of engagement methods used
- Recognises that community engagement is the responsibility of all Council service areas, teams and employees

The diagram below articulates the suite of three documents that are interrelated and should be reviewed in context of each other, in providing direction and support with regard to community engagement:



Definition of community engagement

Community engagement is the process of involving the public in the decision making process.

Community engagement is:

- a two-way process of interaction between a government and its constituents; and
- about something, such as a decision the local government needs to make, or a problem or issue affecting the community that the local government wishes to address

Our commitment to the community

Community engagement is about involving the community in decisions which affect them. It is critical in the successful development and implementation of acceptable policies and decisions and for improving services by being responsive to the needs of the community.

Council is committed to providing good governance and the delivery of high quality local services by fostering democratic representation, social inclusion and meaningful community engagement with its citizens.

Council will achieve its commitment to inclusive and effective community engagement by adherence to this Community Engagement Policy to guide efforts to enhance the planning and delivery of the Council's services and programs.

This Policy does not prevent Council from engaging with the community in addition to any statutory requirements providing that any legal timeframes are met.

Community engagement does not necessarily mean achieving consensus. However it does involve seeking broad, informed input into the decision-making process and the best possible solution for Council and the community.

Community engagement framework

Council uses the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) framework for community engagement.

This framework consists of a spectrum of engagement options which reflect the increasing level of public involvement and engagement from 'inform' through to 'empower' which are applied appropriately based on the activity and context of the subject.

The table below identifies each of the five levels of engagement.

	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
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 the final decision 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 seek your feedback on drafts and proposals	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives development and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work together with you to formulate solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible	We will implement what you decide.

Source: International Association of Public Participation (IAP2)

Community engagement principles

The following principles will guide Council's approach to community engagement.

Council will:

- Communicate the objectives and parameters of the engagement process to participants at the beginning, including legislative requirements, Council's sphere of influence, policy frameworks and context, and budget constraints and opportunities
- Apply the IAP2 framework appropriately based on the activity and context of the subject
- Recognise community participation as a right of all citizens and promote opportunities and mechanisms for a wide cross section of the community to actively participate in decision making, including people with disabilities, carers and families
- Approach engagement free from bias toward any stakeholder and treat all participants in the engagement process with respect and dignity
- Be accountable, accessible and ethical in all dealings with the community in a way that is consistent with our codes of conduct and relevant laws
- Actively listen to all points of view and respect the rights of all citizens to be heard
- Ensure that the engagement will be undertaken early enough in the decision-making process to ensure that its outcomes are considered before the decision is made
- Ensure that the community is given enough time to take part in engagement processes and provide feedback, avoiding where possible holiday periods such as Christmas and New Year
- Demonstrate that all community contributions and relevant data have been considered, prior to making any decisions that affect the local community
- Commit to providing participants with feedback at key stages throughout the project and upon completion and report on how community input influenced the decision
- Ensure any proposed project or decision will be adequately resourced to conduct a thorough and effective community engagement process

When we engage

Council is committed to being inclusive and transparent in its decision-making. Council will engage the community on matters which affect our citizens and whenever it believes that community engagement will result in a better outcome for the community and better informed decisions.

The following are examples of the occasions when community engagement would be undertaken:

- Community planning and land use planning
- Policy development and implementation
- Corporate planning (Council Plan)
- Service levels/standards
- Community specific issues
- The design and location of new infrastructure or facilities (including roads) and renewal of existing infrastructure
- Specific projects or programs (such as sport and recreation, community safety/crime prevention, flood mitigation, tourism)
- Legislative, policy or service issues that are the responsibility of higher levels of government, but where the Council wishes to convey community views (such as issues impacting the Green Wedge, housing, education, the environment and health)
- Where the *Local Government Act 1989* or other legislation prescribes that community consultation is required.

There are some circumstances where Council may not be able to engage widely

This may include when:

- an immediate resolution is required, such as in an emergency
- there is a risk to public safety
- technical or other expertise is required
- an initiative involves confidential or commercial information
- there are clear and defined legislative responsibilities that must be met
- developing or reviewing internal policies and procedures
- timeframes and methodology have been predetermined by other levels of government

Who we engage

The Nillumbik community is made up of people from all walks of life, with unique interest groups. Council values the input of all members of our community, so it is important that our engagement methods are accessible and broad reaching. Each member of our community has the potential to be a stakeholder in Council's engagement activities.

Community

Individuals or groups who may be affected by or who have an interest in Council decision making. The community includes but is not limited to those who: live, work, participate in leisure activities, visit, study, invest in, or pass through Nillumbik.

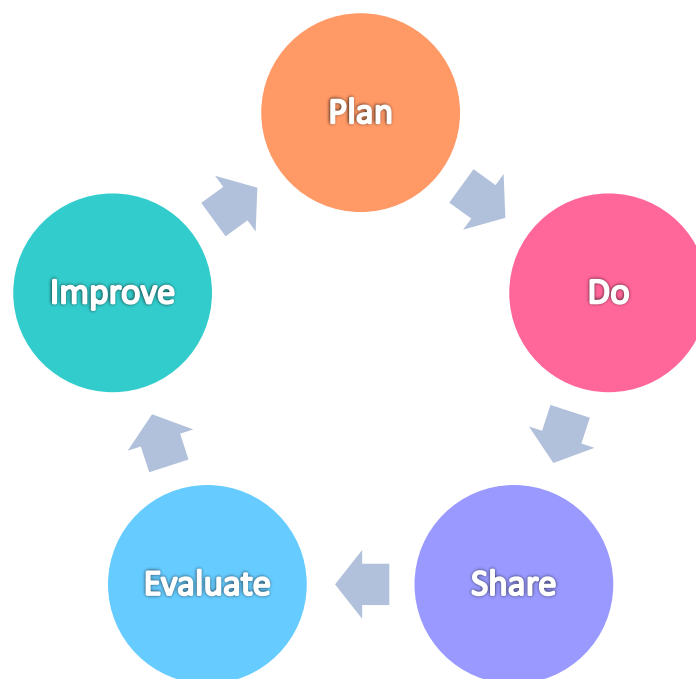
Stakeholders

Community groups, organisations or individuals who may be directly impacted by, involved with, or have an interest in Council's decision making. Stakeholders include but are not limited to: State and Federal governments, businesses, not-for-profit organisations, other local governments and service providers.

How we engage

We engage our community through a variety of types and tools of engagement. The approach varies from one engagement activity to another, depending on what the engagement is for, who the target audience is, and the level of influence the audience can have.

Our community engagement process outlines five stages to ensure we deliver a consistent and robust approach to engagement activities. This includes a process of planning, doing, sharing, evaluating and improving.



Plan

During this stage we will understand and outline:

- why are we engaging
- what are we trying to achieve through the process
- how will results be used
- who we want to engage with
- how we will engage
- when we will engage

Do

During this stage we will:

- Inform the community/target group of the planned engagement activity
- Invite previously identified stakeholders to participate in engagement activity
- Provide information to participants in jargon free, clear English
- Conduct the engagement activity
- Promptly provide any specific feedback for other areas of Council to ensure that urgent issues are dealt with according to our customer service charter

Share

Following the engagement process we will:

- Provide updates at key stages of the project to ensure the community remain engaged
- Report back to the community the results and outcomes of the engagement process
- Provide this information in a timely, accessible and informative manner so that participants understand how their involvement influenced the process and the outcome or decision

Evaluate

We will:

- Plan the evaluation of the engagement process at the beginning of the project so we are aware of what the outcome will be measured against
- Continuously evaluate the engagement process and make any necessary adjustments
- Review the engagement process to ensure we understand what happened and why
- Reflect on what did and didn't work and share observations and recommendations

Improve

We will:

- Examine the lessons learnt throughout the project
- Share ideas for improvement of engagement across the organisation

Supporting information

Relationship to Council Plan

The Council Plan has five key strategic objectives that we believe will help us, in collaboration with the community, realise the Council vision - that Nillumbik is Australia's most liveable Shire.

They are:

- Engage and connected communities
- Active and creative people
- Safe and healthy environments
- A prosperous economy
- Responsible leadership

In particular, this policy is aligned with:

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 1

Engaged, connected communities

GOAL

A place where communities and ideas thrive, underpinned by trust, confidence and continuous learning.

STRATEGIES

- 1.1 Improve community trust through better communications and genuine engagement
- 1.5 Strengthen the focus on social inclusion, building social capital and connection within communities
- 1.6 Ensure that community services, programs and facilities are inclusive and respond to current and emerging needs

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

Effective community engagement is crucial to Council's achievement of all six roles.

Local councils in Victoria are legally required to conduct public consultation through a prescribed process on a range of specific matters.

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.