

Community Engagement Policy 2021

Preamble

Council is committed to actively encouraging individuals, groups and communities to be involved in local government through community engagement.

Bass Coast Shire residents and ratepayers have diverse needs and opinions, innovative ideas and a wealth of local knowledge. Council is able to make better decisions on behalf of the community it serves when it draws on those resources.

This Policy outlines Council's commitment regarding community engagement and aims to increase Council's performance in relation to community engagement. It includes the requirements of the *Local Government Act 2020*.

Genuine community engagement allows Council to make well-informed decisions about issues which directly affect the Bass Coast community. It will also promote community ownership of project, policy and strategy decisions, which can support the long-term sustainability of those initiatives and generate a sense of belonging and pride in Bass Coast's achievements.

A strong partnership between Council and its constituents is necessary to support the democratic process. An informed, empowered and connected community that is involved in the decisions that affect quality of life in the region will make Bass Coast a better place to live, work and visit.

Council decision-making should always seek to take into consideration the diverse views of the community, laws and regulations, finances, human resources and social impacts. Within the communities of Bass Coast, there will be different opinions on many decisions.

The community is more likely to accept and understand decisions if we build stronger processes to listen to diverse views and more clearly explain how the variety of views were considered in making a final decision.

Definitions

Council – the organisation, including the Mayor and Councillors, staff, consultants and contractors working for Council.

Community – a group of people living, owning a property or regularly visiting Bass Coast Shire or with a shared interest or background relating to Bass Coast Shire.

Community Engagement – the process building understanding of issues and genuine involvement in decision-making.

Place-based Engagement – focuses the engagement on an entire community at the neighbourhood-level.

Deliberative Engagement – affords community members and affected individuals a greater influence over policy and decision-making, being inclusive of diverse viewpoints and values through open dialogue and discussion, access to information and progression towards consensus.

IAP2 – International Association of Public Participation, recognised as an international leader in the field of public participation and community engagement.

Policy objectives

The objectives of the policy are:

- To support good decision-making by Council
- To build a strong partnership with our community
- To undertake community engagement activities:
 - with respect
 - by building trust
 - with openness and accountability

Policy statement

Council is committed to actively encouraging individuals, groups and communities to be involved in local government through community engagement. Our recent move to a place-based approach to community planning is evidence our commitment to building strong and sustainable relationships with our community. Council will also ensure the appropriate level of community engagement is applied to ensure informed decision making.

The best decisions will be made if those affected by the outcome have had the appropriate opportunity to participate in the process.

Council is required by legislation to consider community engagement, such as when a proposed change or decision is likely to:

- have significant impact on quality of life in the region
- impact on services or facilities for residents and ratepayers
- have a significant budgetary impact
- involve a level of conflict, controversy or sensitivity

Different levels of community engagement are appropriate for different scenarios or types of issues. The cost of engagement (including the demand it makes on community and staff time) should represent good value for ratepayers, given the scope and scale of the decision.

Under the new *Local Government Act 2020* the principles of community engagement are:

- a) a community engagement process must have a clearly defined objective and scope;
- b) participants in community engagement must have access to objective, relevant and timely information to inform their participation;
- c) participants in community engagement must be representative of the persons and groups affected by the matter that is the subject of the community engagement;

- d) participants in community engagement are entitled to reasonable support to enable meaningful and informed engagement;
- e) participants in community engagement are informed of the ways in which the community engagement process will influence Council decision making.

Deliberative engagement

The new *Local Government Act 2020* places a high level of importance on Deliberative Engagement principles.

Deliberative Engagement has a unique approach which places greater emphasis on involving people in decision-making. Compared to other forms of engagement, it affords participants more opportunity and time to discuss and consider an issue in greater detail, which helps community members to reach a more measured, informed view.

Deliberative Engagement principles are considered to be:

- authentic engagement with the community
- good representation of the community in engagement activities
- clear demonstration of how all views have been considered
- accessible and relevant information available to the community to ensure the decision making process and the community's level of influence is clear in each instance and that participants are fully informed.

There are many strategies that can be used to undertake Deliberative Engagement and Council will design processes based on the principles above to meet the needs of individual projects.

Council must apply the principles of Deliberative Engagement in the development of the following documents:

- Community Vision
- Council Plan
- Financial Plan – Ten Year
- Asset Plan

Deliberative Engagement principles will also be applied to ensure effective engagement occurs in other situations of appropriate scope, impact and/or complexity.

Policy Implementation

In order to achieve the policy objectives, Council will adhere to the following policy principles and implementation the Communication and Engagement Strategy:

Connect with our community

Council will be inclusive and actively seek to connect with the community, including those who are hardest to reach.

Work with our community

Council will improve the ways in which Council and the community work together, focusing on solutions and making a difference. It will support staff to increase their capacity to engage effectively.

Listen and understand

Council will listen and understand the needs and expectations of our community.

Be open and accountable

Council will follow ethical principles of conduct, making engagement processes open and accountable, identifying together with the community the rules of engagement and reporting on the outcomes. Council will explain what community engagement was conducted and how it influenced decision-making.

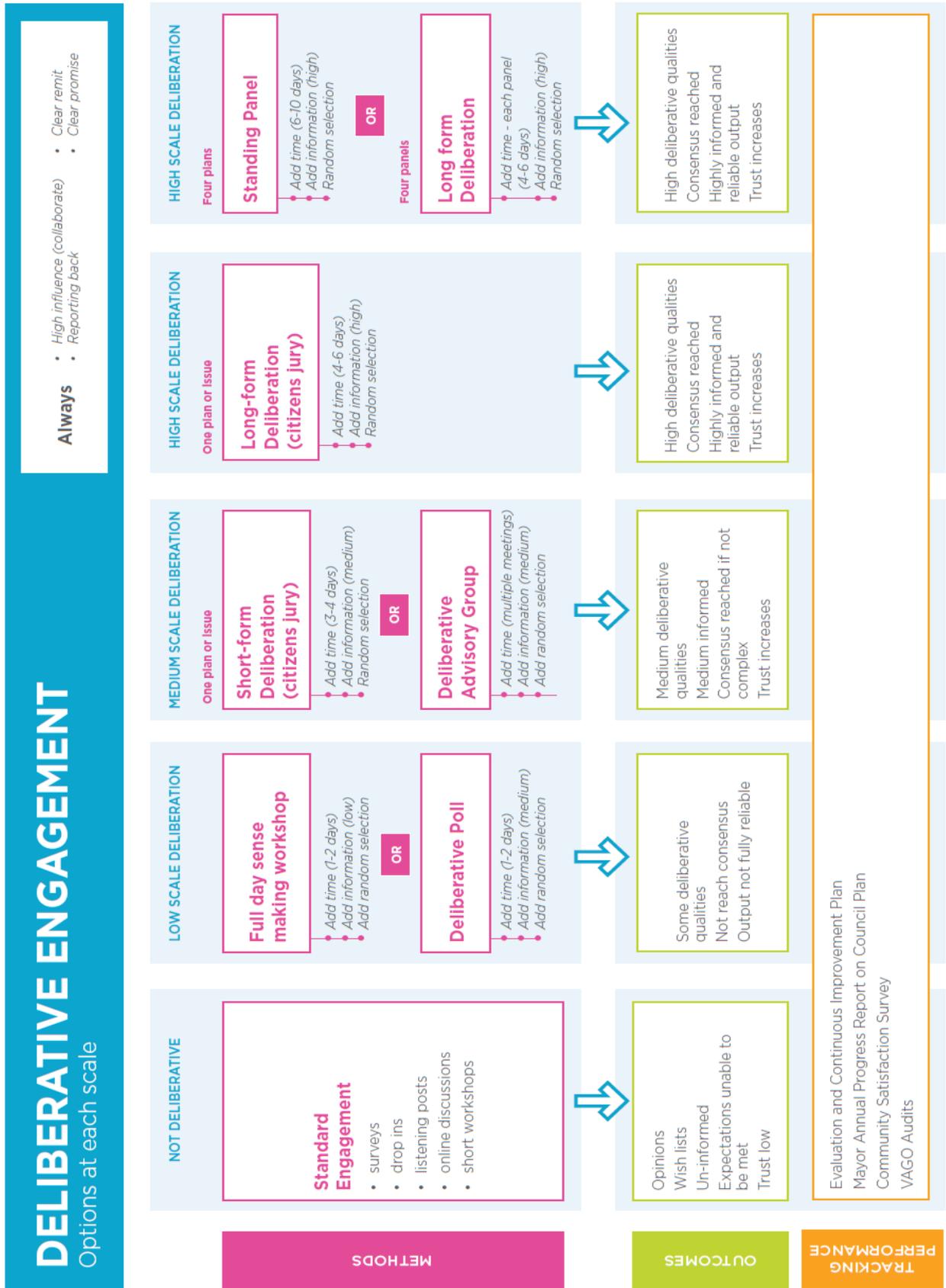
Recognise diverse views

Council processes will actively seek and recognise the diverse range of values and interests from all residents, ratepayers and visitors.

Additional documents

Council has an adopted Communication and Engagement Strategy which will help with the implementation of the Policy. Council will also reference Mosaic Labs 'Deliberative Engagement for Victorian Councils.'

Under the Mosaic Labs model, each engagement option has different methods and outcomes, depending on the scale of the engagement:



The International Association of Public Participation resources found at iap2.org.au will also be used to guide Council's community engagement activities.

- The IAP2 Core Values for the Practice of Public Participation.
- The IAP2 Code of Ethics for Public Participation Practitioners.
- The IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum.

Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Goal				
To provide the public with balanced, succinct, 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
Commitment to the Community				
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
Examples				
Printed materials such as brochures, email, displays, website, Social media	Participate (online consultation platform), Printed materials, mailed surveys, Feedback register	Printed materials, Focus groups, interviews, workshops, field trips, Council Meetings	Council Advisory Committees with specific focus, Community representatives on Council committees	Mediation, Negotiation, Dialogue, Citizen juries, Deliberative polling

Review process

This Policy will be reviewed by the Council within five years of its adoption. This Policy replaces the Community Engagement Policy 2015.

Accountability process

Council will be responsible for ensuring that the objectives of the policy are taken into consideration when making decisions in relation to processes that involve community engagement. The Chief Executive Officer will be responsible for ensuring General Managers and Service Managers in the organisation adhere to the objectives of the policy.

Approval

Adopted by Council at its meeting held on

Date 17 February 2021

Signed by the Mayor, Cr Brett Tessari

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Brett Tessari', with a horizontal line underneath the signature.