



# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT POLICY

Policy Number C06  
Council Meeting Date 24 February 2021  
Next Review Date February 2025

## 1. POLICY OBJECTIVE

The *Community Engagement Policy C06* (the Policy) outlines Council's approach to community engagement to assist with transparency, understanding and trust in Council's decision-making process.

## 2. POLICY SCOPE

The policy applies to all South Gippsland Shire Council employees, volunteers and consultants as community engagement is the responsibility of all service areas and teams. The policy is also applicable to the Council as it influences decision-making.

## 3. POLICY PRINCIPLES – COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

### 3.1 Policy Background

South Gippsland Shire Council is committed to understanding the needs of its community and actively seeks the input of community members when significant decisions are required to be made.

Council recognises the value in diverse views and actively seeks differing opinions in order to tailor services for the community it serves.

The policy ensures that Council hears a wide range of perspectives, understands the breadth of issues to consider, and has access to potential solutions when decisions need to be made.

#### *Our Commitment:*

*As a Council we believe that our decisions are improved through the process of community engagement with the South Gippsland community. We respect the ongoing nature of community engagement and in turn the opportunities we have to build partnerships with our community. We are committed to using these opportunities to stay firmly grounded in community perspectives.*

This policy and all other guiding documents have been developed in line with the *Local Government Act 2020* and methodology developed and endorsed by IAP2.

### 3.2 Implementation

Council understands the importance of community engagement and encourages community members to be involved in government. It is expected that community members should feel they have sufficient opportunities to share their views.



1. Council welcomes the opportunity to engage with the community on important issues. Instances where Council may undertake community engagement include (but are not limited to) situations such as:
  - a. When there is a high likelihood of community members or Council being impacted
  - b. Where community feedback will enhance the decision or action required
  - c. Where a situation has a significant budgetary impact or a level of sensitivity
  - d. Where there is a significant community interest or enthusiasm for a particular issue
  - e. Any compulsory community engagement activities are undertaken where required by legislative obligations.

### 3.3 Principles

Council will have regard to the following principles as outlined in the *Local Government Act 2020* when conducting engagement activities.

1. Local Government Act 2020 Principles:
  - 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.

These principles are also outlined in Council's Community Engagement Strategy 2020-2024.

Council will also have regard to the IAP2 principles and the Victorian Auditor-General's Office (VAGO) Public Participation Principles in order to maintain best practice.

### 3.4 Methodology

1. Activity Selection

Council staff will apply engagement techniques, when appropriate, in a manner that is effective, timely and cost effective for the desired engagement result.

Community engagement activities can be scaled to an appropriate level according to the number of those potentially affected and the resources available.



Focus will be given to a range of factors including scale, context and purpose to help determine appropriate engagement activities. Community Engagement Guidelines have been developed to assist staff when designing relevant engagement plans and the IAP2 Methods Matrix will be consulted when determining appropriate community engagement activities.

A range of engagement opportunities will be offered for community engagement projects to ensure that community members have an opportunity to take part in a way which is meaningful and suits them.

In order to effectively engage the community and ensure inclusivity Council is committed to providing community engagement materials in plain language. Assistance will be available for community member to understand the material that is provided for them to ensure they can provide feedback.

All community correspondence will be accessible. Web content will be provided in a manner that is compliant with the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) internationally recognised Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI) guidelines. Where possible important content will be provided in webpages rather than extensive documents.

Council will provide notice of all community engagement opportunities in Council's e-newsletter In The Know so that interested parties can register and receive alerts. This will be done in conjunction with other advertising efforts.

There are two types of engagement practices which may be used separately or in conjunction depending on the project matter.

a. Deliberative Engagement

Deliberative practices are considered when projects have long-term impacts for the community or are a source of community concern and contention. Typically, these projects have negotiable factors which allow for discussion and the generation of new ideas and solutions.

Examples of deliberative engagement activities are:

- i. Online forums
- ii. Citizen panels
- iii. Advisory groups

When considering the IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum the project is an opportunity to involve, collaborate and empower.

b. Participatory Engagement

Participatory practices are considered when feedback is invited on ideas and documents. These projects typically have a number of non-negotiable factors so there is a limited project scope.

Examples of participatory engagement activities include:

- i. Surveys
- ii. Submissions

When considering the IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum the project provides an opportunity to inform and consult.

## 2. Statutory Requirements



Under the *Local Government Act 2020* Council has a statutory requirement to develop a Community Vision, Financial Plan, Asset Plan and a four-year Council Plan.

The below table outlines the minimum community engagement approach required for these types of activities to ensure this requirement is met.

Council Activity	Community Engagement Approach
<b>Community Vision</b>	Deliberative Engagement
<b>Council Plan</b>	Deliberative Engagement
<b>Financial Plan</b>	Deliberative Engagement
<b>Asset Plan</b>	Deliberative Engagement
<b>Budget</b>	Participatory Engagement
<b>Making of a Local Law</b>	Participatory Engagement
<b>Acquiring or selling land</b>	Participatory Engagement
<b>Leases in excess of 10 years and/or \$100,000 p.a. that are not included in the budget</b>	Participatory Engagement
<b>Other Plans, Strategies or Policies, Service Planning and Capital Works Projects</b>	Level selected dependant on complexity of the activity

In recognition of the *Local Government Act 2020* each Directorate will have the ability to determine its own processes in previously prescribed engagement activities. These processes should be reviewed annually to ensure their relevance.

### 3. Feedback and Reporting

Feedback provided will be presented to Council as a report for situations where decision making is necessary. All other feedback will be utilised for future improvement.

Active participants will be advised of these feedback channels in such a way that suits their original interaction with Council or any other method as negotiated. The wider South Gippsland community will be advised of decisions via media releases, social media and email newsletters.

### 4. RISK ASSESSMENT

This Policy provides for the opportunities and benefits to decision making inherent in community engagement and collaborative practice. The Policy makes a public Council commitment to fostering a practice of community engagement and involvement in relevant decision making. Without this policy no consistent approach to community engagement at Council would exist. This Policy reduces the likelihood of haphazard engagement efforts that can discourage the community from participating, and result in a poor use of Council and the community's resources.

The Policy also ensures Council meets its statutory and legislative requirements, strengthens opportunities to make informed decisions and enhancing Council's reputation.



This Policy strengthens Council’s opportunity to build relationships and stronger levels of trust with the community through community engagement. The Policy helps ensure monitoring and evaluation of engagement plans are undertaken, and learnings are passed on throughout the organisation to ensure we improve in all community engagement efforts.

## 5. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES STATEMENT

Council will develop and implement an ongoing program of community engagement training and practice, including through staff and Councillor induction programs, to ensure the principles within this Policy are enshrined. Consultants working on behalf of Council that undertake consultation must be informed of this policy.

Community members were consulted with in November/December 2020 in order to determine any community expectations of the policy and in accordance to the requirements of the *Local Government Act 2020*.

Community members who participated in the engagement process for this policy will be advised of the adopted policy via OurSay. The broader South Gippsland community will be made aware of this policy through media releases, Council’s website, social media and email newsletters.

## 5. ATTACHMENT SUMMARY

### 1. IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum

<i>SUPPORTING INFORMATION</i>			
<i>Legislative Provisions</i>	<i>Local Government Act 2020 Planning and Environment Act 1987 Information Privacy Act 2000</i>		
<i>Council Supporting Documents</i>	<i>Council Plan 2020-2024 Community Engagement Strategy Community Engagement Guidelines</i>		
<i>DEFINITIONS</i>			
<i>Community Engagement</i>	<i>A planned process with the specific purpose of working across organisations, stakeholders and communities to shape the decisions or actions of the members of the community, stakeholders or organisation in relation to a problem, opportunity or outcome. IAP2 also refers to this process as public participation.</i>		
<i>IAP2</i>	<i>International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) is an international leader in public participation that seeks to promote and improve the practice of community engagement.</i>		
<i>REVISION HISTORY</i>			
<i>Policy Review</i>	<i>In accordance with Council’s policy review process, this policy will be reviewed and adopted on a 4-year cycle unless required earlier for legislation or other reasons.</i>		
<i>Version</i>	<i>Approved</i>	<i>Approval Date</i>	<i>Sections Modified</i>
1.0	Council Meeting	25 July 2018	New Policy



## IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation

IAP2's Spectrum of Public Participation was designed to assist with the selection of the level of participation that defines the public's role in any public participation process. The Spectrum is used internationally, and it is found in public participation plans around the world.



	<b>INFORM</b>	<b>CONSULT</b>	<b>INVOLVE</b>	<b>COLLABORATE</b>	<b>EMPOWER</b>
<b>PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GOAL</b>	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 final decision making in the hands of the public.
<b>PROMISE TO THE PUBLIC</b>	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 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 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.

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