

# Community Engagement Policy

## COUNCIL POLICY NO. 143

### 1. POLICY

#### **What is Community Engagement?**

Community engagement is the processes by which Council provides deliberate opportunities for the community to participate in and influence Council decision making. Effective community engagement results from a strong partnership between Council and the community, in shaping the future together.

Effective community engagement enables Council to collect valuable information from our community and to consider that information in future decision-making. Community engagement also means the community is involved in Council decisions and processes, which offers residents ownership of projects and services.

#### **What is the purpose of a Community Engagement Policy?**

The policy is designed to guide the delivery of community engagement processes across the organisation to better inform decisions in the planning of services, setting of budgets, identifying and planning projects and developing policies and strategies. Council acknowledges that engagement should be a planned process that aims to work with our community and stakeholders to shape decisions and actions in the delivery of Council's services.

This policy provides the core values underpinning our approach to community engagement, and underpins Council's Community Engagement Strategy.

#### **Why does Council engage?**

Community engagement provides Council with greater opportunities to make informed decisions. Through engaging the community, Council is better able to understand local issues and needs.

Community engagement can support Council decision making by:

- Gathering information, genuine feedback and diverse points of view prior to making decisions.
- Fostering community partnerships.
- Increasing trust and community confidence.
- Gathering contribution from stakeholders who are impacted by Council decisions.
- Enhancing understanding of, and commitment to, projects and strategic decisions.
- Improving accountability and transparency through open and genuine consultation and feedback on public participation outcomes.

#### **Our Gannawarra Community**

Our Gannawarra community is diverse, and engage with Council in different ways.

As part of reviewing this strategy and updating our Community Engagement Strategy, Council surveyed residents via the *2025 Community Satisfaction Survey* and *How Do You Engage With Council?* survey to determine how they currently engage with Council and how they would like to work with Council in the future. These surveys found that:

- A newsletter sent by mail is the preferred form of communication from Council regarding news, information and upcoming events.
- Residents aged under 50 years continue to prefer to receive communication from Council regarding news, information and upcoming events by Council's website or social media.
- Residents aged 50 years or older prefer to receive communication from Council regarding news, information and events via newsletters sent by mail or email.
- Residents prefer Council to push relevant information to them, rather than actively seeking it out.

The top 5 methods our community wants to receive information are via:

- Council's website, which is updated regularly to ensure it features correct and relevant information.
- *Gannawarra Connect*, Council's newsletter produced every three months and distributed to all properties in the municipality.
- Social media, including Facebook and LinkedIn.
- Media releases distributed to local newspapers, radio stations, television networks and community newsletter publishers.
- *Gannawarra News*, Council's fortnightly advertisement published in local newspapers.

### How do we engage?

We understand the importance of early engagement when proposing changes to, or introduction of new services, facilities, policies or local laws that impact our community. In some circumstances, engagement will occur several times before a plan is adopted or a decision is made. We commit that where decisions will have an impact on the community, the greater the impact, the greater the engagement will be.

Council will adhere to the engagement principles outlined within the Act, set clear engagement objectives, and consider statutory processes, community interest, political sensitivity, time, resources and budget constraints.

This Policy has been developed considering the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) spectrum (refer Table 1). Many ideas, actions and decisions will involve more than one level of engagement. This is because the community can have different levels of influence at different stages of the project and different individuals and groups within the community may be more directly impacted than others.

Council will use appropriate and considered timeframes for each engagement, considering the complexity or impact of the action or decision to be made.

Table 1 - IAP2 Spectrum and Council's engagement commitment.

	<b>Councils Engagement Commitment</b>	<b>Community Role</b>
<b>Inform</b>	Council will inform and engage by maintaining an honest dialogue with our community.	<b>Listen</b>
<b>Consult</b>	Council commits to sharing information about Council projects and services with our community, giving them a reasonable opportunity to express their views, and taking those views into account in decision making.	<b>Contribute</b>
<b>Involve</b>	Council will work with our community to ensure they are included in the process of Council decision making that affects them.	<b>Participate</b>
<b>Collaborate</b>	Council will ensure the community are enabled to participate in the decisions that affect them.	<b>Partner</b>

<b>Empower</b>	Council will build understanding of its goals and priorities and work to empower our community to achieve community-led initiatives.	<b>Partner or Lead</b>
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### **Who do we engage?**

When we are planning to make decisions which impact the community, we recognise the need to identify affected stakeholders. Some individuals or groups may only engage with Council on one key issue, some members of our community may fall within multiple stakeholder groups, making them particularly relevant to certain engagement processes. We will use the most appropriate methods of engagement to minimise barriers to engagement, and reach members of the community who may be underrepresented. Council's key stakeholders can be broadly categorised into the following four groups:

#### Community

- Residents
- Community groups
- Service users
- Businesses
- Tourists/Visitors
- Indigenous groups and organisations

#### Influencers

Influence the ability of Council to gain funding and benefit from policy decisions:

- State and Federal Government
- Media
- Local business and community leaders
- Leadership organisations such as the Murray Regional Tourism Board or organisations with Councillor Representation
- Municipal Association of Victoria
- Focus groups

#### Partners

Ensure Council can offer its range of services to the community:

- Organisations and businesses which partner with Council to deliver services
- State and Federal Government agencies
- Neighbouring councils
- Municipal Association of Victoria
- Local health services
- Emergency Services

#### Organisation

Responsible for the day-to-day operation of the Council and the ability of Council to serve its community:

- Councillors
- Council staff
- Volunteers
- Contractors

### **Methods of engagement**

It is important that the methods and tools of engagement we use enable effective participation and meaningful feedback. We may need to use different methods at different stages depending on the reason we are engaging. For example, we might consult to gather ideas early on and then involve, collaborate or

empower to finalise priorities, details or decisions. Every situation will vary according to its context, who it affects and how it impacts them as well as what can be influenced or is achievable. To ensure the best outcome for each situation this will vary, highlighting the uniqueness of every engagement with our community.

It is important to note that these methods are not the only way we may engage. We will continue to look for new engagement methods that ensure we provide a voice to all residents and stakeholders.

#### Inform

- Gannawarra Connect
- Media releases
- Gannawarra News
- Radio advertising
- Social media
- Direct mail
- Signage

#### Consult

- Listening Posts
- Surveys (physical and online)
- Ideas boards

#### Involve and Collaborate

Methods that can be conducted with varying levels of involvement

- Advisory groups
- Workshops
- Online two-way engagement tools
- Online forums/meetings
- Project Control Groups

#### Empower

- Community-led organisations or panels
- Independent reference groups
- Delegated decision making

## 2. OUR LEGISLATIVE RESPONSIBILITY

Council is committed to adhering to the Community Engagement principles detailed in the *Local Government Act 2020*:

- (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.

Other legislation relevant to this policy includes *Charter for Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*, *Public Administration Act 2004*, *Equal Opportunity Act 2010* and the *Child Safety Act 2015*.

A number of Council documents are also linked to this Policy, including;

- *Connecting Gannawarra – 2021-2025 Council Plan*
- *Policy No. 141 - Public Transparency*
- *Community Engagement Strategy*
- *Social Inclusion Strategy*
- *Advocacy Strategy*
- *Policy No. 101 – Media*

### 3. DEFINITIONS

**Community Engagement:**

By which Council provides deliberate opportunities for the community to participate in and influence Council decision making. Effective community engagement results from a strong partnership between Council and the community, in shaping the future together.

**Public Participation:**

Encompasses a range of public involvement and can include, but is not limited to, simply informing people about what Council is doing, delegating decisions to public groups, consulting with members of the community about their views on certain issues, community activities and projects addressing the common good, membership on Council reference groups or committees or volunteering activities.

**Our Community:**

Includes people who live in the municipal district of the Council; people and bodies who are ratepayers of the Council; traditional owners of land in the municipal district of the Council; and people and bodies who conduct activities in the municipal district of the Council.

**Methods:**

Refers to the number of engagement methods and tools used to engage with the community.

**Stakeholders:**

Involves members of the community who may be impacted or interested in a topic or issue that an engagement process will address. Can also refer to external organisations and/or Government agencies involved in a project or decision.

### 4. POLICY REVIEW

Council will review this policy as required but always within two years after a general election of the Council. At the time of review, this policy was compliant with the Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act.

### 5. FURTHER INFORMATION

Members of the public may inspect all Council policies at Gannawarra Shire Council's Kerang and Cohuna offices or online at [www.gsc.vic.gov.au](http://www.gsc.vic.gov.au).

Any enquiries in relation to this policy should be directed to the Director Community Wellbeing on (03) 5450 9333.

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