Community Engagement Policy

CONTENTS

1.   PURPOSE

1.1   This Policy provides the guiding principles, requirements and processes for Council to follow when undertaking community engagement.

2.   SCOPE

2.1   This Policy applies to all Council officers when considering and undertaking engagement with communities. This includes the requirement to ensure deliberative engagement practices are implemented as mandated by the *Local Government Act 2020,* including for the following:

   2.1.1   Community Vision

   2.1.2   Council Plan

   2.1.3   Asset Plan

   2.1.4   Financial Plan

   2.1.5   Other engagement processes as determined, which may include but are not limited to:

   (a)   The making of local laws

   (b)   Budget and policy development

   (c)   When decisions of a strategic nature, where community input will inform outcomes, are required – including for strategies, projects, assets and/or services which directly impact the community.

3.   POLICY STATEMENT

3.1   Golden Plains Shire Council is committed to engaging with residents and stakeholders when making decisions that impact the community. The provision and consideration of community feedback and reviewing and improving engagement processes is integral to empowering communities, building relationships and informing and improving Council operations.

3.2   Deliberative engagement practices at Golden Plains Shire Council are defined by Council as those that specifically seek and enable the input of communities, residents and stakeholders to enhance decision-making or the development of a strategy, policy, plan, service or project.

3.3   Council will undertake deliberative engagement practices as required by legislation or where it has been determined as appropriate that decision-making or the development of a strategy, policy, plan, service or project, be informed by deliberative engagement practices.

3.4   In undertaking community engagement, Council will apply the five community engagement principles defined in the *Local Government Act 2020* (Section 56). These are:

(a)   community engagement processes 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.

3.5   Council will provide feedback to the community on the outcomes of any engagement conducted.

4.   PROCEDURES

4.1   Public engagement (including deliberative engagement practices as required under the Act) can take many forms. When scoping and proposing any community engagement activities, the timing, type and form of engagement needs to take into account as well as the significance and complexity of the matter and the level of resourcing required.

4.2   The IAP2 (International Association of Public Participation) Spectrum of Public Participation is the industry standard matrix for determining both the level of engagement and impact community engagement will have on decision-making. To assist Council staff in identifying appropriate levels of community engagement, a sample list of types of engagement activities for each of the five levels of the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation has been provided in Appendix 1.

4.3   In undertaking deliberative engagement practices (and for other engagement processes as determined), a Community Engagement Plan is required to be developed to scope and record:

(a)   What Council is engaging on and why;

(b)   The participants in the engagement;

(c)   How the engagement will be undertaken – time, place, method, resources, etc.;

(d)   How the information will be gathered and used;

      (e)   How the community and engagement participants will be updated or informed of engagement outcomes.

A Community Engagement Plan template (Appendix 2) is provided to assist.

4.4   Deliberative engagement practices should be both accessible and inclusive to promote and encourage participation. In developing and conducting Council engagement activities, consider:

      4.4.1   What objective information/context is required to support and inform participants in engagement?

      4.4.2   Whether a staged approach with multiple phases of community engagement is beneficial or required.

      4.4.3   What activities, promotion and locations will best reach the intended audience? Are there specific cohorts, areas, groups that are more difficult to reach or require further/targeted engagement?

      4.4.4   The findings of community engagement, how the information was or will be used to inform decision-making and reporting the findings to the community and Council.

      4.4.5   Capturing participant feedback and reviewing/evaluating the engagement activities and practices implemented in terms of participation, reach, effectiveness for engaging the audience and quality of information.

      4.4.6   Seeking opportunities to further revise, modify and continuously improve engagement processes.

4.5   As part of implementing reforms and adapting to changes under the *Local Government Act 2020*, Golden Plains Shire Council participated in a Rural Council's Victoria process where a guidance resources in the form of a Community Engagement Toolkit was developed. The Rural Council's Victoria Community Engagement Toolkit (Projectura, August 2020) provides extensive detail and options for Council staff to consider when undertaking community engagement. A comprehensive checklist for undertaking community engagement as provided in the toolkit is included as Appendix 3.

5.   RESPONSIBILITIES

Roles and Responsibilities

5.1   Golden Plains Shire Council Staff are required to undertake and promote community engagement in accordance with this Policy when applying deliberative engagement practices

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Compliance, monitoring and review

5.2   A periodic review of this Policy will be undertaken to ensure the Policy aligns with relevant legislation and Council's policies/values. Implementation of the Policy will be monitored and reviewed to evaluate its continuing effectiveness.

5.3   A Reporting and Compliance Statement (consideration of the Community Engagement Principles under Section 56 of the *Local Government Act 2020*) is required to be addressed in the preparation of all Council Reports.

Reporting

5.4   A dedicated section on Community Engagement is provided in the template for all Council Reports where officer's detail community engagement planned or undertaken, the level of input that stakeholders had on an item and how the community engagement was carried out.

Records Management

5.5   Council must maintain all records relevant to administering this Policy in accordance with the *Public Records Act 1973.*

6.   RELATED LEGISLATION AND DOCUMENTS

Strategic Documents, Policies or Procedures

Public Transparency Policy

Information Privacy Policy

Information Privacy Procedure

Legislation

Local Government Act 1989

Local Government Act 2020

Privacy and Data Act 2014

Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006

Public Records Act 1973

7.   APPENDICES

7.1   Engagement Types by IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum

7.2   Community Engagement Plan Template

7.3   Engagement Checklist

8.   HUMAN RIGHTS STATEMENT OF COMPATABILITY

8.1   This Policy has been reviewed against, and complies with, the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*. In particular, the Policy aligns with, and provides for, a person's right to have the opportunity, without discrimination, to participate in the conduct of public affairs (Section 18) and freedom of expression (Section 15).

9.   POLICY OWNER

9.1   Manager Community and Council Planning

10.   FEEDBACK

10.1   You may provide feedback about this document by emailing:
        enquiries@gplains.vic.gov.au

11.   DOCUMENT INFORMATION

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NOTES:	Policy documents may be amended, therefore please do not assume a printed copy is the current version. Please consult Council's Policy page on the Golden Plains Shire Council website to ensure that the version you are using is up to date. Available at: https://intranet.goldenplains.vic.gov.au/the-hub

APPENDIX 1: ENGAGEMENT TYPES BY IAP2 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION SPECTRUM

*Public Participation	Promise to the Public	Types of Engagement
Empower	To have the public make the final decision/s	Citizen Panels Polling and ballots Delegated decisions
Collaborate	To build active partnerships with the public for decision/s	Co-design workshops Advisory committees Project Control Groups Participatory budgeting Consensus building
Involve	To work with the public in considering decision/s	Community Reference Group Network Advisory Groups Forums Workshops Interviews
Consult	To receive public feedback, advice or input into decision/s	Town meetings Community surveys Community meeting Public Submission Processes Focus Groups Questionnaires
Inform	To provide information only to assist with public understanding	Media Releases Websites Social Media Email Notice boards Advertising Signage Fact Sheets Newsletters Direct mail Information sessions

(Left margin, vertical text: INCREASING LEVELS OF PUBLIC IMPACT ON DECISION)

* 5 Levels of Public Participation as defined by IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation

Note: A number of the items listed as Types of Engagement can be applied across more than one Level of Public Participation.

APPENDIX 2: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PLAN TEMPLATE

Project Summary:

Item	Details
Project Name	
Project Manager	
Project Details	
Project Purpose	
Start Date	
End Date	

Engagement Summary: *(please overwrite section in italics)*

Item	Details/Actions	Start Date	End Date
Purpose of Engagement	*What is Council engaging on and why?*		
Key stakeholders	*Who will be impacted by any decisions?*		
Target Audience	*Who will engagement be conducted with?*		
Engagement Design • Method/s • Venue/s • Time/s • Location/s • Resources	*How will the engagement be undertaken?* *List, expand on and repeat for all planned activities…*		
Engagement findings	*How will the information gathered be used?*		
Outcomes of engagement	*How will the community be updated or informed?*		

Other relevant information for the engagement:

May include stakeholders, multiple phases of engagement, questions, methods of promotion, etc.

_____

_____

_____

APPENDIX 3: ENGAGEMENT CHECKLIST

This checklist is an optional resource for staff consideration a provided in the RCV Toolkit.
See: Rural Council's Victoria Community Engagement Toolkit

Stage 1: Prepare	Addressed
Preparation is integral to developing a relevant, targeted, and successful engagement program that is tailored to the expectations and needs of persons and groups affected by the subject matter. A thorough understanding of the subject matter will set a strong basis for framing and design.	
Research and understand the context, scope and purpose of the Plan, Strategy or Project. Also conduct research into industry trends, best practice examples and drivers.	
Be aware of any legislative compliance matters including reporting and deadlines for the completion of the project.	
Review the Council community engagement policy to understand the underlying approach, principles, and governance structures.	
Identify Council resources including human equipment and technology that will be required to take part in the project.	
Research current Council plans, strategies and projects that are interlinked to your project to ensure consistency.	

Stage 2: Frame	Addressed
Your engagement should have a robust framework, identifying key issues, internal and external stakeholders, and performance measures. Building your framework will increase transparency and the level of participation as you will have clarity of scope when discussing the engagement with participants.	
Convene a project control group including Council officers you have identified through your resources review and allocate responsibilities.	
Collaborate with the project control group to define the problem and articulate: • Issues that need to be addressed/answered/resolved. • Negotiables and non-negotiables. • Who the final decision maker is. • The decision makers ideal outcome.	
Prepare a stakeholder analysis to identify internal and external stakeholders with an interest in the subject matter. Identify issues and the best communication channels for stakeholder groups.	
Conduct a risk assessment including identification of internal and external parameters.	
Determine the desired level of public participation and the weighting their input will have on decision making. Use the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation as a guide with a view to achieving the highest practical and achievable level of engagement taking into consideration timeframes and resources.	
Set key performance indicators regarding level of engagement, satisfaction with engagement methods and outcomes of engagement.	
Confirm your engagement budget for the project.	

Stage 3: Design	Addressed
The design of your engagement plan brings together the key decisions you make in Stages 1 and 2. How you design your engagement will impact the evaluation and reporting elements of the project.	
Extend the problem definition work already conducted. Consider the best way to seek input from the public including: • What is the purpose of the question? Am I seeking data or more in-depth feedback? • What engagement tools will be most effective for the stakeholders I am seeking to engage? • How will I record the feedback? (Survey link? Post its? Written form?) • Is this question understandable and free of jargon? • Is the question relevant and related to an aspect of the project that the community will influence through their feedback?	
Develop an engagement plan that is tailored to promote the inclusion, participation, and accessibility of stakeholder groups by: • Identifying engagement tools and techniques that will be used to maximise participation. • Considering a design thinking approach that outlines the phases and timeframes for key milestones including, • The release of information in a format that is easily accessible to stakeholders, • The rollout of engagement activities. • Providing feedback to the project control group, engagement participants and the community. • Dates for submission and approval of key documents. • Reporting requirements for key performance indicators. • Identify the resources that will need to be used at each stage of the engagement.	
Your engagement plan should be complemented by a communications strategy which outlines: • Deadlines for the provision of information to engagement participants, the project control group and decision makers. • Channels to communicate with potential participants (social media, newspaper advertisements, media releases, mailing lists, engagement platforms, webinars, seeking the assistance of stakeholder groups to distribute information). • How you are going to measure the reach and effectiveness of communication channels.	
Reach out to stakeholder groups and leaders to seek their input into the engagement design.	

Stage 4: Execute	Addressed
The execution of your engagement plan relies on your planning and preparation.	
Test any platform you will be using, particularly for online engagement. Develop comfort with its functionality and be sure to provide basic trouble shooting advice to participants.	
Consider occupational health and safety when you are packing, transporting, and setting up engagement activities. Also check if there are any permit or site-specific requirements to address.	
Conduct a pre engagement brief with your engagement representatives. It is important that participants know that representatives are informed and understand the key issues that are affecting them. The briefing should also identify any potential 'hot topics' and provide representatives with the tools to discuss them in a constructive manner with the community.	
When talking with participants: - Acknowledge the scope of the engagement and any limitations or constraints. - Be clear about participant's level of influence decision making. - Be open to new ideas, connections and partnerships that may be established through engagement – exciting! - Ask questions that extend the thoughts and ideas of participants to test robustness. Don't be afraid to ask the 'what if' or 'have you considered' questions. And don't be afraid of answers that don't meet your own values - If you are unsure you have understood the input, check back in by rephrasing the participants thoughts to make sure you understood them correctly. - Remember, you do not have to provide a solution to every issue that is raised on the day. The important thing is to hear what a participant is saying and respond with authenticity and an open mind. - Have a mechanism for referring issues that do not relate to the engagement that participants raise on the day. It is important to bring participants back to the subject at hand while giving them concrete pathways to follow up their other concerns.	
Take the time to pack down neatly. Trust us – you will thank us later!	
Conduct a debrief straight after the engagement to ensure you are able to identify key learnings and areas for further exploration or follow up.	

Stage 5: Report	Addressed
The purpose of this stage is to advise participants, stakeholders and decision makers about the findings of the engagement and how the input has been used to make decisions. This part of the engagement plan is often referred to as 'closing the loop'.	
Examine the findings of your engagement and determine: • Major themes from feedback. • Any data trends that are evident. • Any contrary views, what level of support they have, and how can they be compared to the support of major themes. • What projects, propositions or idea have strong or weak support. • Areas for further investigation. • Difference in feedback between demographics (gender, age, income, education). • Difference in the feedback offered by different townships and regions.	
Feedback the findings to participants, stakeholders and decision makers through mechanisms identified in your communications plan. Present the analysis in a format that is understandable to a broad audience, and provide an avenue for participants, stakeholders and decision makers to offer clarification if required.	
Record the analysis of engagement and articulate how it has been used in determining scope, content and direction of the piece of work.	

Stage 6: Evaluate	Addressed
Reflective practice allows us to refine and continually improve our practices. Evaluation is an important element of any engagement activity.	
Seek feedback from participants, stakeholders and decision makers about the process.	
Measure your progress against the KPI's you set during stage 2 regarding level of engagement, satisfaction with engagement methods and outcomes of engagement.	
Ensure any changes in practice align with your Councils continuous improvement mechanisms.	