


# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT POLICY 2026–30

## SUMMARY



An aerial photograph of a coastal park. A paved path winds through dense green vegetation. To the left, a sandy beach meets the ocean with waves breaking. In the distance, a coastal town and a headland are visible under a clear blue sky.

**We Acknowledge the Wadawurrung People as the Traditional Owners of the Land, Waterways and Skies. We pay our respects to their Elders, past, present and emerging. We Acknowledge all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are part of our Greater Geelong community today.**

We recognise the important civic leadership role that community engagement plays in fostering genuine reconciliation and achieving real outcomes.

We are committed to deepening our understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and histories and acknowledging the experiences and needs of First Nations peoples living within the City of Greater Geelong region, so they feel listened to, respected, and valued.

We support truth-telling, justice, and the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to self-determination, and we actively support the process towards Treaty in Victoria.

# PURPOSE

This policy supports our *Council Plan 2025–29* goal to deliver better outcomes for the people of Greater Geelong.

This policy explains how we will do community engagement well so we can:



## ENHANCE COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

Encourage and facilitate active participation from all community members, ensuring their voices are heard and considered in decision-making processes.



## BUILD TRUST AND TRANSPARENCY

Foster trust and transparency between the City and our community by providing clear, accessible, and timely information.



## PROMOTE INCLUSIVITY AND DIVERSITY

Ensure that engagement activities are inclusive and reflect the diverse needs and aspirations of the community.



## SUPPORT INFORMED DECISION-MAKING

Provide decision-makers with comprehensive and diverse community input to inform policies, plans, and projects.



## STRENGTHEN RELATIONSHIPS

Build and maintain strong, respectful, and collaborative relationships with community members, stakeholders, and partners.

# WHAT IS COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT?

**Good community engagement means asking the right questions, of the right people, at the right time, and in the right way, ensuring that community voices meaningfully inform the decisions we make.**

## WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

A collaborative partnership with our community can be a powerful way to deliver positive changes across our region.

Engagement empowers people to contribute to the future of the places where they live, work, do business, learn and play. It also helps us hear different perspectives and better understand what matters most to our community.

We value the knowledge, ideas and life experiences of our diverse community. By listening and learning together, we can make better decisions - now and into the future.

## OUR COMMITMENT

We approach community engagement with openness and a genuine commitment to listening. We seek to understand our community's needs, experiences and values, and use community feedback to contribute to our planning and decision-making.



# WHO WE ENGAGE WITH

We will engage with our Greater Geelong community, including the people, groups and organisations who are likely to be affected by, or interested in, council planning and decision-making.

We know that some people and groups face barriers to participating in engagement. To hear a wide range of views and make sure our decisions reflect community needs, we will tailor our engagement activities so that as many people as possible can take part.

We will look for ways to offer support and remove barriers to encourage hearing from priority populations, including:

- First Nations peoples
- multicultural communities
- children and families
- young people
- older people
- people with disabilities
- LGBTQIA+ communities
- Socio-economic disadvantaged: particularly health care card holders, single parent families and those with lower levels of education.



# WHEN WE WILL ENGAGE

We engage with the community as early as possible when decisions or plans might affect people. Sometimes we will engage at several stages in the lead up to final plans or decisions.

We will engage when:

- making plans – for example, developing strategic plans or policies, or planning for emergencies
- changing or evaluating something – for example a review of a program or changes to a service where those changes may have an impact on the community or Country
- making a decision that is likely to impact people and the places they live, work, invest or play – for example, introducing a new project, initiative or service
- seeking feedback on alternative draft designs or plans or gauging support for a proposal
- asking the community for local knowledge
- required by law to do so
- seeking to address an issue affecting the community that has been raised and requires a decision.

We may also engage in cases where we:

- see that the broader community has raised, or expressed an interest in, a policy, initiative or service
- require assistance to identify community needs or aspirations
- desire to build capacity, provide information to increase knowledge and change behaviour
- seek new, or wish to strengthen, existing relationships with the community.



## SITUATIONS WHERE WE MAY NOT ENGAGE

There are times when we may decide it is not appropriate to engage with the community. This would include when:

- decisions must be made immediately – for example, during a live emergency, or for occupational health and safety reasons.
- the community has been recently engaged on the same issue and the views of community are well understood.\*
- demonstrated evidence and data from recognised sources already exist to inform the decision.\*
- decisions relate to the City's day-to-day organisation operations.
- legal or commercial restrictions prevent it.
- we do not have the decision-making power.

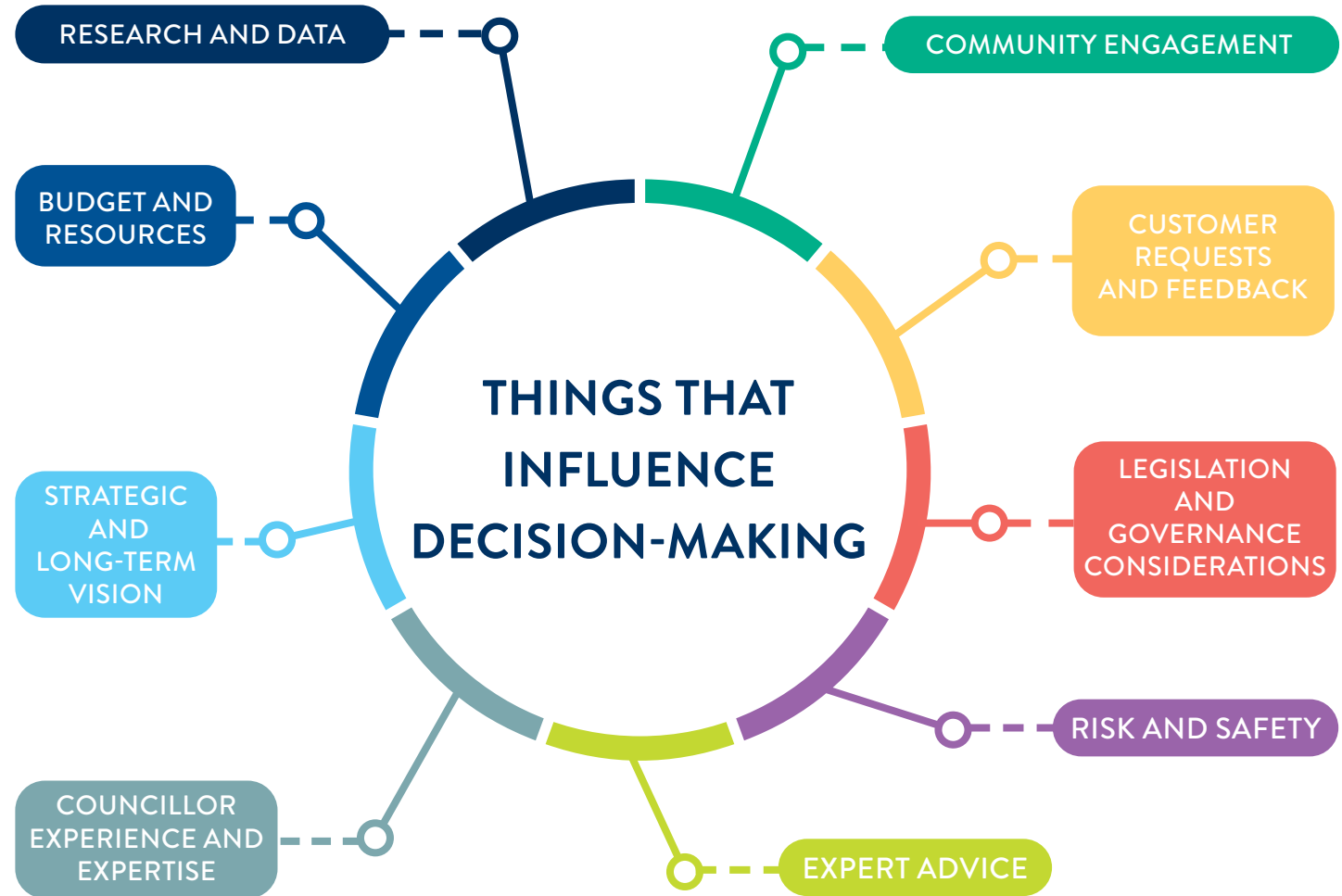
\*with appropriate approval.

***We will not engage with people once it becomes apparent that their feedback or submissions are obscene, offensive, or racist.***

# HOW DECISIONS ARE MADE

We consider lots of things – including community feedback, internal and expert advice, data and research, and cost – when making decisions.

While community engagement informs decision-making, it does not replace the responsibilities of elected representatives and City employees. Instead, it enhances decisions made in the best interests of Greater Geelong by helping to understand community needs, priorities, and the potential impacts of decisions.



# HOW WE WILL ENGAGE

We will use the *International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) Spectrum of Engagement* to guide our planning for every engagement.

The table below identifies the IAP2 Spectrum of Engagement's five levels of engagement, the goal, promise and role of community for each one, along with the types of engagement methods and examples of projects we may use for each.

LEVEL OF INFLUENCE	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
<b>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 identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision making in the hands of the public.
<b>Our promise to the community</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 into decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.
<b>The role of community in decision-making</b>	Listen	Contribute	Participate	Partner	Partner or lead
<b>Examples of methods we will use to do this</b>	Fact sheets, brochures, flyers, newsletters, media, advertising media releases, displays at City facilities, website updates, social media.	Briefings, surveys, meetings, workshops, Advisory Committees, pop-up events, interviews, information sessions and Town Hall meetings.	Workshops, surveys, focus groups, interviews, tours of project site, Advisory Committee workshops, roundtables, world cafes.	Deliberative engagement processes including citizens juries, community panels and ballots, co-design workshops, steering groups, interviews, roundtables.	Ballot or voting, deliberative engagement processes including citizens juries, community panels and ballots (subject to the remit).
<b>Examples of projects or decisions typical of this level of engagement</b>	Projects with no opportunity to influence decision-making, such as maintenance upgrades, roadworks and closures, rate changes, projects where the City is not the lead agency.	Draft strategic plans or policies, statutory projects such as land-use planning and hearing of submissions, low to medium impact interest projects, including single tree installations, small scale traffic projects, community-facing policies.	Medium to high impact interest projects, such as major capital works, master plans, annual council budget, key strategies and plans, making of local laws.	High impact interest projects, key strategic documents including the Community Vision, 4-year Council Plan, Asset Plan and Financial Plan.	Council elections.

# HOW WE WILL ENGAGE

The greater the impact on the community, the more interactive the engagement will be.

Our engagement opportunities will always be available online on our Have Your Say engagement platform and will look for face-to-face opportunities whenever possible.

When we're out in the community, we'll set up in a variety of locations across the municipality, places where people naturally spend time in their day-to-day lives, like shopping centres, parks, libraries, neighbourhood houses and local events.

We will also seek opportunities to connect with people through the services we provide and by leveraging partnerships with community organisations that work closely with our community.



We will take reasonable steps to ensure that both online and in-person engagement opportunities are welcoming, safe and respectful spaces, particularly for people who may face barriers to participation.

# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PRINCIPLES

## PLAN PROACTIVELY

- Identify stakeholders, including those directly affected and those with an interest in the issue.
- Start engagement early and continue it throughout the project to allow genuine input.
- Make sure engagement is timely, open, and easy to understand.

## BE INCLUSIVE AND ACCESSIBLE AND SUPPORT PARTICIPATION

- Communicate clearly using plain language, accessible formats, and a respectful tone.
- Design engagement activities that are inclusive and accessible so people can contribute meaningfully. This includes:
  - physical accessibility – venues, transport, and facilities
  - digital accessibility – screen readers, alt text, captions
  - language support – translations and interpreters
  - cultural sensitivity – approaches that are respectful and appropriate.
- Actively seek diverse perspectives, especially from under-represented groups.

## BE TRANSPARENT ABOUT INFLUENCE

- Be clear about what aspects of the decision can be influenced (as well as what can't be influenced and why), utilising the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation (refer to table on page 8).
- Define the community's role in each engagement process.
- Identify what other factors, in addition to community engagement, will influence decision making (refer to the *How decisions are made* section on page 7).

## CHOOSE THE RIGHT ENGAGEMENT METHODS

- Use tools and approaches that suit the project, audience and level of influence, such as:
  - face-to-face conversations
  - workshops
  - surveys
  - online forums
  - pop-up events or community gatherings
  - reasonable support and incentives or stipends, where appropriate, to encourage and remove barriers to participation.
- Allow enough time for the community to participate.
- Engagement activities will be open for at least four weeks (with extensions encouraged if over school holidays or religious holiday periods) unless:
  - a City Executive Director approves a shorter timeframe, or
  - legislation requires a shorter period.

## PROVIDE FEEDBACK AND KEEP IMPROVING

- Let the community know how their input has influenced decisions.
- Provide updates at key milestones throughout the project.
- Be flexible and willing to adjust our approach as needed.
- Learn from each engagement to improve future practices.

# DELIBERATIVE ENGAGEMENT

**Deliberative engagement is a way of working with our community that brings people closer to the decision makers and involves people who broadly represent our Greater Geelong community.**

It focuses on deep, thoughtful conversation, often over several weeks or months and this process is usually used for more complex, long term and high impact issues, where perspectives are likely to differ and/or where the issue is high impact on sections of the community.

Participants learn from different perspectives, work together, and shape well-informed advice that may influence decisions.

As part of the *Local Government Act 2020*, we will engage this way when developing long-term strategic documents, including:

- Community Vision
- Council Plan
- Asset Plan
- Financial Plan
- other projects or initiatives as considered appropriate.



# ROLES OF PEOPLE IN ENGAGEMENT

The Greater Geelong community, our elected officials and all employees of the City of Greater Geelong play a role keeping the promises we make in the policy.

## COMMUNITY

- Stay informed and get involved in relevant engagement opportunities.
- Be open to new ideas and respectful of others' perspectives.
- Follow the process and respect timelines.
- Accept that final outcomes may not always align with personal preferences but aim to serve broader community needs.

## ELECTED MEMBERS

- Adopt the Community Engagement Policy, oversee its implementation.
- Champion the commitment and principles for community engagement through leadership and decision-making.
- Promote community engagement opportunities to constituents.
- Review outcomes of community engagement activities for decision-making.
- Consider engagement results when forming opinions and making decisions.

## EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP TEAM

- Demonstrate behaviours that foster good engagement practice and drive the community engagement principles through policy, process and leadership.
- Implement and ensure compliance with this policy and hold employees accountable for its use and improvement.
- Provide final approval before engagements go live.

## CITY OFFICERS

- Uphold the Community Engagement Policy.
- Consult and partner with the Community Engagement Team before starting projects.
- Attend community engagement training.
- Act with integrity and avoid bias.
- Conduct transparent and inclusive engagements.
- Communicate clearly about decision-making steps.
- Engage in a timely and informative manner to encourage participation.
- Provide feedback and guide participants on staying engaged.
- Commit to understanding all viewpoints and fully consider findings in recommendations.

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TEAM

- Monitor the implementation of this policy and conduct reviews so we keep improving.
- Support employees to plan and deliver best-practice engagement processes.
- Provide training to City employees.

# HOW WE WILL REPORT ON ENGAGEMENT

We will report back to the community:

- at key milestones, such as when a decision is being considered by Council and when the engagement closes and moves to another stage in the process
- what we learnt during the engagement process – that is, the data and information collected as part of the process, including the key themes and insights heard from our community and who we heard from
- how this has influenced the decisions, plans and activities
- what the next steps are.

**We recognise that people may also share feedback informally, such as through social media, emails, or in conversations with employees. While this type of input may be less structured and harder to verify, it can still provide useful insights into community sentiment and will be reviewed where possible.**

## WE WILL REPORT BACK VIA:



updates on the Geelong City website



updates on the Have Your Say platform, including emails to 'followers' of individual pages



posts on social media



public notices and newspaper advertisements



Council meeting agendas and minutes



printed materials in community facilities



direct communication, such as letters, phone calls and meetings, with the involved people and groups.



# THANK YOU!

Thank you to our community, Councillors and City employees who shared their views on what meaningful engagement should look like and helped shape this policy and our commitment to clearer, more inclusive and transparent engagement.

We appreciate the time, insights and interest people shared, and we look forward to continuing to build a stronger culture of collaboration and good decision-making together.

## STAY IN TOUCH!

Visit [yoursay.geelongaustralia.com.au](https://yoursay.geelongaustralia.com.au) to have your say on a range of engagement projects and receive updates.

This is a summary document.

Visit [yoursay.geelongaustralia.com.au](https://yoursay.geelongaustralia.com.au) to read the full version.

HAVE  
YOUR  
SAY 

