



## **COMMUNITY CONSULTATION POLICY 2005**

## INTRODUCTION

### Definition

Community consultation is an important way for Councils to find out the views of residents and ratepayers on a range of issues. Consultation is generally defined as,

"The process of informed communication between the Council and the community on an issue prior to the Council making a decision or determining a direction on that issue."<sup>i</sup>

### Context

It is important to define what consultation is and what it is not:

- a) consultation is a process, not an outcome;
- b) consultation is one way to assist decision making - a Council is elected to make decisions;
- c) consultation impacts on decision making through influence rather than power;
- d) consultation is about input into decision-making, not joint decision-making or decision-making by referendum;
- e) to make consultation meaningful it must have good processes that include a representative view from the broader community and relevant stakeholders;
- f) the views of those who do not usually have a voice should be sought – the more views the better;
- g) good decisions are informed by: listening to diverse perspectives, having sound information, considering alternatives, defining the parameters of the decision, assessing strengths and weaknesses, identifying common ground or identifying how parties differ;
- h) there are lots of different and evolving ways to consult to ensure views are representative of the community; and
- i) consultation is a tool, not a solution - the parameters of consultation need to be stated in a transparent way to avoid creating unrealistic expectations in the community.

In addition to structured consultation activities, all interactions with the community in daily work practice should be seen as an opportunity to gather information, knowledge and understanding of the Yarra community. Examples include emails, informal discussions, face-to-face meetings and phone calls.

More information about consultation is provided under the section on resources.

## POLICY

### Purpose of the Policy

The consultation policy has the following purposes:

- a) to provide guidance to the organisation in undertaking community consultation activities;
- b) to inform the Yarra community about Council's approach to consultation; and
- c) to foster high quality consultation and engagement practices across the organisation.

### Yarra's Approach

Council has a commitment to community engagement and effective consultation. The essence of community engagement is trust, goodwill and respect. Effective consultation will support and strengthen trust, goodwill and respect between Council and its community. How and when Council consults is outlined in the Principles of the Consultation Policy.

### Community Engagement

The following definitions of community engagement help describe what Council aims to achieve through good consultation processes.

Community Engagement is:

- a) *"achieved when the community is and feels part of the overall governance of that community;"<sup>i</sup>*
- b) *"the process of working with groups of people affiliated by geographic location, special interests or similar situations to address issues affecting their well being;"<sup>iii</sup>*
- c) *"people working collaboratively, through inspired action and learning, to create and realise bold visions for their community;"<sup>iv</sup>*
- d) *"a public process in which the general public and other interested parties are invited to contribute to particular proposals or policy changes. Community engagement has the potential to go beyond merely making information available or gathering opinions and attitudes...engagement covers many types of exchanges."<sup>v</sup>*

### Scope

The Consultation Policy applies to all officers and Councillors of the City of Yarra. A range of resources will be provided to assist officers and Councillors in undertaking consultations. This Policy should be applied to all consultations undertaken by Council.

### Accountability

Accountability for all major consultations lies with Directors. Responsibility for other levels of consultation rests with Managers.

## Consultation Principles

### How Council Will Consult

*It is Council policy that it will:*

1. Be upfront, clear and honest about the purpose of any consultation activity. Provide details of role, the process of consulting and any known constraints (financial, technical or legal).
2. Provide timely feedback to participants who have been involved in consultation activities. Council sees this as an essential commitment, which will assist us to build credibility and respect for our processes.
3. Work to agreed timelines in all consultation activities. Where unforeseen delays occur, inform participants of changes and anticipated response times.
4. Integrate its consultation activities across the organisation to minimise duplication of effort, resources and risks of 'over-consultation'.<sup>1</sup>
5. Refer information that arises from consultations and impacts on another area of Council for further use and action.
6. Acknowledge the good practice that already exists within the organisation and learn from each other's successes.
7. Acknowledge that conflict is often part of the consultation process. Council will work to create the environment where different opinions can be expressed in a *mutually* respectful and constructive way.
8. Design consultation processes that meet the availability and accessibility needs of its residents. We will actively go out to different neighbourhoods and locations when consulting and use Council venues such as maternal and child health and leisure centres and funded events more effectively. Work to ensure accessibility for disengaged and disadvantaged groups through provision of transport support, interpreters and childcare when required.
9. Will provide quality information to its community so that consultation is conducted in an informed atmosphere of shared knowledge and mutual respect.
10. Be at the cutting edge of consultation practice. Council will be bold and inventive in finding new ways of engaging residents.
11. Evaluate every community consultation and learn from mistakes to continually improve.

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<sup>1</sup> *Over consultation and duplication refers to the potential to consult the same group on many different matters and possibly simultaneously. This places an unfair burden on these people and also dilutes the likelihood of good participation, as people will have consultation fatigue. Information gathered as part of informing consultations should be intelligently applied and fed back by those conducting the consultation.*

## Consultation Principles

### When Council Will Consult

*It is Council policy that it will:*

1. Consult to help it plan and make informed decisions on major strategic, planning permit, policy and service provision issues and be open to new ideas and information.
2. Consult in time to use the results to inform decision-making processes and early enough to help identify issues at the beginning of the process when major strategies, polices and decisions are involved.
3. Consult when needed and use the information gathered in a meaningful way.
4. Clearly identify when a consultation is simply providing information about a Council decision or service.
5. Consult on the following:
  - a) major strategies, eg: Council Plan, Municipal Strategic Statement, Municipal Public Health Plan;
  - b) policies and targeted strategies eg: Municipal Early Years Plan, Heritage Strategy, Transport Strategy, Community Safety, Structure Plans and Neighbourhood Planning;
  - c) statutory and compliance eg: regulatory and legislative matters when required eg: planning permits;
  - d) service planning and program review eg: User Surveys;
  - e) some site specific projects eg: Edinburgh Gardens, Victoria Park, Carlton Library;
  - f) performance (overall and service specific) eg: Service Performance Plans, Annual and Community Surveys; and
6. Recognise that there may be some circumstances where wide consultation may not be possible. Consultation may not take place when:
  - a) the Council must make a decision quickly in the interests of the City eg: public safety, community benefit;
  - b) when Council is bound by legal, commercial or legislative constraints and/or considerations;
  - c) the issue relates to internal operational matters; and
  - d) critical incidents which require an immediate response and action by Council.

In addition to these circumstances where Council will not consult, there are many day-to-day matters that do not require Council to consult. These are not included in this policy.

## RESOURCES

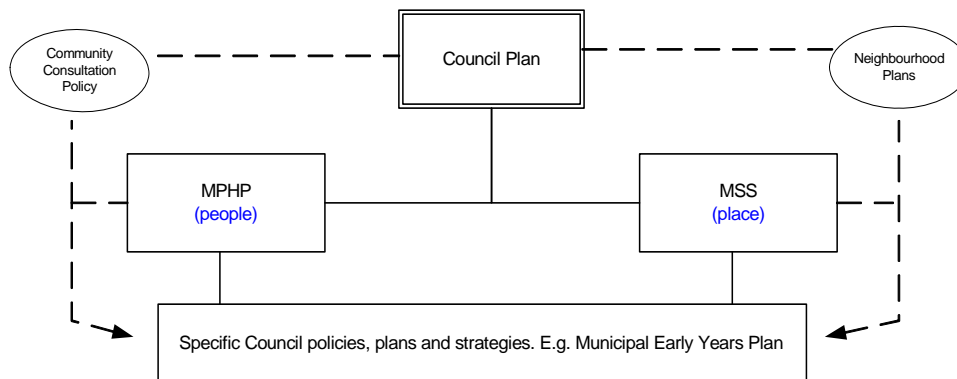
A number of resources and references are provided here that may assist with understanding the different kinds of consultation and engagement that can occur. These references will provide additional reading and detail for those who have a particular interest in community consultation.

### Consultation Matrix

A matrix, outlining the different levels of consultation and methods that are applicable to use when consulting, was developed by the VLGA in 2001. The VLGA matrix is attached to the Policy and can be used when planning consultations.

### Framework/Hierarchy of Policy and Strategy

The following diagram maps out Council's policy hierarchy and provides a framework for thinking about how other strategic and policy documents fit into consultation planning.

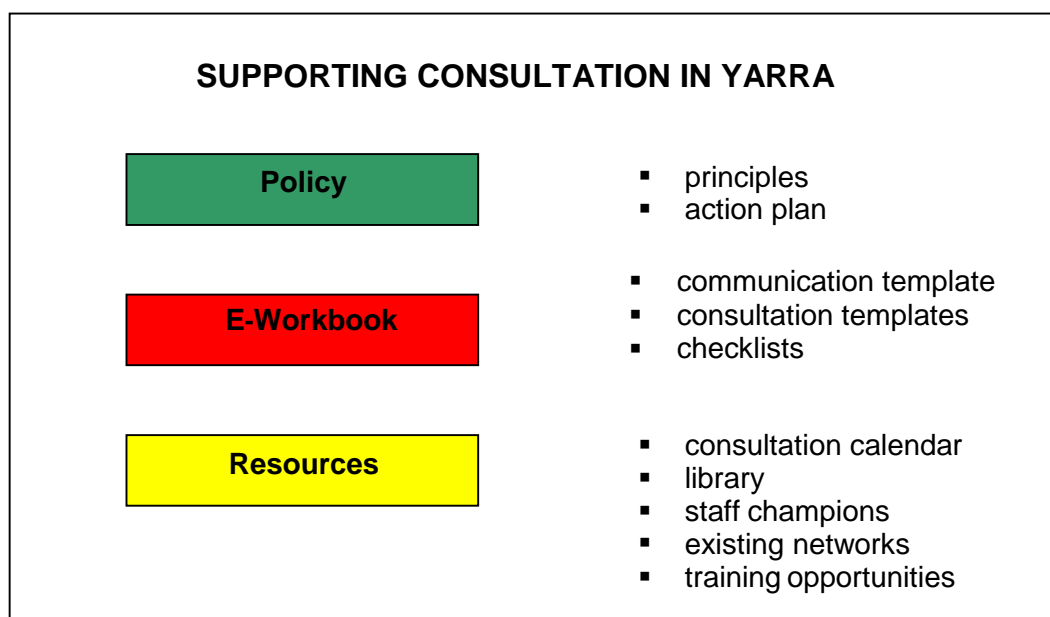


Council Policies and Strategies making up the third level of the hierarchy are:

- Aboriginal Partnerships Plan 2004 – 2008
- Access & Inclusion Strategy 2004 – 2009
- Affordable Housing Statement and Strategy 2004
- Arts and Cultural Plan 2004 – 2009
- Asset Management Policy, Strategy & Plans 2004 –2009
- Buildings and Property Asset Management Plan Sept 2004
- Economic Development Strategy 2001 – 2004
- Financial Plan 2004/2007
- Food Safety Strategy
- Inner Melbourne Action Plan (Draft)
- Multicultural Policy Statement & Action Plan 2004 – 2006
- Municipal Early Years Plan 2005-2007
- Open Space Asset Management Plan August 2004
- Open Space Strategy (Draft 08/04)
- Recreation Strategy Plan 2003 –2008
- Regional Housing Statement Inner Region of Melbourne (Draft 11/04)
- Road Infrastructure Asset Management Plan 2004
- Safer Yarra Plan 2004-2007 (Draft 11/04)
- Strategic Transport Statement (Draft 10/04)
- The Yarra Environment Strategy 2000
- Youth Action Plan

## Structure

Consultation in Yarra consists of three components:



**Policy** The policy includes a set of principles to guide consultation and engagement activities and an action plan to implement the policy.

**E-Workbook** The workbook provides a number of templates, checklists and links to assist in the five stages of development of a consultation plan:

- (a) designing and planning;
- (b) preparing and organising;
- (c) implementation;
- (d) providing feedback and follow-up including reporting to Council; and
- (e) evaluation.

**Resources** The following suite of resources will be at hand to support consultation and engagement activities...

- (a) a consultation calendar which records details of consultation activity, (existing and planned) across the organisation and feedback on consultations undertaken;
- (b) a library of documents (hard and soft copies) including best practice in consultation strategies; legislation; research and theory; using interpreters and meeting the needs of different communities eg: business, youth;
- (c) staff 'champions' within each division of Council who are trained and experienced in consultation and who can provide advice and support to fellow staff; and
- (d) details of community networks and groups that may assist or be involved in consultation activities.

## **Organisational Support**

The Communications and Culture and Community Planning Units will provide support for other areas to *enable* them to apply the policy and to use the templates and resources that are available. This may include: running a consultation planning session, assisting with identifying a suitable approach to specific consultations, support in accessing resources and developing a communication plan.

The web based nature of the resources and the Consultation Calendar means that Information Services also play a key support role for the whole of the organisation.

Within each Branch of Council there will be champions who assist and support their colleagues in undertaking consultations.

Training will be available for staff with responsibility for undertaking consultation. Additional training will be available for staff identified as having skills in facilitation and consultation who want to develop these skills as an organisational resource.

## **Communication Unit Role**

The Communications Unit can support consultations through the provision of a Communication Plan template and by providing expertise in developing communication approaches that are strategic, effective and targeted.

## **Culture and Community Planning Branch Role**

The Culture and Community Planning branch can assist with using the consultation templates and the resources provided for consulting. The branch can provide specialist advice in key areas such as: Social Housing, Multicultural, Aboriginal and the Arts.

An important tool to assist in consulting with the community is the demographic profile of Yarra which can be accessed on the Internet at;

<http://www.yarracity.vic.gov.au/community/demographics.asp>

Examples of other specialist areas of Council that can help when planning a consultation include: Economic Development, Disability Access, Aged Services, Recreation, Family Services, Open Space, Transport and Children's Services. Consideration of how any specific consultation impacts or interacts with other Council departments is essential. The Communications Committee will facilitate closer cross Council co-operation on consultation.

The Culture and Community Planning Branch will be responsible for research, establishment and implementation of the Household Panel as an innovative method for consulting the community.

## Continuum of Consultation

There is a widely accepted and applied continuum of consultation, which provides definitions for the different kinds of consultation with increasing levels of participation. The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) has developed a continuum of engagement

➔➔➔➔➔➔ Increasing Level of Public Impact ➔➔➔➔➔➔				
<b>Inform</b>	<b>Consult</b>	<b>Involve</b>	<b>Collaborate</b>	<b>Empower</b>
Objective	Objective	Objective	Objective	Objective
To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, developing alternatives, or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives, or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public and private concerns 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.

Table One: IAP2 Spectrum of Engagement ([www.iap2.org](http://www.iap2.org))

The following table helps to map out the processes of increasing community engagement

➔➔➔➔➔➔ Increasing Level of Public Impact ➔➔➔➔➔➔				
<b>Inform</b>	<b>Consult</b>	<b>Involve</b>	<b>Collaborate</b>	<b>Empower</b>
Promise to Public	Promise to Public	Promise to Public	Promise to Public	Promise to Public
We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge your concerns, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and issues are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for direct advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	To place final decision making in the hands of the public.

Table Two: IAP2 Spectrum of Engagement – Obligations to Public ([www.iap2.org](http://www.iap2.org))

## Consultation and Engagement References

These resources provide an overview of consultation and engagement and have assisted in the development of this policy.

### VLGA

- Community Consultation Resource Guide, VLGA, 2001. ([www.vlga.org.au](http://www.vlga.org.au))
- Consultation and Engagement Website (<http://www.vlgaconsultation.org.au/>)

### Best Practice

- DSE Website Vic Gov  
<http://www.dse.vic.gov.au/DSE/wcmn203.nsf/LinkView/144C3FC483DC6C72CA257034007FD53677F54463EE8D06B3CA257036001508E7>
- Community Engagement in the NSW Planning System, Planning NSW, 2003  
<http://www.iplan.nsw.gov.au/engagement/>
- Towards Whole of Community Engagement: A Practical Toolkit, Murray Darling Basin Commission, 2004 <http://mdbc.gov.au/data/o309t12.pdf>
- International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) [www.iap2.org](http://www.iap2.org)

### Local Government

- Community Consultation Policy and Guidelines, City of Darebin, 2002.

### Other

- The Engagement Workbook and Tools, DSE. (Draft).
- Western Australian Citizenship Strategy - A Voice for All: Strengthening Democracy, Government of Western Australia.
- E-engagement guidelines, WA Department of Premier and Cabinet. (Draft)
- Citizen Participation and Local Governance, Tamarack – An Institute for Community Engagement. ([www.tamarackcommunity.ca](http://www.tamarackcommunity.ca))
- Our Growing Understanding of Community Engagement, Tamarack – An Institute for Community Engagement. ([www.tamarackcommunity.ca](http://www.tamarackcommunity.ca))
- Youth Resources [http://www.yacvic.org.au/includes/pdfs\\_wordfiles/TYPsbook1.pdf](http://www.yacvic.org.au/includes/pdfs_wordfiles/TYPsbook1.pdf).

## End Notes

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<sup>i</sup> VLGA Community Consultation Resource Guide 2001

<sup>ii</sup> VLGA Community Consultation Resource Guide 2001

<sup>iii</sup> Draft of Effective Engagement DSE 2005

<sup>iv</sup> Our Growing Understanding of Community Engagement, Tamarack – An Institute for Community Engagement

<sup>v</sup> Community Engagement in the NSW Planning System” Planning NSW