

Community Engagement Policy



Yarra City Council acknowledges the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people as the Traditional Owners and true sovereigns of the land now known as Yarra. We also acknowledge the significant contributions made by other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to life in Yarra. We pay our respects to Elders from all nations and to their Elders past, present and future.

This publication is available in alternative accessible formats on request.

Electronic copy

PDF versions of this report can be downloaded from yarracity.vic.gov.au

National Relay service

TTY 133 677 then (03) 9205 5555
or relayservice.gov.au

Yarra Council language line

العربية 9280 1930

中文 9280 1937

Ελληνικά 9280 1934

Italiano 9280 1931

Español 9280 1935

Tiếng Việt 9280 1939

Other 9280 1940

REF 18,801

Contents

What do we mean by 'community engagement'?	4
What guides our engagement	6
Who we engage with	8
Our tools and methods	12
Transparent and accountable engagement	14
Understanding our community	16
Legislative environment	18
References	19
Definitions	20

What do we mean by 'community engagement'?

Community engagement provides opportunities for the community to be involved in planning and decision-making because understanding the needs, aspirations, concerns and ideas of the community improves Council's planning and delivery of services.

Good community engagement supports the building of respectful relationships it can also result in community strengthening and capacity building. Hearing from a range of perspectives leads to sustainable decisions and encourages ownership and belonging from all sections of our community. Importantly, it ensures transparency, integrity and trust in Council processes.

What is the purpose of this policy?

This policy is our commitment to the community on the principles and values that guide our community engagement. It applies to our councillors, staff, contractors and volunteers. As elected representatives, who engage with and are directly accountable to the community, councillors will play a key role. It also serves as a guide for external organisations delivering infrastructure and services in Yarra. The policy outlines the role that community members can reasonably expect to play in our planning and decision-making.

This policy provides the core values underpinning our approach to community engagement. Detail on our day-to-day practice is provided to all Yarra staff in *A guide to Community Engagement in Yarra*. The process guide is a regularly updated companion volume with advice on a range of engagement scenarios, as well as a suite of templates and other resources. More detail on our deliberative engagement practice (see definitions) is available to all staff in *A guide to deliberative engagement in Yarra*.

Our promise to the community

The principles opposite (Table 1.) guide each of our community engagement projects. They are based on community feedback sought over a six month period and involving online and in person opportunities. A number of targeted consultations were arranged to include all advisory groups, different socio-economic groups, a range of language backgrounds, the voice of children and young people, the growing renter demographic and those living in multi-unit developments.

They are also based on best-practice community engagement frameworks including the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) *Core Values for the Practice of Public Participation*, the Victorian Auditor General's Office (VAGO) *Public Participation Principles* and the principles outlined in the *Victorian Local Government Act 2020*.

"Knowing my council cares motivates me to get involved"

Table 1. We commit to community engagement that is:

Representative	We identify people and groups likely to be affected by our decision, and ensure they have the chance to participate.
Accessible	We use methods that empower underrepresented groups to get involved. We use a variety of online, print and face-to-face methods to maximise our reach and remove potential barriers and ensure culturally safe spaces for engagement.
Meaningful	We empower stakeholders with relevant, objective and plain English information and resources to allow informed participation.
Transparent	We explain which elements the community can influence, to what level and how we will use our community's input.
Accountable	We report back to the community, explaining what we asked, what we heard, and what we did.
Respectful	We value and respect our community's time, engaging closely when their influence is high and scaling back when it is more limited.
Flexible	We adapt to evolving circumstances, including allowing for newly identified stakeholders to engage as necessary throughout the process.
Supportive	We advocate on behalf of the Yarra community where the work of external agencies (including other tiers of government) impacts our community.
Prepared	We ensure our engagement practitioners and decision makers have the appropriate training, guidance and resources.



What guides our engagement

When we engage






Engagement should happen early in the planning stage for any changes to or introduction of new, services, facilities, policies or local laws that impact our community, including Council's budget. It may need to occur at several stages in the lead up to final plans or decisions. The greater the impact on the community, the more interactive the consultation will be. Where necessary we will conduct technical research and feasibility of options before seeking community input to ensure the community is appropriately informed.

How we engage

Our approach is guided by the IAP2 *Spectrum of Engagement* which describes five levels of engagement, from 'inform' through to 'empower'. It matches the role of the community with the level of influence they should expect. Many projects 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 groups within the community may be more directly impacted than others. Table 2 opposite describes the five levels of the spectrum and the roles of Council and community.



Table 2. Spectrum of engagement

	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
					
Goal	To provide balanced and objective information to make our community aware of something that has happened or will happen.	To listen to our community's feedback on options or a potential decision and take their input into account.	To seek input to identify issues, concerns and aspirations to inform decision making and show how that input has informed the decision.	To work with our community to develop a detailed understanding of all the issues and opportunities and identify agreed solutions at every step of the process.	To build the capacity of our community to identify solutions and/or lead change.
Commitment to community	We will keep you informed.	We will listen to and acknowledge your concerns.	We will work with you to exchange information, ideas and concerns.	We will seek advice and innovation from amongst the various stakeholder groups.	We will work with you to implement agreed decisions.
Community role	Listen	Contribute	Participate	Partner	Partner or Lead

"Knowing that the engagement process is transparent and there is sufficient time available to collaborate encourages me to participate"

Who we engage with

We make better decisions when we fully understand the needs, priorities and concerns of individuals and groups within our community.

When we are planning to make a decision, we first identify the people and groups likely to be affected, and we reach out to involve them in the process. We recognise that some groups face barriers to engaging with us and we commit to using methods that enable and encourage their participation. Identifying who is impacted or interested in a decision, best methods of outreach and any barriers to participation are guided by a rigorous stakeholder identification process and our guide to working with groups at risk of underrepresentation that is routinely updated for current best practice.

Community stakeholders

We understand that some of our decisions affect the entire community, but we also know that most of our decisions affect some people more than others. We work hard to identify and engage directly with the most impacted, including those who face barriers to participation. Some community members fall within multiple stakeholder groups, making them particularly relevant to certain engagement processes.



Table 3. Examples of our many community stakeholder groups include:

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people	Motorists	Public transport users
Business owners and workers	Neighbourhood houses and community centres	Resident associations
Carers	Neighbouring councils	Residents including ratepayers and renters
Children and young people	Non-resident ratepayers	Rough sleepers
Community advocacy groups (e.g. 'Friends of...')	Not for profit services	Schools, kindergartens and childcare centres
Council service users	Older people	Service groups
Culturally and linguistically diverse people	Other government agencies and tiers of government	Shoppers and diners
Cyclists	Owner-occupiers	Sports and recreation clubs
Diverse groups such as the LGBTQI community	Parents and guardians	Students
Emergency services	Park users	Visitors
Families	People with disability	Heritage and history interest groups

"My interest in my community, makes me want to be involved in Council planning and decision making"

Other stakeholders

Sustainable decision making is also achieved when we involve relevant service providers, decision makers and funding bodies who might be external to council. This might be seeking their input prior to community engagement to understand all issues and parameters of a decision or to facilitate conversation between different community stakeholders and other levels of government or to inform those organisations and state and federal government of our community's concerns and aspirations.

"Deliberative community engagement can help to create better council services, promote social cohesion and foster a thriving democracy"

Table 4. Examples of other stakeholders include:

Public Transport Victoria and Yarra Trams	Melbourne Water	VicRoads
Department of Health and Human Services	Victorian Planning Authority	Not for profit community service providers

Council committees

We work with a number of advisory committees including Council interest groups and project consultative groups who provide us with detailed feedback on the ways our decisions may affect specific communities. Some help us understand the issues and concerns of underrepresented voices (e.g. Yana Ngargna Advisory Group, Yarra's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Committee), while others help us understand specific interests (e.g. Heritage Advisory Group). The role of these advisory committees is guided by the *Council Committees Policy 2019*.



Our tools and methods

Different types of engagement suit different decisions according to the level of impact, and level of influence the community will have. Every project or decision will vary according to its context, who it affects and how it impacts them as well as what can be influenced or is achievable. We assess each project accordingly.






Table 5. Examples of how different types of engagement may align with influence

Examples of Council decisions and planning	
Inform	<p>Sometimes, we may need to inform you of a decision where there is no opportunity for community input. For example where:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are public safety issues that need to be addressed, related to traffic or otherwise • We are not the decision-making authority • There are no real options available • It's a decision of the elected Council e.g. included in a council strategy already endorsed by Council • It has previously been consulted on • It relates to an internal staffing or employment matter which is determined by the CEO
Consult	<p>Sometimes options are limited for practical reasons for example work must be carried out but we will ask you how and when it should happen.</p>
Consult and Involve	<p>Decisions carrying a lower impact still require community input but less time and resource intensive methods.</p>
Involve and collaborate	<p>High impacts and complex projects for example, major park upgrades, precinct master planning or annual budget planning require extra levels of interaction and often happen over several stages.</p>

The tools and methods we use make a big difference to who can participate and how meaningful the feedback is. Often our projects will use different methods at different stages. For example we might consult to gather ideas at early stages and then involve, collaborate

or empower to finalise priorities, design details or decision details. Examples of the types of methods and tools we employ are shown in table 5 according to the type of engagement.

Table 6. Examples of tools and methods according to engagement type

	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
					
Example methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Signs • Yarra Life ebulletin • Social media • Yarra News bimonthly magazine • Direct mail 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Surveys (online and hard copy) • Ideas boards • Creative projects • Online pin-dropping map tools • Face-to-face listening posts 	<p>Partnering with the community</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshops • Community panels • Advisory groups • Online forums • Detailed online mapping, ranking and prioritising tools • Regularly reporting back to the community across multiple stages of engagement • Elements of deliberative engagement processes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Independently governed reference groups • Citizens juries • Representative deliberative panels • Deliberative budgeting 	

This list is not exhaustive. There are many other methods and tools we can use. *Our Guide to Community Engagement* in Yarra provides a longer and more detailed list of our methods and tools. It also discusses the ways we adapt our approach to reach different stakeholder groups. For example, to boost participation of people with disability, we can make sure that our online survey is

compatible with screen readers, our workshop venues are accessible to mobility aids, and that participants are aware that we can arrange support staff (e.g. Auslan and language interpreters). Where projects impact children and young people we work with our local early years and youth service providers and school communities, and use age appropriate methods.

“It’s important that I’m asked for info in a way that is easy for me to give my opinion”

Transparent and accountable engagement

Our community tell us that clearly understanding the scope and potential impact of a decision, the type of influence they can have on a decision and being made aware of the outcomes of participating in engagement are the key drivers of participation.

These three elements are also what make our engagement meaningful, transparent and accountable.

We will achieve this transparency and accountability through:

1. Empowering stakeholders with relevant, objective and plain English information and resources to allow informed participation.
2. Explaining which elements the community can practically influence, to what level and how we will use our community's input.
3. Reporting back to the community, explaining what we asked, what we heard, and what we did and/or the next steps that can be expected in the process.

Note: Reporting and updates will always be available online through our Your Say Yarra consultation platform, as well as provided directly to those who asked to be kept informed and have provided contact details.

"Being provided with a platform or place to voice a view on the issue encourages me to participate in Council planning"



Understanding our community

Understanding our communities of identity, place and interest supports targeted engagement and outreach to those groups.

Our research tells us that currently, the top three sources of local news and information for our residents are:

- Word-of-mouth – friends, family, co-workers and neighbours (49%),
- Facebook (44%), and
- Council publications (39%)

We also know that unique aspects of our community and changes in technology and expectations require us to routinely adapt, refresh and update our approaches.

The diversity of our population

The Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people are the cultural custodians of the land now known as the City of Yarra. They cared for the land for many thousands of years before being displaced by European settlers from the 1830s. Council acknowledges the profound impacts of these changes and today celebrates the rich and enduring culture of Yarra's Traditional Owners.

Over the past 70 years, Yarra has welcomed large numbers of immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers from Europe, Asia and (more recently) Africa. Each group of new arrivals has diversified and strengthened the culture and economy of Yarra. We know that currently:

- about 19% of Yarra residents were born in non-English speaking countries, and
- 23% speak a language other than English at home.
- In Yarra, 14.8% of the population has a disability and 7.2% of the Yarra population are unpaid carers assisting their family members. This totals 21% of Yarra's population – a large proportion of our community that face challenges to actively participate in community life.

- Yarra is a municipality of socio-economic extremes. While a third of households earn over \$2,500 per week, and 58% of workers are in managerial and professional occupations, more than one quarter earn less than \$400 per week and many are living with economic hardship and social disadvantage.
- Our methods of travel differ greatly to other municipalities. Yarra residents are more likely to travel by foot or bike than other municipalities, with nearly a half of all journeys to and from work using sustainable methods.
- Yarra has more than double the number of carless households (20%) than greater Melbourne (9%).

Changes to how we live and interact

Our population is increasingly young and transient.

- Just over 30% are aged 25 to 34, compared with 16.3% for greater Melbourne and just over half our residents are renting, compared to just under a third in greater Melbourne.
- Over the years 2011-2016, we had close to 8,000 people move into Yarra who were between the ages of 18 and 35. During this time, close to 3,300 people aged 35-44 moved out. These statistics reflect the high number of renters in Yarra (ABS, Census of Population and Housing 2006 and 2016).



More than ever, we are operating in a digital society where mobile technology makes access to information and people's ability to interact instant, easy and attractive to a much larger audience. This presents great opportunities for us to engage with our community online through our Your Say Yarra consultation platform and social media channels. A mixture of online, in person and hard copy opportunities, however, are still important.

Our inner urban culture and character

Our 235 hectares of parkland and open space offer a welcome buffer to high density living, and our heritage buildings are central to Yarra's character. Three-quarters of Yarra's buildings are covered by a Heritage Overlay.

Yarra has an identity as a creative place, built upon the legacy of students, artists and activists over many decades. Yarra's cultural assets include:

- 60 art galleries and numerous artist studio.
- Over 50 live music venues.

- The Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation and other key Aboriginal organisations such as, MAYSAR - Melbourne Aboriginal Youth Sport and Recreation Cooperative, VACCHO – Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation, the Social Enterprise – Charcoal Lane and Aboriginal Housing Victoria.
- Three community radio stations.
- A growing creative industry.

Yarra is renowned for its dynamic mix of retail, hospitality and entertainment precincts, attracting locals, visitors and tourists alike and we have a thriving local economy employing nearly 70,000 people.

- The largest employer is the health sector, which accounts for over a fifth of all jobs.
- Closely followed by the retail food and accommodation sector.
- Most of Yarra's workers (86%) live outside the municipality.

Legislative environment

Our engagement work is necessarily guided by Victorian Government legislation and we are obliged to follow some processes.

These processes often relate to long term and strategic planning and finance, for example the Council budget, developing the community vision, the four year Council plan or amending the planning scheme.

The *Victorian Local Government Act 2020* outlines a set of five overarching principles that are central to our engagement practice. They broadly outline the need for community engagement to be transparent, accountable, meaningfully informed and representative. The act also outlines the process for developing a Community Vision.

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

Development and adoption of the policy

This Community Engagement Policy 2020 was adopted by Council resolution in September 2020, superseding the Community Engagement Policy 2014.

This policy was directly informed by:

- Online and face-to-face conversations with our community generating nearly 400 contributions.
- In person opportunities that included direct engagement with our neighbourhood houses, community events engaging public housing residents, activities adapted for our CALD communities and a number of engagement projects trialling different methods to include the voice of children and young people.
- Consultation with our 14 community advisory groups.
- Best practice and statutory guides outlined in the references.
- Detailed input from our internal engagement network of IAP2-certified engagement practitioners.

References

This policy is informed by a range of external research, and best practice standards, including:

- The Victorian Public Participation in Government Decision Making – Victorian Auditor General's Office – better practice guide.
- IAP2 Quality assurance standards – Core Values, Practitioners code of ethics and the IAP2 Spectrum of engagement.
- Victorian Small Business Engagement guidelines.
- New Democracy - Foundations for best practice in deliberation.
- 2017 Market research study – communication methods and hard to reach groups.
- 2019 Yarra City Council Annual Customer Satisfaction Survey.
- City of Yarra Community Profile – social atlas id.
- REMPLAN – City of Yarra economic profile Definitions.

Definitions

Community engagement	Involving those affected by or interested in a decision in the decision making process.
Community	Can refer to the City of Yarra community as a whole or: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • community of place (based on geographic location e.g. the Richmond community) • community of practice (based on common interests and activities e.g. the bike riding or gardening community) • community of identity (based on an individuals shared perspective e.g. Aboriginal heritage, language speakers, residents of public housing, particular age groups or a religious community)
Stakeholders	Sections of the community involved in engagement because of impact, interest or responsibility to deliver on an outcome. Can also refer to external organisations, and other levels of government involved in a decision. Always includes internal decision makers and implementers of decision outcomes.
Tools and methods	Refers to the many types of engagement that can be employed such as online or in person, public meetings and community panels, surveys, ideas boards, public competitions or deliberative budgeting for example
Engagement approach	The design/plan that ensures appropriate timing, resources, tools and methods according to a considered analysis of those affected, impacted or interested and the scope and remit of any engagement project.
Co-design	A partnership with community to come to an agreed model or design of service delivery or public infrastructure. Can also refer to the co-design of the engagement process itself to ensure it is fully transparent and works for all parties.
Representative Community Panel	Can be used to deliver a range of engagement types from world café's, in person and/or online advisory groups through to complex deliberative processes. Larger panels (50-60 participants) can provide a representative sample of the population (to acceptable industry standards) of Yarra and can be appropriate for whole of Yarra decisions with wide reaching impact. Smaller panels (15-30 participants) can provide representative samples for niche decisions impacting particular groups of the Yarra community but still require appropriate support, time and information.

Deliberative processes and/or citizens juries

Usually convened 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. Can take different forms but best practice always involves:

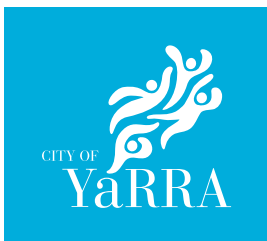
- a representative sample of the population or group who are impacted (see representative panel)
- a clear scope and remit that often asks for an agreed compromise of interests and outcomes, agreed priorities or consensus on a vision and direction
- provision of timely, objective and independently sourced/verified information
- sufficient time (often half day sessions spread across several weeks or months)
- support to participate (including independent facilitation, reimbursement for time, hardships and expenses incurred and sometimes co-design of the process)
- a commitment to participants on the level of influence their recommendation or decision holds (usually high)

Deliberative elements

Used where time and resources required of a full deliberative exercise is incompatible with the level of impact a decision entails, but the impact is sufficiently high or the decision is sufficiently complex to still warrant an extra level of transparency, meaningfulness and representation.

Examples of elements of deliberative practice include:

- Inviting a representative sample of those impacted by a decision in to a one off workshop in order to hear the range of perspectives and share more detailed information (this would usually happen after a broader community consultation so the full range of perspectives and issues requiring compromise are fully understood)
- Inviting the community to consider the trade-offs involved in decision by presenting options, choices or a budget framework
- Offering information sessions and accessible explanations of the project scope where issues are complex or dependent on other factors
- Inviting key stakeholders or a sample of those highly impacted to co-design the engagement process to ensure it reaches out to the right groups and is fully representative



Yarra City Council

PO Box 168, Richmond, VIC 3121

9205 5555

info@yarracity.vic.gov.au

yarracity.vic.gov.au

Customer service centres

Richmond Town Hall

333 Bridge Road, Richmond

Collingwood Town Hall

140 Hoddle Street, Abbotsford

Connie Benn Centre

160 Brunswick Street, Fitzroy

Bargoonga Nganjin, North Fitzroy Library

182 St Georges Road, Fitzroy North