

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT POLICY

Hume City Council recognises the rich Aboriginal heritage within the municipality and acknowledges the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung, as the Traditional Custodians of this land. Council embraces Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' living cultures as a vital part of Australia's identity and recognises, celebrates and pays respect to the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Elders past, present and future.

Policy Reference No.	POL/289
File No.	HCC20/343
Strategic Objective	3.1 - Empower and engage our community through advocacy and community engagement of the Council Plan.
Adopted by Council	22 February 2021
Re-Adopted	15 March 2022
Date for Review	1 March 2027
Responsible Officer	Manager Organisational Performance & Strategy
Department	Organisational Performance & Strategy

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1 POLICY STATEMENT

- 1.1 Community engagement is essential to open and transparent governance and informed decision making.
- 1.2 Input from the community provides valuable insights and information to inform planning, solution design and decision making, and to support the ongoing development of “a sustainable and thriving community with great health, education, employment, infrastructure, and a strong sense of belonging”.
- 1.3 Hume City Council will provide genuine and meaningful opportunities for the community to contribute to decision making processes that impact them.
- 1.4 Hume City Council Officers continuously make day-to-day decisions based on Council policies, strategies and directions. To help inform these decisions, Council will engage the community in the development and review of Council plans, strategies, policies, major projects, local projects, local laws, programs and major changes to service delivery, based on the level of impact of a project (see section 6.4).
- 1.5 Hume City Council will continually develop the capacity of Council staff to deliver consistent and best practice community engagement through the provision of tools, resources and staff development opportunities.

2 PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to:

- 2.1 Describe Hume City Council’s commitment and approach to genuine, consistent, and meaningful community engagement in Council’s decision-making processes.
- 2.2 Contribute to informed decision making by ensuring the diverse perspectives, experiences, abilities and aspirations of the community are considered when Council makes decisions.
- 2.3 Strengthen relationships and trust between Council and community by creating opportunities for people to participate in decisions that impact them.
- 2.4 Align Hume City Council’s approach to community engagement with:
 - 2.4.1 The expectations and feedback from the Hume community.
 - 2.4.2 The requirements and best practice standards of the:
 - a) *Local Government Act 2020*.
 - b) Victorian Auditor-General’s Office *Public Participation in Government Decision Making: A Better Practice Guide*.
 - c) International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) Core Values, Public Participation Spectrum, Code of Ethics and Quality Assurance Standard.
- 2.5 Align with, and support the implementation of other Council policies, frameworks, strategies and action plans.

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3 OBJECTIVE

The objectives of this policy are to:

- 3.1 Ensure the community has an opportunity to participate in decision making processes that impact them, and facilitate Council's Strategic Objective to "Empower and engage our community through advocacy and community engagement".
- 3.2 Reinforce Council's commitment to community accountability and transparent decision making through the 'Community Engagement Principles'.
- 3.3 Outline when and how Council will undertake community engagement.
- 3.4 Ensure that all Hume City Council employees, Councillors, volunteers, consultants and contractors understand their roles and responsibilities in relation to community engagement.

4 SCOPE

- 4.1 This policy applies to all Hume City Council decisions that have an impact on the community, including partnerships and collaborations, and those required by legislation.
- 4.2 Community engagement processes initiated by Hume City Council.

5 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PRINCIPLES AND COMMITMENTS

- 5.1 Community engagement demonstrates Hume City Council's commitment to social justice. This includes the right of Hume's citizens to participate in the community and specifically to:
 - 5.1.1 Participate in public life by actively participating in the decisions that affect their lives.
 - 5.1.2 Access easy to understand information about policies, programs and decisions that affect them and their wider community.
- 5.2 The community engagement principles and commitments (Table 1) underpin all community engagement activities delivered by, or on behalf of Hume City Council.

Table 1: Community Engagement Principles and Commitments

Community Engagement Principles*	Hume City Council's commitment
(a) a community engagement process must have a clearly defined objective and scope	<p>We will define the scope and objective of a project or decision, including what is negotiable and non-negotiable.</p> <p>We will provide genuine and meaningful opportunities for the community to participate in decision making processes.</p> <p>We will explain what the community can influence, and how they can participate.</p>

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Community Engagement Principles*	Hume City Council's commitment
(b) participants in community engagement must have access to objective, relevant and timely information to inform their participation	<p>We will provide objective, relevant and timely information, allowing participants to make an informed contribution.</p> <p>We will provide information that is accessible for participants.</p>
(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	<p>We will identify participants and groups, and encourage participation by all who may be impacted by the project or decision.</p> <p>We will use a mix of communication, outreach and engagement activities to ensure those who are impacted are informed and are supported to participate in decision making processes.</p>
(d) participants in community engagement are entitled to reasonable support to enable meaningful and informed engagement	<p>We will design engagement activities that are inclusive and accessible, and make reasonable adjustments where necessary to remove barriers to participation.</p> <p>We will provide sufficient time to ensure those impacted can participate in a meaningful way.</p>
(e) participants in community engagement are informed of the ways in which the community engagement process will influence Council decision making	<p>We will inform participants of how their feedback will be used in the decision-making process.</p> <p>We will report back to the community in a timely and straightforward way how community feedback informed the decision-making process.</p>

* Local Government Act 2020

6 WHEN WE WILL ENGAGE

6.1 Hume City Council will engage the community in decision making processes when:

6.1.1 A decision will impact on the community.

6.1.2 An issue will have a long-term impact on the community.

6.1.3 There is an action or commitment in a Council strategic document to undertake community engagement.

6.1.4 There is a legislated or statutory requirement.

6.2 Hume City Council will plan for community engagement early in the project planning process, to ensure community feedback can genuinely inform project outcomes.

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- 6.3 There are legislated requirements for the community engagement approaches for some project types, as outlined in Table 2 below:

Table 2: Project type and engagement approach

Project type	Community engagement approach
Community Vision*	Under the <i>Local Government Act 2020</i> deliberative engagement practices are required to be used.
Council Plan*+	
Financial Plan*	
Asset Plan**^	
Project type	Community engagement approach
Council budget *	Under the <i>Local Government Act 2020</i> community engagement is required, and should be undertaken in accordance with this policy.
Governance rules*	
Lease of land* (in some limited cases)	
Local Laws (Incl. alterations)*	
Sell or exchange land*	
Other Council plans, policies, planning permits, planning scheme amendments, strategies, major projects, local projects and service delivery decisions	The level of community engagement required will be assessed in accordance with 6.5 below, or in accordance with the requirements of the relevant legislation.

Note: This table is not a definitive list of legislative requirements, but rather the key requirements under the *Local Government Act 2020*. Other Acts and Regulations may also specify community engagement or consultation requirements that are required to be considered in particular circumstances, for example, but not limited, to the *Health and Wellbeing Act 2008* and the *Planning and Environment Act 1987*.

* This engagement approach is required by the *Local Government Act 2020*.

+ Engagement process must be led by the Mayor in accordance with the *Local Government Act 2020*.

^ Deliberative engagement is not required for the first iteration of the Asset Plan, and will be effective 2026.

- 6.4 Deliberative engagement practices should incorporate the following elements:
- 6.4.1 Have a clearly defined and communicated level of **influence** on the final decision.
 - 6.4.2 Participants are broadly **representative** of the community impacted by the project.
 - 6.4.3 Accessible, relevant and objective **information** is available to participants.
 - 6.4.4 Participants have time to **deliberate** by exploring a range of information sources and points of view to understand and consider trade-offs, compromises and alternatives.

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6.5 Table 3 outlines when and how Council will engage:

Table 3: Project assessment criteria and level of engagement

Criteria	Level of engagement required (based on the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation – Appendix 1)
High impact or risk (perceived or real) on City as a whole or a section of the community. Potential for any decision to create controversy or not have wide levels of acceptance within the community, or requires trade-offs or compromises between stakeholders.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The level of public participation should be aimed at 'collaborate' to 'empower' for key stakeholders/ communities of interest. Lower levels may be appropriate for other stakeholders/ communities of interest. The level of engagement may vary during the course of the project. <p><i>Deliberative engagement practices to be followed</i></p>
Medium impact or risk (perceived or real) on City as a whole or a section of the community. Potential for any decision to create some controversy or conflict of competing views, or that the decision is likely not to be accepted by some sections of the community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The level of public participation should be aimed at 'involve' for key stakeholders/ communities of interest, although in some circumstances 'collaborate' may be appropriate. Lower levels may be appropriate for other stakeholders/ communities of interest. The level of engagement may vary during the course of the project. <p><i>Deliberative engagement practices are encouraged to be considered when appropriate</i></p>
Low impact or risk (perceived or real) on the City as a whole or a section of the community. It is likely the decision will be widely accepted by the community and seen as having positive outcomes or being required.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The level of public participation should be aimed at 'inform', with some minor consultation ('consult') before making the final decision. <p><i>Deliberative engagement practices not required</i></p>

6.6 Community engagement may not be possible or feasible prior to making a decision where Council is required to respond quickly to avoid an immediate threat to the health, safety or wellbeing of the community.

6.7 All planned community engagement activities will be conducted in accordance with Hume's *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Recognition Policy*, including the following requirements:

6.7.1 For significant Council events, Council will invite an Elder of the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung to conduct a Welcome to Country.

6.7.2 Acknowledgement of the Traditional Custodians of the land now known as Hume City will be given at all planned community engagement activities.

6.7.3 Seek contact with and maintain working relationships with networks that consider the priorities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities so that Council is informed of the needs of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

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- 6.8 Planned community engagement activities relevant to 0–18-year-olds will align with the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations, including the principle that children and young people are informed about their rights, participate in decisions affecting them and are taken seriously.
- 6.9 Council recognises that Hume City Council Councillors and staff may have professional interest/expertise with community engagement projects outside of their areas of responsibility, and many also be impacted by projects as a local resident. Where possible, Councillors and staff should be provided with the opportunity to participate in internal engagement processes, rather than externally facing community engagement. Where this is not possible, Council's conflicts of interest, and code of conduct policies apply, and these responses should be identified as coming from a Councillor or staff member when possible.
- 6.10 For legislated and high or medium impact projects (as outlined in 6.2 and 6.4.4), documented community engagement plans should be developed for each project, which outlines the scope of influence, key stakeholders and engagement methods or approaches. In accordance with Council's *Public Transparency Policy*, this plan should be made available to the community when requested, ensuring Council decision making processes are transparent.
- 6.11 Prior to adopting a strategy, plan, policy or local law, the final stage of consultation may include the right to make a written submission to Council. Those who make a submission have the right to speak in support of their submission to a meeting of the Council.
- 6.12 Participants in community engagement activities and the wider Hume City community will be informed of the outcomes of community engagement projects. The way we do this is by communicating when key decisions are made. The ways we share this information may include:
- Direct communication to participants.
 - Project summaries on Council's online engagement platform or website.
 - Reports and briefings to Council.

7 POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

The policy will be implemented by:

- 7.1 All staff when assessing the need for community engagement on decisions they are proposing to Council.
- 7.2 All staff leading community engagement projects will:
- 7.2.1 Apply the community engagement principles, commitments and engagement approach outlined in this policy.
 - 7.2.2 Review and evaluate community engagement processes and share best practice with staff across the organisation.
- 7.3 The Organisational Performance and Engagement Department will lead:
- 7.3.1 The development of, and informing staff of, community engagement guidelines, tools and templates to ensure staff have the tools and support to deliver consistent, best practice community engagement.
 - 7.3.2 The provision of staff training and development opportunities, including a staff community of practice.

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- 7.4 This policy will be reviewed every five years, or earlier if required, to ensure relevancy and policy alignment.

8 DEFINITIONS AND ABBREVIATIONS

Accessible: Accessible engagement means anyone who is impacted can participate. Making engagement accessible involves consideration of the following factors:

- The timing of engagement activities.
- Offering different ways for people to participate. This may include online and face to face options.
- Designing engagement activities that make people feel comfortable and engaged.
- Information that is easily understood and in plain English. This may include Easy English¹, translated materials, appropriate font size and use of colour, the use of images, or audio-visual tools.
- Language spoken and provision of interpreters.
- The location and accessibility of venues. This may include public transport and parking access as well as disability access to the building and facilities.

Community: A flexible term used to define groups of connected people. Council uses it to describe people of Hume City generally, including ratepayers, residents, individuals or groups who live, work, play, study, visit, invest in or pass through the municipality. More specifically, it can refer to everyone affiliated with Hume City, and can include people or groups who extend beyond the municipal boundaries. For the purposes of this policy this term encompasses both individuals and groups.

Community engagement: A planned, two-way process that seeks, considers and acknowledges community input to inform Council decision making processes.

Deliberative Engagement Practices: Deliberative engagement practices are designed to create informed conversations among participants to build a deeper understanding of the complexities, trade-offs, compromises and alternatives when seeking to address complex issues. Hume City Council's approach to deliberative engagement is shaped by the application of four deliberative principles: Influence; Representation; Information; and Deliberation. The *Local Government Act 2020* requires deliberative engagement practices be applied to the development of the Community Vision, Council Plan, Financial Plan and Asset Plan. Further information about Hume's deliberative practices is included in the staff guide to deliberative engagement.

Impact: The impact of a project relates to how the project will affect the community. Impact may be perceived or real. The way we will assess impact will include consideration of the:

- impact on high value attributes, such as lifestyle or physical environment;
- impact on City as a whole or a section of the community;
- level of change proposed;
- financial impact on ratepayers or the organisation;
- impact on vulnerable community members or groups;

¹ Easy English is a style of writing that has been developed to provide understandable, concise information for people with low English literacy. People with low English literacy can be described as people with a limited ability to read and write words.

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- level of community interest;
- potential for controversy or conflict; and
- level of complexity of the issue being considered.

International Association of Public Participation: IAP2 is an international association of members who seek to promote and improve the practice of public participation in relation to individuals, governments, institutions, and other entities that affect the public interest in nations throughout the world.

Public participation: Public participation is used interchangeably with the term community engagement. Community engagement is more commonly used in Australia, whereas public participation is more commonly used overseas.

Stakeholder: For the purposes of this policy the term stakeholder is encompassed within 'community', and may include other levels of government, service providers, businesses or community groups and Council staff.

9 RELATED DOCUMENTS

9.1 Legislative requirements

Council will adhere to all legislation that requires Council to give notice, consult or engage with the community in a specific way, including:

- *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Victorian Child Safe Standards)*
- *Gender Equality Act 2020*
- *Local Government Act 2020*
- *Planning and Environment Act 1987*
- *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014*
- *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008*
- *Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*

9.2 Hume policies and procedures

- *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Recognition Policy*
- *Creative Community Strategy (2020-2025)*
- *Gambling Harm Minimisation Policy*
- *Governance Rules*
- *Hume Child Safe Policy*
- *Hume Social Justice Charter*
- *Public Transparency Policy*
- *Information Privacy and Health Records Policy*
- *Media Communications Policy*
- *Social Media Guidelines*
- *Use of Council's Internet, Email and Electronic Communications Policy*

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Appendix 1 – IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation

IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation



IAP2's Spectrum of Public Participation was designed to assist with the selection of the level of participation that defines the public's role in any public participation process. The Spectrum is used internationally, and it is found in public participation plans around the world.

INCREASING IMPACT ON THE DECISION					
	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GOAL	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 the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision making in the hands of the public.
PROMISE TO THE PUBLIC	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 and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.

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