

COUNCIL POLICY



Community Engagement Policy	Document No:	SCS – 017
	Approval Date:	
	Approved By:	
Responsible Officer: Manager Community Development	Trim Reference:	D15/87580
Authorising Officer: Chief Executive Officer		

1. Purpose

This policy outlines the principles that underpin Council's approach to community engagement.

The policy commits Council to community engagement practices that are trustworthy, responsive, simple and progressive.

The policy affirms that Council understands effective community engagement leads to improved decision making.

The policy acknowledges that effective community engagement results in strong, well-functioning, highly connected communities that understand and participate actively in a range of democratic processes.

2. Scope

This policy provides direction on formal and informal community engagement activities undertaken by, or on behalf of, Surf Coast Shire Council.

3. Application

This policy applies to all community engagement activity undertaken by Council, including work undertaken by consultants and volunteers.

This policy applies to citizen-lead community engagement when sufficient input is received from citizens on a particular topic.

4. Human Rights Charter 2006

Surf Coast Shire has observed the freedoms, rights and responsibilities outlined in *The Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* in the development of this policy.

5. Local Government Act 1989

Surf Coast Shire has observed the requirements outlined in the *Local Government Act 1989* in the development of this policy. Specifically sections '223 *Right to make submission*' and '*Section 208A*', which in accordance with one of the six Best Value Principles identified in the Act requires that Council develop a 'program of regular consultation with its community in relation to the services it provides'.

6. Policy

6.1. Definitions

6.1.1. Community

Within the Surf Coast Shire, communities may be made up of permanent and non-permanent residents, tourists, visitors, and those engaged in paid or unpaid employment within Surf Coast. Communities are formed around shared localities, interests, values, beliefs or other common links. Council acknowledges that the Shire is made up of numerous communities, with citizens often associating with many different community groups at any given time.

6.1.2. Citizenship

Council views all members of the various communities as citizens. Citizenship within Surf Coast involves political, civil and social rights and responsibilities. Citizenship grows and develops with the participation of citizens in democratic processes.

6.1.3. Community Engagement

The International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) defines community engagement as a planned process with the specific purpose of working across organisations, stakeholders and communities to shape the decisions or actions of the members of the community, stakeholders or organisation in relation to a problem, opportunity or outcome.

Surf Coast Shire Council commits to being flexible and responsive in its approach to community engagement. It will apply different approaches to engagement depending on the aims and timeframe of the engagement and the level of interest or concern within the target community.

The Communications and Community Engagement Strategy provides a framework for Council's approach to community engagement.

The International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) Spectrum of Public Participation and code of ethics are also important reference points for Council's community engagement practice.

Other models and methodologies will also have a bearing on Council's community engagement practice depending on specific circumstances.

6.2. Discussion

Council acknowledges that community engagement plays a vital role in the achievement of Council's Vision:

"Working towards an engaged, innovative and sustainable community".

- Effective engagement generates better decisions, delivering sustainable economic, environmental, social and cultural benefits to Surf Coast communities.
- Effective community engagement enables the free and full development of human potential, fosters relationships based on mutual understanding, trust and respect, facilitates the sharing of responsibilities, and creates more inclusive and sustainable communities.
- Meaningful community engagement seeks to address barriers and build the capacity and confidence of people to negotiate and partner with institutions that affect their lives, in particular people who may have previously felt excluded or disenfranchised.
- A wide range of methods and technologies are available, including new and emerging tools associated with digital technology to facilitate appropriate and effective community engagement. Online community engagement is a high priority as people increasingly expect to access services and experiences online. Other engagement methods need to be considered to include those who are not active online.

6.3. Principles

The health of a democracy can be judged by the quality and quantity of conversations that happen within the community

Surf Coast Shire Council seeks to place community engagement at the centre of Council activity, in order to increase community wellbeing, resilience and connectedness. Council's community engagement approach promotes an active community, through participatory and deliberative engagement processes.

Surf Coast Shire Council supports the IAP2 Code of Ethics for its community engagement practice.

- **Purpose** - We support public participation as a process to make better decisions that incorporate the interests and concerns of all affected stakeholders and meet the needs of the decision-making body.
- **Role of Practitioner** - We will enhance the public's participation in the decision making process and assist decision-makers in being responsive to the public's concerns and suggestions.
- **Trust.** - We will undertake and encourage actions that build trust and credibility for the process and among all the participants.
- **Defining the Public's Role-** We will carefully consider and accurately portray the public's role in the decision-making process.

- **Openness** - We will encourage the disclosure of all information relevant to the public's understanding and evaluation of a decision.
- **Access to the Process** - We will ensure that stakeholders have fair and equal access to the public participation process and the opportunity to influence decisions.
- **Respect for Communities** - We will avoid strategies that risk polarizing community interest or that appear to "divide and conquer."
- **Advocacy** - We will advocate for the public participation process and will not advocate for a particular interest, party or project outcome.
- **Commitments** - We will ensure that all commitments made to the public, including those by the decision-maker, are made in good faith.
- **Support of the Practice** – We will mentor new practitioners in the field and educate decision-makers and the public about the value and use of public participation.

6.4. Policy statements

- Council is committed to open dialogue with its communities, to empower them to have a meaningful role in Council's planning and prioritisation processes.
- Council will articulate the level of influence, in all engagement processes and will highlight the negotiable and non-negotiable elements of any community engagement.
- Council will encourage a diverse range of perspectives to be heard, and will actively seek to gain broad representation of communities when undertaking engagement processes.
- Council will continue to provide opportunities for community members to come together to learn and share information, and have meaningful and informed deliberations.
- Council will consider the cost-effectiveness of community engagement processes when developing project proposals.
- Council will support staff to gain confidence and capacity to engage effectively with communities.

7. References

Internal Documents

- Surf Coast Shire Council Plan 2013-2017
- Surf Coast Shire Communications and Community Engagement Strategy 2015-2018
- Surf Coast Shire Health and Wellbeing Plan 2013-17
- Surf coast Shire Customer Service Strategy 2015-18

External Documents

- Local Government Act 1989
<http://www.localgovernment.vic.gov.au/web20/dvclgv.nsf/headingpagesdisplay/legislationlocal+government+act>
- International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) Spectrum of Public Participation
<http://www.iap2.org.au/resources/iap2s-public-participation-spectrum>
- IAP2's Core Values for the Practice of Public Participation
<http://www.iap2.org.au/about-us/about/core-values>

The Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities
<http://www.humanrightscommission.vic.gov.au/index.php/the-charter>