

Darebin Community Engagement Policy

Purpose

Darebin City Council is committed to building a fair, inclusive and equitable city. This is why we put residents, business owners and the community sector at the heart of our decision-making.

This policy was developed with input from the community and other stakeholders in Darebin. It guides us on engagement that is meaningful and includes all voices in the community. We actively seek to remove barriers people and groups in Darebin might encounter. Our engagement is open and transparent to ensure the community can trust decisions we make as caretakers of this city.

Our community engagement practice is:

- Underpinned by principles outlined in the *Local Government Act 2020 (Vic)*.
- Supported by clear minimum standards of engagement, based on the Darebin community engagement principles, and fostering meaningful, equitable and inclusive engagement.
- Consistently applied to planning, implementation and evaluation of all community engagement processes and activities at Darebin.

Scope

Community engagement is part of Council's core business.

This policy applies to anyone in the organisation, including Darebin Councillors, Council officers, contractors, volunteers or anyone else who through partnerships with Council engages with the community in Darebin.

It does not apply to projects where there is no decision to be made that may have impact on the community in Darebin.

This policy is a requirement of the *Local Government Act 2020 (Vic)*, aligns with the Victorian Auditor General *Public Participation in Government Decision-Making Better Practice Guide* and complies with the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*.

It encompasses the policy's goals outlined in the *Darebin Community Engagement Improvement Plan (2024)*.

Definitions and Abbreviations	The following definitions have been used for the purposes of this policy: Community Engagement: A planned process that provides individuals and groups the opportunity to be involved meaningfully in service planning, delivery and decision-making which may affect them or are of interest to them. Community engagement seeks to build trust and strengthen relationships. Community: A term that includes residents, businesses/workers, community leaders/representatives and community groups and organisations in Darebin. Consultative Engagement: A term used to describe engagements at the level of ‘inform’ or ‘consult’ on the <i>IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation</i>, with the related promise of keeping the community informed or seeking feedback on strategies, policies and plans. Deliberative Engagement: A process to reach an outcome on a complex issue. It involves an informative and engaging dialogue with an inclusive, diverse and genuine representation from our community, where considered views and joint outcomes can be developed. Participants are provided with a breadth of inputs, information and enough time and opportunity to engage and discuss issues in depth in a welcoming and respectful environment, then provide recommendations and feedback which is reviewed and considered for adoption by Council. Public Participation: A term used by IAP2 describing the involvement of those affected (interested or impacted) by a decision in the decision-making process. We use the term interchangeably with Community Engagement, Stakeholder Engagement or Consultation.								
Policy Statement	Darebin City Council recognises the inherent knowledge and experiences of the diverse communities that live, work, own a business, study and visit our city. Genuine and meaningful engagement is at the core of all Council engagement activities. Together we build a future for all.								
Responsibilities	All teams and staff members engaging with the community at Darebin are responsible for the implementation of this policy. There are specific roles for stakeholders listed below: <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Who</th><th>Roles and responsibilities</th></tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Councillors</td><td> Adopt Community Engagement Policy. Champion meaningful community engagement commitment and support the community’s mandate. </td></tr> <tr> <td>Executive Leadership Team</td><td> Check this policy has been applied to community engagement activities when reviewing reports and presentations. Champion best practice community engagement. Approve (sign off) the Community Engagement Plans for high impact/risk projects. </td></tr> <tr> <td>Managers Group</td><td> Ensure this policy is applied to community engagements undertaken by their teams. Approve (sign off) the Community Engagement Plans for high impact/risk projects. </td></tr> </tbody> </table>	Who	Roles and responsibilities	Councillors	Adopt Community Engagement Policy. Champion meaningful community engagement commitment and support the community’s mandate.	Executive Leadership Team	Check this policy has been applied to community engagement activities when reviewing reports and presentations. Champion best practice community engagement. Approve (sign off) the Community Engagement Plans for high impact/risk projects.	Managers Group	Ensure this policy is applied to community engagements undertaken by their teams. Approve (sign off) the Community Engagement Plans for high impact/risk projects.
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	Coordinators/ Team Leaders	Ensure this policy is applied to community engagements undertaken by their teams. Approve (sign off) the Community Engagement Plans for medium impact/risk projects.
	Staff	Ensure this policy is applied to community engagements. The Project Lead seeks advice from and works collaboratively with the Community Engagement team to ensure community engagement for their project is designed and undertaken in accordance with this policy.
	Community Engagement team	Ensure best engagement advice is shared with project teams. Ensure there is consistency in Council's engagement approach in line with this policy and goals of the <i>Darebin Community Engagement Improvement Plan (2024)</i>.
Breach of Policy	Breaches of policies are treated seriously. Any concerns about non-compliance should be reported immediately to the owner of this policy.	
Privacy	All personal information collected during engagement activities is protected in accordance with the <i>Darebin Information Privacy Policy</i> and <i>Health Privacy Policy</i>. Collecting respondent's postcode of residence is mandatory at all engagements undertaken with the community. A question asking for the respondent's connection to Darebin must be offered. A response to this question is optional. Projects may collect a range of other demographic questions during engagements as required. Standardised demographic questions are available from the Community Engagement team.	
Risk management	Maintaining all aspects of safety, including cultural safety, of the community and staff is paramount to the success of engagement activities. Staff should have the knowledge, capability and confidence in demonstrating inclusive engagement practices. It is highly recommended that all staff attending and conducting engagements undertake any relevant safety and cultural awareness training. These opportunities should be sought internally and externally. Project teams working on high level impact/risk projects are expected to undertake risk analysis for their projects that considers risks triggered by engagement. All engagement activities and feedback provided need to be in line with Council's <i>OH&S Policy</i> and adhere to relevant moderation guidelines.	

What is community engagement and why we engage	Community engagement is an opportunity for the community to share their feedback through various engagement methods. It is a key step in forming decisions and developing policies, services, programs, places and spaces that continue to be relevant and responsive to the community's changing needs and expectations. Maintaining and improving the wellbeing of the community depends on effective and transparent decision-making that considers the diversity of community views in an equitable, inclusive, open and authentic way. Community engagement seeks to build trust and strengthen relationships. International research shows that the decision-making of governments is improved when communities are involved (Parvin 2018). It makes local government: respond better to the diverse needs of the community; design better services; and best of all, use the ideas of the community to respond to change. It also builds trust in government as people become involved in and therefore see themselves reflected in it. At Darebin we engage to: ▪ strengthen the community representation in decision-making and ▪ make sure we fulfil our commitments to community in line with our core minimum standards of engagement and ensure decisions and actions Council makes are transparent and well explained to the community. Following on Principle 4 <i>Delivering meaningful, equitable and inclusive community engagement</i> from the <i>Towards Equality – Equity, inclusion and human rights framework 2019-2029</i> we are particularly committed to supporting the rights of people and groups who experience discrimination and disadvantage. This includes, but is not limited to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, children, young people, older people, diverse multilingual community members, migrants, refugees, women and girls, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer (LGBTIAQ+) people, people with disability and people experiencing poverty, including intergenerational disadvantage in the context of historical and growing inequalities. The Minimum Standards of Engagement section supports us in delivery of this practice.
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Community Engagement Principles	Our engagement practice is guided by principles outlined in the <i>Local Government Act 2020</i>. There are five community engagement and four deliberative engagement principles. <u>Principles guiding community engagement</u> • a community engagement process must have a clearly defined objective and scope • participants in community engagement must have access to objective, relevant and timely information to inform their participation • participants in community engagement must be representative of the persons and groups affected by the matter that is the subject of the community engagement • participants in community engagement are entitled to reasonable support to enable meaningful and informed engagement • participants in community engagement are informed of the ways in which the community engagement process will influence Council decision-making. <u>Principles guiding deliberative engagement</u> • authentic engagement with the community • accurate representation of the community in engagement activities • clear demonstration of how all views have been considered • accessible and relevant information available to the community to ensure the decision-making process and the community’s level of influence is clear in each instance and that participants are fully informed.												
Type of Community Engagement	In alignment with the <i>IAP2 Spectrum of Participation</i>, engagement practices can largely be considered as ‘consultative’ or ‘deliberative’. For definitions of these concepts check the Definitions and abbreviation section of this policy. <table><tr><th>Type</th><th colspan="2">Consultative</th><th colspan="3">Deliberative</th></tr><tr><th>Level</th><td>Inform</td><td>Consult</td><td>Involve</td><td>Collaborate</td><td>Empower</td></tr></table> When undertaking engagement falling under the <u>Consultative Engagement type</u>, at the minimum, project teams: • share information with the community to help understand a project or a matter • seek feedback from the community, including ideas, thoughts and insights to be considered by Council and • report the outcome of engagement back to the community through the closing the loop process. Council will implement engagement activities falling under the <u>Deliberative Engagement type</u> in the following circumstances: 1. Where it has a legislated obligation for engagement on key strategic documents (including Community Vision, Council Plan, Financial Plan and Asset Plan) or 2. Where it is assessed as appropriate to undertake this engagement approach for projects or processes that meet the level of influence and promise required.	Type	Consultative		Deliberative			Level	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
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The table below shows examples of Darebin's key strategic documents and their suggested engagement types:

Strategic document, plan or process	Engagement type
Council Plan	Deliberative Engagement
Municipal Health and Wellbeing Plan	Deliberative Engagement
Community Vision	Deliberative Engagement
Financial Plan	Deliberative Engagement
Asset Plan	Deliberative Engagement
Making of local laws	Consultative Engagement
Budget	Consultative Engagement
Governance Rules	Consultative Engagement
Acquiring, purchasing, selling, exchanging or leasing land	Consultative Engagement
Electoral structure review	Engagement type to be decided upon assessing the intricacies of the matter
Other Council policies, strategies and plans that directly impact the community	Engagement type to be decided upon assessing the intricacies of the matter
Projects that create new assets or change service levels	Engagement type to be decided upon assessing the intricacies of the matter

Community engagement level of influence/ how we engage

Engagement opportunities provided by Council will vary in level and type and will depend on the significance, complexity of projects and matters, and level of interest, impact and influence that the stakeholders have on decisions being made.

We use the *IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation* to guide our engagement approach. The Spectrum, as adapted below, describes the five different levels of engagement, each with a different level of influence that the community should expect to have, and the promise that we make to the community.

		Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
	Participation goal	To provide well balanced and objective information to assist our community to understand or make them aware of the problem, alternatives opportunities and/or solutions	To seek community feedback on analysis, alternatives and proposed decisions	To work directly with the community throughout the process to ensure that their concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered	To partner with the community in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and identification of preferred solution, and work together toward a jointly agreed outcome.	To place decisions in the hands of the community, and build their capacity to deliver change
	Our promise to the community	We will keep you informed	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations and provide feedback on how community 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 community input influenced the decision	We will work together with you to formulate solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible	We will implement what you decide or recommend or we will provide reasons if Council amends a decision or recommendation

	Role of the community	Listen	Contribute	Participate	Partner	Partner or lead
	Examples and practices	Information sessions Media releases Social media posts On-site signage Direct mail Project updates	Surveys (online and hardcopy) Ideas collection Drop-in sessions Opinion poll Submission processes Pop-up sessions	Advisory groups Workshops Deliberative polling Elements of deliberative engagement practices	Citizen advisory committees Participatory decision making. Community ownership project governance Elements of deliberative engagement practices (i.e. deliberative panels)	Citizens' jury/ panel/ assembly Deliberative budgeting Consensus Conference Representative deliberative panels
This policy seeks to provide transparency on the different levels of engagement so that community has clear expectations around level of influence. It is difficult to define examples of projects that fall under each pillar of the IAP2 participation spectrum. Where engagement falls within this spectrum relies on the negotiables and level of influence of a project. Each project is different and needs to be assessed individually and allocated to a level. An example of a project under 'Inform' level is something with no negotiables and mainly supported by communication approaches. It is important to remember that whilst communication is a vital part of engagement, it is a one-way exchange of information, unlike engagement, which relies on a dynamic two-way information exchange. We should only use 'Inform' as a starting point to share information about projects that we are certain will follow up with the community through at a higher level of engagement, e.g. 'Consult'. For example, inform can be used as an engagement level to share information about a feasibility study results for a Council asset in preparation for a further engagement with the community on the ideas for future possible use of this asset. A decision when to use 'Inform' as an engagement level can be discussed further with the Community Engagement team. Where Council officers carry out community engagement in accordance with different legislative requirements, they must still have regard to this policy.						

Statutory written submissions versus written feedback	Public exhibition and notice, written submissions and written feedback are engagement methods available to project teams. It is important to note there is a difference between a statutory process guided by the Section 223 of the <i>Local Government Act 1989</i>, and a non-statutory public notice and written feedback process. <u>Public exhibition and written submissions as a statutory requirement</u> Projects required to undertake formal public exhibition and written submissions are guided by a processes outlined in Section 223 of the <i>Local Government Act 1989</i>. Examples of such projects include: • changes to the Road Management Plan and • proposed declarations of roads as public highways. In addition, engagement on planning scheme amendments also require statutory process for public exhibition and formal written submissions. This process is governed by the <i>Planning and Environment Act 1987(Vic)</i> and where relevant the amendment process can be supported by this policy. Formal written submissions require hearings at Council's ordinary or special committee meetings. In case where the submissions are heard at the Hearing of Submission Council Committee meeting submitters have an opportunity to speak to their submissions. <u>Public notice and written feedback</u> Occasionally, Council or ELT can decide that significant engagements impacting on the municipality can use elements of the formal statutory process. Depending on the complexity of the project, one or all can be selected as engagement methods. These elements include: a public notice, collection of the written feedback, presentation of the report's findings at Council's ordinary or special committee meeting, speaking to the submission if report is presented at the Hearing of Submission Committee meeting. For these projects engagement approach is established on a case-by-case basis, is project specific, and follows the engagement practice outlined in this policy. A decision can be made to implement community engagement in minimum three weeks. Please note, at Darebin we acknowledge that the formal structure supporting the statutory requirement or written submissions may not be accessible to everyone in the community. Council should only use this method for projects where this requirement is legislated.
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When we do/don't engage and how we engage	We engage when: • a decision or an issue will have impact or long-term impact on the community • there is a specific commitment to engagement in one of Council's key strategic documents • there is a legislated/statutory requirement to do so. We do not engage when: • we require an immediate resolution • there are no negotiables or opportunities for the community to influence our decisions • an initiative involves commercial or confidential information • the project requires specialist or technical expertise • there is risk to public safety. Thorough planning for community engagement approach takes time. Projects that require presentation and approval of their engagement approach by ELT/Council are required to contact the CE team at least six weeks prior to that reporting date. Failure to meet this timeline may impact on the delivery of engagement for the projects. Exceptions to this rule include projects that are led by other entities (governments, utility service providers, community organisations) in partnership with Council. The optimal period for seeking input from the community is from four to six weeks. The length of engagement depends on the complexity of the project, number of stakeholders and time required to implement some engagement methods. The length of engagement should always be discussed with the CE team. The Your Say Darebin online platform is a central engagement hub for community engagement at Darebin. Council recognises that not everyone engages using online tools and some members of the harder-to-reach communities are underrepresented in engagement with Council. The Minimum Standards of Engagement and the <i>Engaging Equitably and Inclusively</i> document provide guidance and specific advice on how to approach and select engagement methods that suit individual stakeholders. It is important to communicate the scope of the community's influence on any decision-making for the project. This information is usually outlined in negotiables/non-negotiables for each engagement. 'Negotiables' state what the community can have a say about and influence and 'non-negotiables' lists aspects of the project that have already been predetermined. These can include statutory and legislative regulations, budgets, technical components, and any other relevant issues.
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Minimum standards of engagement	<u>Engaging with diverse communities – overarching minimum standards of engagement</u> At Darebin, the practice of engagement with diverse communities is: ▪ Meaningful – by recognising that better decisions are made with community feedback and input, identifying demographic and priority groups relevant to engagement topics, and ensuring representativeness of the diverse community. ▪ Inclusive – by recognising there are barriers to engagement and ensuring that engagement activities are delivered in places where community and staff feel safe, in a suitable and culturally relevant ways, supported by timely planning and sufficient resources. ▪ Transparent – by being clear about objectives and scope of the project and what is within and out of community's influence and sharing this information with the community. ▪ Informed – by ensuring that language, location, format, platform and time of engagement are accessible. This means that information about the project is clear and where needed language is at Year 8 level, includes access to language support services, including Auslan where necessary. ▪ Accountable – by sharing the findings of engagements and outcomes that impact the community. ▪ Valuable – by matching the type of engagement to the depth of information needed from the community, building ongoing relationships with the community and recognising that community can participate in topics that are of interest to them.
Minimum standards of engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities	Council is committed to high quality, open and respectful engagement with all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities. Council acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities' right to self-determination and community-control principles. These principles have special significance for the way in which Council engages with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Council recognises there is a diversity of views and opinions within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities have been deeply harmed by the policies and actions of past governments. This means trusting relationships may not exist or may need time and resources to establish and build. In all of Council's engagements with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and organisations, Council will ensure that there are culturally appropriate opportunities for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community to be involved in and strive to establish and sustain collaborative relationships: working together, giving recognition for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community decision-making and, importantly, supporting the ongoing aspirational efforts of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples themselves towards justice and community wellbeing.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities must always have the authorising voice in any thinking and decisions in matters which will affect them and their communities. This is usually where there is a higher level of community influence in the decision-making.

Engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

- As a first principle, Council will lead engagement activities with the Traditional Owners, the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation, on all matters of key importance.
- Culturally appropriate opportunities provided.
- Views and guidance must be sought from the earliest stages of an idea or proposal before moving into scoping and planning.
- Advice cannot be sought and then ignored.
- Advice must be integrated without adjustment or censorship.
- Advice may need to be sought and integrated successively, at each stage of a project or initiative.
- When engagement type is deliberative engagement there must be a partnership decision-making process.
- On matters of importance, there should always be Aboriginal voices in the room when discussing Aboriginal matters and when key decisions are made.

The implementation of these minimum standards is supported by the *Practical steps – engagement with Aboriginal people and communities – March 2025*.

References

- Aboriginal Cultural Protocols Guide to guide Darebin City Council workplace practices* (nd).
- IAP2 (International Association for Public Participation) (2020) IAP2 Published resources – spectrum and quality assurance webpage. Available at: <https://www.iap2.org.au/Resources/IAP2-Published-Resources>.
- Local Government Act 2020*. Available at <https://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/in-force/acts/local-government-act-2020/003>.
- Ministerial Good Practice Guideline and General Guidance for Councils Engaging with Aboriginal Australians* (2022) issued under the Local Government Act 2020.
- Parvin P (2018) Democracy Without Participation: A New Politics for a Disengaged Era. *Res Publica*. February 2018, Vol 24, 1: 31–52. Available at: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11158-017-9382-1>.
- Planning and Environment Act 1987. Available at <https://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/in-force/acts/planning-and-environment-act-1987/144>.
- Statement of Commitment to Traditional Owners and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Available at <http://www.darebin.vic.gov.au/Darebin-Living/Community-support/Aboriginal-and-Torres-Strait-Islander-Darebin>.
- The Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006. Available at <https://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/in-force/acts/charter-human-rights-and-responsibilities-act-2006/014>.
- Towards Equality: Equity, Inclusion and Human Rights Framework 2019-2029. Available at <http://www.darebin.vic.gov.au/en/Your-Council/How-council-works/Organisation-and-Performance>.
- Victorian Auditor-General (2015) *Public Participation and Community Engagement: Local Government Sector*. Victorian Government: Melbourne. Available at: https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/file_uploads/VAGO_PP-Local-Gov_qQN5QyHk.pdf.
- Victorian Aboriginal and Local Government Strategy 2021 – 2026 Pathway to Stronger Partnerships* (2020).

Parent Strategy/ Plan	Council Plan 2025-2029
Related Documents	This policy should be read in conjunction with the Council Plan 2025-2029
Supporting Procedures and Guidelines	Community Engagement Toolkit
Legislation/ Regulation	Local Government Act 2020
Author	Ania Sieracka, Community Engagement Lead
Policy Owner/Sponsor	Enna Giampiccolo, Executive Manager, Governance, Risk and Communication
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Content enquiries	Community Engagement Lead

All Darebin policies and procedures must be developed through the lens of key Darebin strategies, plans and related considerations. See the **Darebin Policy Review Lens** to inform and guide policy development and review.