

Community Engagement Policy

February 2021



Contents

Thank you to our community	3
What is community engagement?	4
Purpose of this policy	4
Our commitment to community engagement	5
Community engagement core values	5
Community engagement framework	6
Community engagement principles	7
When we engage	8
Who we engage	9
How we engage	10-11
Evaluation and Review	12
Resources and tools to support our Community Engagement Framework	12-13
Definitions	14
Statutory requirements	15

Cover image:

Community enjoying the Diamond Creek Regional Playspace opening September 2020

Acknowledgement

Nillumbik Shire Council acknowledges the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people who are the Traditional Custodians of Land known today as Nillumbik. We pay respect to the Elders both past and present and extend that respect to other Indigenous Australians.

Thank you to our community

Nillumbik Shire Council would like to thank community members who have contributed to the development of our community engagement policy.

Community feedback was used to inform the policy on how Nillumbik Shire Council will engage with our community going forward.

Through the feedback received by our community members and staff we identified some core engagement objectives.

Transparent	Effective two-way communication with clear and relevant information.
Time	Fair and reasonable opportunity for the community to give input.
Keep it simple	Easy to understand language and less jargon.
Opportunity	Multiple options to participate in the engagement processes.

What is community engagement?

Community engagement is the process of involving the public in decisions that affect them.

It is critical to the successful development and implementation of Council strategic planning and decisions, and for improving services by being responsive to the needs of the community.

Community engagement is:

- a two-way process of interaction between Council and the community,
- about matters such as a decision Council needs to make, a matter affecting the community that Council wishes to address or an issue that the community wants Council to address.

Purpose of this policy

This Community Engagement Policy (Policy) is a formal expression of Council's commitment to engaging the Nillumbik community in planning and decision-making through the use of appropriate, effective and inclusive practices.

This Policy:

- articulates Council's commitment to engaging effectively with its community in a meaningful, accountable, responsive and equitable way;
- outlines how Council will ensure that community engagement is integrated into Council activities to support decision-making, build relationships and strengthen the Nillumbik community's sense of identity;
- should be applied at the planning stage of any project or initiative, when a change in service, activities or infrastructure is considered and again prior to when a decision is made;
- when a change in government policy or legislation impacts Council services/business;
- seeks to improve Council's engagement processes and outcomes through encouraging a consistent and transparent approach and continual learning through evaluation, and through expanding the range of engagement methods used;
- applies to Councillors, staff, contractors and volunteers. It also serves as a guide to external organisations delivering infrastructure and services in Nillumbik; and
- outlines the key role of the community in Council's planning and decision-making.

Our commitment to community engagement

Nillumbik Shire Council is committed to providing good governance and the delivery of high quality local services by enabling meaningful engagement with the community.

It will achieve its commitment to inclusive and effective community engagement by adherence to this Community Engagement Policy to guide efforts to enhance the planning and delivery of Council's services and programs.

Community engagement does not necessarily mean achieving consensus. However, it does involve seeking broad, informed input into the decision-making process to achieve the best possible outcomes.



Image: Council officers at the Healthy Active Ageing Expo March 2019

Community engagement core values

The International Association of Public Participation (IAP2)¹ specify a series of core values that should be used to underpin community engagement.

Nillumbik's Community Engagement Policy builds on these core values.

1. Public participation is based on the belief that those who are affected by a decision have a right to be involved in the decision-making process.
2. Public participation includes the promise that the public's contribution will influence the decision.
3. Public participation promotes sustainable decisions by recognising and communicating the needs and interests of all participants, including decision makers.
4. Public participation seeks out and facilitates the involvement of those potentially affected by or interested in a decision.
5. Public participation seeks input from participants in designing how they participate.
6. Public participation provides participants with the information they need to participate in a meaningful way.
7. Public participation communicates to participants how their input affected the decision.

¹ **Source:** www.iap2.org.au

Community engagement framework

Council's approach to community engagement is guided by the IAP2² framework for community engagement.

Council will apply the IAP2 framework appropriately in its community engagement processes based on the activity and context of the subject and the time and resources available.

The table below identifies each of the five levels of engagement.

Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Goal				
To provide the public with balanced, succinct, and objective information to assist them in understanding the matter, 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 the final decision in the hands of the public
Commitment 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 public input influenced the decision. We will seek your feedback on drafts and proposals	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives development and provide feedback on how public 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
Examples				
Printed materials such as brochures, email, displays, website, social media, local radio	Participate (online consultation platform), printed materials, mailed surveys, feedback register	Printed materials, focus groups, interviews, workshops, field trips, Council meetings	Council Advisory Committees with specific focus, community representatives on Council committees	Mediation, negotiation, dialogue, citizen juries, deliberative polling

We will also look to introduce new and innovative ways to communicate to ensure our engagement achieves the necessary reach and level of information.

² **Source:** International Association of Public Participation (IAP2)

Community engagement principles

The following principles will guide Council's approach to community engagement:

Clear Objectives

- clearly define the objectives and scope of the community engagement process, by describing the decision to be made, taking into account relevant legislation, and making clear how the community's input will influence Council decision-making.
- ensure that all information will be captured in a succinct summary and be available to the community.
- ensure that the engagement is undertaken early enough in the decision-making process to ensure that its outcomes are considered before the decision is made.
- ensure that the community is given enough time to take part in engagement processes and provide feedback, avoiding where possible engaging only over holiday periods such as Christmas and New Year and other significant occasions.
- promote opportunities and provide reasonable support to enable a wide cross section of the people and groups affected by the matter that is the subject of community engagement to actively participate in decision-making.
- consideration will be given to the types of engagement activities being planned to ensure they are inclusive and maximise the potential for participation.

Inclusive and Diverse

- approach engagement free from bias toward any stakeholder and treat all participants in the engagement process with respect and dignity.
- provide participants in community engagement with relevant, objective, accessible and timely information and resources such as leaflets, rates notice, newspapers, *Nillumbik News*, social media, direct stakeholder engagement, stalls at community events to allow informed participation.
- be accountable, accessible and ethical in all dealings with the community in a way that is consistent with our codes of conduct and relevant laws.
- actively listen to all points of view and respect the rights of all citizens to be heard.
- be willing to amend a position if a good argument/idea has been put forward.
- recognise barriers to participation and increase opportunities by engaging in meaningful and supportive ways.

Transparent

- commit to providing participants with updates at key stages throughout the project and why certain feedback may or may not have been taken into account.
- demonstrate that all community contributions and relevant data have been considered, prior to making any decisions that affect the local community.
- report back to the community on the outcome of the community engagement and how the community's input influenced decision-making.

When we engage

Council is committed to being inclusive and transparent in its decision-making. Council will engage on matters that affect our community and where it believes that community engagement will result in a better outcome for the community and better informed decisions.

Council's engagement will generally commence as early as possible in the process. This helps to ensure our community and stakeholders can make a meaningful contribution that can help direct Council outcomes and decision-making. Engagement may occur once or multiple times, commensurate with the scope, complexity and impact of the project or decision. Opportunities to give feedback and input will be made available for 3-4 weeks.

The following are examples of the occasions when community engagement would be undertaken:

- Major strategic planning;
- Land use planning;
- Service levels/standards;
- The design of new infrastructure or facilities and renewal of existing infrastructure;
- Specific projects or programs (such as sport and recreation, community safety, tourism);
- Legislative, policy or service issues that are the responsibility of higher levels of government, but where the Council wishes to convey community views (such as issues impacting the Green Wedge, housing, education, the environment and health); and
- Where the *Local Government Act 2020* or other legislation prescribes that community consultation is required.

There may be reasons or times when engagement will not be possible these may include;

- an immediate resolution is required, such as in an emergency;
- a risk to public safety;
- technical or other expertise is required;
- an initiative involves confidential or commercial information;
- clear and defined legislative responsibilities must be met;
- developing or reviewing internal policies and procedures; and
- time frames and methodology have been predetermined by other levels of government.

Image: Healthy Active Ageing Expo March 2019



Who we engage

Council values the input of all members of our community so it is important that our engagement methods are accessible and broad reaching.

For each engagement we will identify the communities or stakeholders who are impacted and seek to engage with them to ensure we have representative feedback to guide our project or decision-making.

The community includes but is not limited to:

- traditional owners of land in Nillumbik;
- people who live, work, participate in leisure activities, visit, study, invest in, or pass through Nillumbik;
- people and bodies who are ratepayers of the Council;
- Nillumbik Council staff; and
- people and bodies who conduct activities in Nillumbik. This may include, but is not limited to: community groups, not-for-profit organisations, businesses, State and Federal Governments, other local governments and service providers.



Image: Healthy Active Ageing Expo March 2019

How we engage

In planning for community engagement, Nillumbik Shire Council will ensure that appropriate tools and methods are applied, taking into account the scope and objectives of the engagement project, the significance and complexity of the matter, the level of resourcing required and the level of impact on the community.

The key drivers of community participation are:

- Having a clear understanding of the scope and potential impact of a decision;
- The level of influence that the community can have on a decision; and
- An understanding of the outcomes made possible through participation.

Council will align with 'engagement elements' specified by the Victoria Auditor General Office³, which councils may be audited on.

1. Define

Clearly define the decision required, and the scope of the public participation exercise.

2. Identify:

Understand who is affected and how they should be included.

3. Understand

Identify the resources, skills and time required for effective participation.

4. Document

Document the public participation and management approach.

5. Implement

Implement the public participation plan and monitor its progress.

6. Evaluate

Evaluate the public participation exercise and apply continuous improvement.

Council will apply deliberative engagement practices where legislation requires it such as the long term Community Visions, 4 Year Council plans, financial management plans, Asset Management Plans and when it is suitable to the scope, complexity and impact of the project or decision.

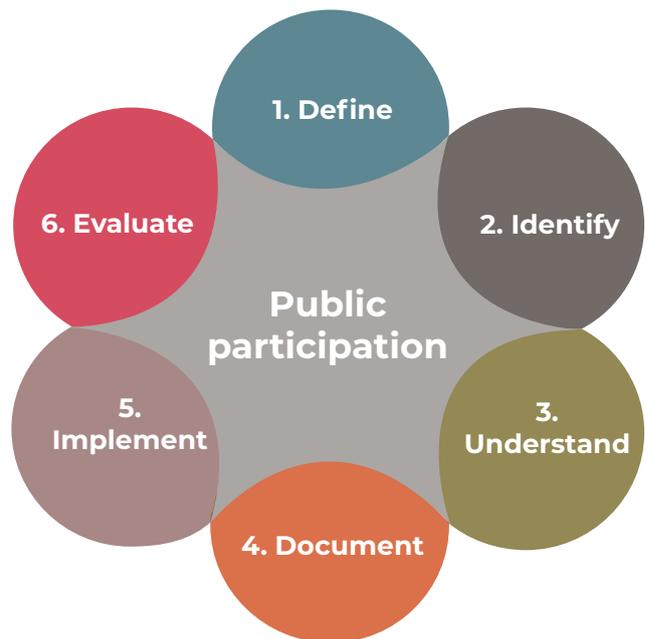


Figure 1: VAGO elements

³ Source: www.audit.vic.gov.au

Among the key features of deliberative engagement is that it must be:

- **Representative:** in the sense that it involves a representative cross-section of the community, usually selected at random – with the aim of maximising inclusion.
- **Deliberative:** allowing for extended consideration of a key question; and
- **Influential:** participants will be informed of the level of influence the community engagement process will have on Council decision-making.

We value and recognise the contribution of participants who have given up their time to provide feedback or attend engagement activities. Our community will be informed by progress updates of engagement processes underway.

Council will provide notice on the collection, use and disclosure of personal information provided within a submission.

Any data collected during the engagement process will be stored in a way that maintains privacy and meets the requirements of Information Privacy Principle 1 contained within the *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014*.

Submissions received under section 223 of the *Local Government Act 1989* until its repeal or received through a community engagement process undertaken by Council are made available for public inspection and may be published in Council business papers.



Image: Council Officer demonstrating the Community Directory to a community member - March 2019

Evaluation and Review

The evaluation activities will allow Council to meet its commitment to best practice community engagement by responding to evolving needs and expectations.

Evaluating and reviewing our engagement allows us to be both transparent and accountable. Feedback from our community provides clear data and evidence. It is also an important tool used by our Councillors to help inform their decision-making in matters before the Council. The Community Engagement Guidelines will provide guidance and transparent criteria for Evaluation and Review.

Resources and tools to support our Community Engagement Framework

Independent research

Community satisfaction and preferred methods of engagement are captured in independent research. This is based on a randomly selected sample of citizens and delivers statistically reliable results that can be compared across years and in some years across Councils.

Each year Council engages a consultancy company to undertake the Annual Community Satisfaction Survey as Council wants to know what our community thinks about a range of areas including Council's overall performance, Council's services and facilities, Planning and Housing development, Communication methods and more.

The survey assists in providing insight into how we can provide improved and effective services and facilities to our community.

The survey also assists Council in meeting annual and mandated State Government performance reporting requirements by measuring community satisfaction in a number of areas covered by the survey. We are able to compare our customer satisfaction ratings and benchmark our performance from year to year.

Our communication channels

To encourage and invite our community and stakeholders to participate in community engagement activities, we may promote the opportunities in a range of different ways.

All communication will be in line with the Nillumbik brand guide.

Some of the communications channels and tools that can be used to support our engagement activities include:

- Participate Nillumbik website, participate.nillumbik.vic.gov.au;
- Nillumbik Shire Council website, www.nillumbik.vic.gov.au;
- *Nillumbik News*;
- eNewsletters;
- Social media including Instagram, Facebook and Twitter;
- Print promotions such as letters, posters or flyers;
- Drop in sessions, site visits and open days;
- Focus groups, workshops and stakeholder briefing sessions; and
- Media promotion including media releases and/or advertising.

Resources and Training

To ensure the effective and consistent application of engagement principles, processes and behaviours, appropriate to the opportunity, a set of Community Engagement Guidelines has been developed.

These guidelines describe engagement approaches, provide guidance and set expectations for Council employees on the level of engagement and approaches we will use.

Access to expert staff to give advice on matters relating to project planning, resource allocation, communications and best practice engagement methods are also available.

Training will be provided to staff to increase understanding of our Community Engagement Framework, processes and tools, and to build capacity in order for staff to deliver sound engagement activities across the organisation.

Integrated community engagement

We have several legislative requirements to engage. Council is committed to being respectful of the community's time in our engagement activities. We will coordinate and integrate our large scale community engagement where possible in the interests of efficiency.



Figure 2: Integrated community engagement

Definitions

Accessibility Identifying and eliminating obstacles and barriers to ensure anyone can access or use places, services and information, regardless of their ability, location, culture, time, resources or other differentiating factors.

Council Can refer to Nillumbik Shire Council as an organisation as well as the Mayor, Councillors, Administrators, Council staff, Executive Management Team, consultants, and contractors working on behalf of Nillumbik Shire Council.

Community A group of people, the members of which reside in the same geographical area or have a shared background, interest, affiliation or membership.

Deliberative Engagement Describes a series of engagement practices that demonstrate all of the following features:

- Influence - Promise of influence over policy and decision-making (Involve/Collaborate/Empower using the IAP2 Levels of Engagement).
- Inclusion - Participation that is representative of the community and inclusive of diverse viewpoints and values.
- Deliberation - open dialogue and discussion, access to information and movement towards consensus.

Engagement A genuine process of working with people to build understanding, strengthen relationships and inform decisions.

Guidelines A resource developed to provide guidance for Nillumbik staff to plan and evaluate community engagement initiatives.

IAP2 The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) is an international organisation dedicated to advancing the practice of public participation.

Public Individuals who may not belong to a specific community relevant to the project, but they still have an interest in the project.

Stakeholder Individuals or organisations, which affect, or can be affected by project decisions.

VAGO Victorian Auditor General's Office

Statutory requirements

As a local government, Nillumbik Shire Council is required to meet a wide variety of legislative obligations. Many of these obligations relate to when and how engagement must occur, such as the *Local Government Act 2020*.

Nillumbik Shire Council will meet all of its legislative engagement requirements and this policy is designed to complement and support these existing requirements. Other relevant legislation includes, but is not limited to the following statutes and their associated regulations and guidelines:

- *Local Government Act 2020*
- *Equal Opportunity Act 2010*
- *Disability Act 2006*
- *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014*
- *Planning and Environment Act 1987*
- *Road Management Act 2004*
- *Multicultural Victoria Act 2011*
- *Subordinate Legislation Act 1994*
- *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008*
- *Matters subject to s.223 of the Local Government Act 1989*
- *Gender Equality Act 2020*
- *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*
- *Public Administration Act 2004*
- *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005*
- *Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (DDA)*.

Image: Nillumbik Shire Council office at Civic Drive, Greensborough



Nillumbik Shire Council

Civic Drive (PO Box 476) Greensborough Victoria 3088
9433 3111 | nillumbik@nillumbik.vic.gov.au



nillumbik.vic.gov.au