

Community engagement report

Community Engagement Policy and Framework

Purpose and scope of community engagement

The overall purpose of the community engagement was to collaborate across Council and with community representatives to codesign a policy that reflects the requirements of the *Local Government Act 2020*. The scope of community engagement was limited to the principles and types and levels of engagement applicable to the matters named in the Act.

Stages and level of influence

Stage 1 Community survey	Stage 2 Internal workshops with staff External workshops with members of advisory committees	Stage 3 Internal workshop with staff Online consultation with members of advisory committees to review draft documents
March/May 2020	May/June 2020	July 2020
Consult	Collaborate	Involve

Objectives

- Identify community values, preferences and current level of satisfaction with community engagement.
- Consult internally to establish the matters the policy will cover; the process to address any matters prescribed by regulation; and how to manage risk and compliance.
- Determine a process of accountability that 'closes the loop' between community engagement and Council decisions.
- Consult internally and externally to understand what 'deliberative engagement practices' means to different groups and when and how they should be employed.
- Determine the range of community engagement methods that will be used for different matters and scenarios.

Information and support provided to participants

A background paper provided information about the topic of engagement. Council officers provided support where needed to participants with disability, inexperience with technology or who were young.

Who we consulted

Community engagement practitioners across Council and members of the internal Advisory Committee on Community Engagement were engaged internally. To consult with representative

members of the community, 40 members were recruited from Council's advisory committees and ambassador programs.

The groups represented are:

- Disability Advisory Committee
- Environmental Advisory Committee
- Gender Equity Advisory Committee
- Monash Youth Committee
- Multicultural Advisory Committee
- Positive Ageing Reference Group
- Community Ambassadors
- Age-friendly Ambassadors
- Youth Ambassadors

Where and when and how engagement was conducted

The community survey was conducted by telephone during May 2020. Five workshops were conducted by Zoom and facilitated by MosaicLab. Three of the workshops were with members of staff and two were with members of the community. A private page on the engagement platform was utilised for community participants to provide online feedback on the draft community engagement framework.

Engagement	Method	When
Community survey	By telephone	May 2020
Internal codesign workshops	By zoom	12 May & 3 June 2020
Workshops with community participants	By zoom	9 & 16 June 2020
Sensemaking workshop with staff	By zoom	24 July 2020
Review of draft community engagement framework with community participants	Shape Monash engagement platform	17 to 28 July 2020

What we asked

Survey	Have you participated in a Monash community engagement in the last two years, excluding this survey? In what types of consultations, if any, would you be interested in participating? In what ways would you prefer to provide your views to Council?
Staff workshops	Given our current context what is important for us to keep in mind when developing our own engagement policy? Review a sample policy, and share 2 things you like / don't like and one thing we must do with our engagement policy for it to be successful. What questions do we need to put to our advisory groups to help inform the drafting of the engagement policy? What engagement aspects do we do now that need to continue? What engagement aspects do we currently do, that now need to stop? What engagement do we need to start doing given the changes to the Act? What do we need to achieve from the engagement? What resources may be required and timeframes? What stands out for you now after considering our engagement requirements for the future?
Community workshops	Future visioning activity What needs to be in the charter (promise to the public)?
Sensemaking workshop	Small groups were asked to go through the Policy or Framework and provide comments (what you like, any concerns, any opportunities, any questions, suggest word changes and why)
Community feedback on draft framework	What would you most like to see improved about community engagement in Monash? How satisfied have you been with engagements you have been part of? Do you think our proposed promise (in the community engagement policy and framework) to the public is right? What would you change? Are you satisfied with: the quality and content of the Framework? The readability of the Framework? Tell us what you like? Tell us what you would like to see improved?

What we heard

Stage 1: Community survey

The survey questions were asked of 800 people who participated in the Community Satisfaction Survey. About one in six (16%) of respondents reported they had participated in at least one type of Monash community engagement in the last two years, excluding this survey. The two most common forms of consultation in which respondents had engaged were surveys (7%) and a community meeting or workshop (6%).

Q1. Participated in a Monash community engagement in the last two years		
Response	2020	
	Number	Percent
A survey (such as this one)	57	7.1%

Q1. Participated in a Monash community engagement in the last two years		
Community meeting or workshop	51	6.3%
Made a submission or objection	27	3.4%
Council presence at an event	18	2.2%
Listening Post	4	0.5%
None, this is my first time	640	79.5%
Total responses	797	
<i>Respondents identifying at least one aspect</i>	770 (95.6%)	

Approximately half (49.3%) of respondents nominated to at least one type of consultation in which they would be interested in participating in future. Most respondents nominated two preferred types of consultations. The most common types of consultation in which respondents were potentially interested in participating were related to decisions about the natural environment (26%) and formal council plans and policies (20%) and engagement on community wellbeing (20%).

Q2. Preferred types of consultations in which to participate		
<i>Response</i>	2020	
	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Decisions about the physical environment	210	26.1%
Formal Council plans and policies	161	20.0%
Ongoing engagement on services for community wellbeing	159	19.8%
Research and evaluation of services	121	15.0%
Regulatory matters	100	12.4%
Total responses	751	
<i>Respondents identifying at least one type of consultation</i>	396 (49.3%)	

The majority of respondents nominated at least one preferred method of providing their views to Council. Surveys and online methods were preferred (noting that respondents were actually participating in a survey at the time).

Q3. Preferred ways of providing views to Council		
<i>Preferred methods</i>	2020	
	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Survey	388	48.2%
Online interaction participation	296	36.8%
Written submissions	111	13.8%
Informal conversations with staff at Listening Posts or events	102	12.7%
Workshops or meetings	91	11.3%
A panel made up of community representatives	36	4.5%
Other	12	1.5%
Total responses	1,036	
<i>Respondents identifying at least one method</i>	678 (84.2%)	

Stage 2: Community and staff workshops

Staff workshop 1

Q1. What is important for us to keep in mind when developing our own Engagement Policy?

Theme 1: Make the policy and procedures manageable (52%)		Theme 2: Demonstrate commitment and good practice (48%)	
Clarity	36%	Make sure engagement is inclusive	48%
Simple and flexible processes	36%	Build capacity and collaboration within Council	28%
Resourcing engagement	27%	Make sure engagement happens at the appropriate level and uses appropriate methods	24%

Q2. Sample policies: What do we like, dislike and what things must we do for success

Liked	Disliked	Must do for success
Clear structure	Not enough guidance	Provide reliable guidance
Genuine commitment	Too technical	Promote good practice
Design	Not user friendly for the community	Speak to community

Q3. What questions do we need to put to our advisory groups to help inform the drafting of the engagement policy?

The suggestions can be divided into the types of questions to ask or things to consider.

- Be clear and transparent about why we are engaging
- Find out if there are groups we have missed in the past
- What would you like to see from this policy?
- Discuss methods of engagement

Community workshops

Activity 1: Future visioning

The groups captured their aspirations in an activity to describe an ideal future state for how Monash meets these principles. The text outputs produced two broad themes. The first theme (60% of comments) reflects expectations of Council and is summarised as:

Council delivers community engagement in a way that is targeted and inclusive, with the resources to engage appropriately and well.

The second theme (40% of comments) reflects an engaged community:

We are well-informed and understand our level of influence. Our needs and aspirations are well understood by Council and reflected in a transparent way in the outcomes.

The broad themes are underpinned by sub-themes illustrated by visions of the future below:

Theme 1: Community expectations of Council (60%)		Theme 2: What an engaged community looks like (40%)	
Community engagement is inclusive in every way	40%	Community is well-informed	47%
Council has the time and resources to engage well	38%	Community's needs and aspirations are understood and reflected in outcomes	33%
Building engagement capacity to build community	22%	Community's level of influence understood and reported back	20%

Activity 2: What needs to be in the charter (framework)?

In this activity, participants reviewed some examples of community engagement charters and discussed what was most important to them and the communities they represent. The feedback was largely along two main themes: The charter should reflect transparency and accountability by Council (52%) and encourage participation and inclusion (48%). Examples of comments are provided below:

Transparency and accountability (52%)	Participation and inclusion (48%)
<p>Honesty, transparency and accountability as principles.</p> <p>Needs to be clear how it will be shared with the community.</p> <p>Feedback is important - needs to be visible.</p> <p>Legal rights of residents to have their say, it's in law, not just tick the box.</p> <p>How are Council going to measure themselves against this charter and rate how they are doing?</p> <p>Research and data used for evidence base to help make balanced/good decisions.</p>	<p>Diversity of community needs to be acknowledged.</p> <p>Use graphic representation of the languages, potentially an infographic by a communication expert.</p> <p>Being able to ask questions - forums, so you can keep asking questions and feedback being important.</p> <p>Communication in lots of different formats to ensure it is accessible to all.</p> <p>Presentation and sharing of all information in a way that it is usable for the public.</p>

Staff workshop 2

Q1. What engagement aspects do we do now that need to continue?

There were 16 comments summarised into two main themes: for current (non-mandated) engagement methods to continue (69%) and for engagement to continue to consider the impacts (31%).

Q2. What engagement aspects do we currently do, that now need to stop?

Eighteen comments were summarised into two main themes: to stop poor engagement practices (61%) and stop being project/operations focussed (39%).

Q3. What engagement do we need to start doing, given the changes to the Act?

Start to strengthen engagement processes (64%)		Integrate engagement planning (36%)	
Improve engagement methods	33%	Have regard for the existing planning framework	53%
Provide more information	30%	Staff development	27%
Improve participation	22%	Clear engagement framework	20%
Improve the use of data	15%		

Q4. What do we need to achieve from engagement?

Cultural change on engagement is managed (62%)		Engagement is practical and realistic (38%)	
Provide leadership and transparency	61%	Gather the information that is needed	64%
Support cultural change	22%	Community engagement and promises are contained	36%
Community has a greater understanding of their influence	17%		

Q5. What resources may be required and timeframes?

Sixteen responses on resources required were themed into three main categories: specialist skills (38%), time for planning, implementation and evaluation (38%), and supporting community participation (24%).

Q6. What stands out for you now after considering our engagement requirements for the future?

There were 31 comments that were broadly along separate themes of policy- use this opportunity for change (61%) and procedure – We need a consistent, ongoing approach (39%). The comments are further broken down into subthemes by the proportion of responses under each of the two main themes.

Stage 3: Review of draft documents

Community workshop participants were asked a few general questions about community engagement and asked to review the draft Framework document. Only four participants responded to this final stage of engagement. The responses were as follows:

What would you most like to see improved about community engagement in Monash?

Aspect	Number of responses
Accessibility options	1
Diversity of participants	2
Options for how to engage	0
Cultural consideration	3
Clarity of purpose for the engagement	2
Clarity of what the community could influence	3
Appropriateness of venue / time / day	1
Quality of facilitation	2
Timeliness of information	1

Quality of information	2
Reporting back to the community on the feedback and outcomes	2
Understanding how your feedback was used	3
Feeling that your time as a participant was valued	2

How satisfied have you been with engagements you have been part of?

Very = 1

Mostly = 3

Do you think our proposed promise (in the community engagement policy and framework) to the public is right?

Yes = 3

Mostly = 1

Are you satisfied with the quality and content of the Framework?

Yes = 3

Mostly = 1

Are you satisfied with the readability of the Framework?

Yes = 2

Neutral = 2

Tell us what you like?

- I like how the [council] seeks participants who are affected from specific groups and gathers their opinions

Tell us what you would like to see improved?

- I would like to see all communications delivered in plain English particularly for those from non-English speaking backgrounds who do not understand the jargon/modern language used in many situations.
- Identifying the purpose for participating and engaging with the community

Staff and community feedback on the draft documents was collated and changes made where appropriate.

Our Response

The staff workshops recommended that the policy needs to provide unambiguous decision-making guidance on selecting the appropriate level of engagement. There were also recommendations for the policy to provide practical guidance on planning, implementing and following up on engagement – a toolkit to ensure good practice with genuine inclusion of diverse communities. There was also a recommendation that the policy should demonstrate to the community that it is their policy too because they contributed to it, therefore it should reflect what was said and be easily accessible and understood.

The response to this feedback was to create two separate documents, a policy that would provide the guidance needed to staff and a framework that would provide the community with a clear comprehension of how we intend to conduct community engagement and that is reflective of the community's expectations.

The feedback from the community workshops was for Council to demonstrate its intention to include diverse groups; by building capacity in the community to engage with Council; and providing enough information, including the level of influence to expect, time, and choice of methods to encourage participation. They also want to see Council accounting for the way results of their participation influence Council decisions, by being transparent with the decision process and closing the loop with participants by reporting back to them and evaluating and improving their outcomes.

The response to this feedback was to ensure these expectations were included in the intentional wording in the principles and community engagement planning steps.

The final stage of engagement helped to familiarise staff and community representatives with the proposed documents and brought about some minor wording changes to add clarity

Evaluation

How closely did we meet the objectives?	Most of the objectives were met. The objective 'Consult internally and externally to understand what 'deliberative engagement practices' means to different groups and when and how they should be employed' was achieved internally only. It was decided that 'deliberative engagement practices' is relevant to community engagement practitioners determining the appropriate level of engagement. The policy and framework provide only a high level definition and guidance for 'deliberative engagement' with the detail to be provided in the Guidelines
How many people participated in the community engagement?	The stage 1 survey interviewed 800 respondents, and there were 40 staff participants and 40 community participants that took part in the workshops.
How do these participants know their views have been listened to?	Reports were sent to participants after each of the two staff workshops and one report was sent to all community members who participated in the two community workshops.
Which communities were represented and how did this engagement helped to build relationships with these communities?	There was diverse representation with participation from each of Council's advisory and ambassador groups.

<p>Did we obtain all the data we needed to inform this report?</p>	<p>There was sufficient quantitative data from the survey to indicate willingness to participate and preferred methods. There was a large amount of qualitative data recorded from the workshops that informed the policy and framework.</p>
<p>What are the learnings for future engagement?</p>	<p>All engagement was undertaken during the pandemic which meant face to face engagement was not possible. Online alternatives worked well on the most part but the two-way feedback process had challenges for members of the community that are not experienced with online communication.</p>