

Community Engagement Framework
Shire of Donnybrook Balingup

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Introduction

Purpose & Scope

The Community Engagement Framework has been developed to provide a clear and consistent approach to engaging with the community across the Shire of Donnybrook Balingup. It sets out the principles, processes, and tools that will guide Elected Members and Shire staff in all departments in planning, delivering, and evaluating engagement activities, from localised projects to large-scale strategic planning. This will ensure that all engagement is conducted in an inclusive, transparent, and coordinated manner consistent with the Council Plan.

Accessibility

The Shire is committed to ensuring that people with disabilities have the same opportunities as others to participate in public consultations. This commitment extends across the full engagement process—from planning and promotion to delivery and feedback. This includes:

- Provide accessible formats and channels for engagement materials, including easy-read summaries, large-print documents, plain-language content, online formats compatible with screen readers, and alternative communication methods where required.
- Ensure physical accessibility of engagement venues by selecting locations that are wheelchair accessible, close to accessible parking and public transport options, and equipped with appropriate facilities such as accessible toilets and hearing-assistance technology.
- Offer reasonable adjustments to meet individual needs, including assistive listening devices, alternative meeting formats (online/phone), and opportunities for one-on-one conversations where group settings may be a barrier.
- Plan engagement activities proactively, allowing sufficient notification time and ensuring methods do not disadvantage people with disabilities, carers, or support workers.
- Embed continuous improvement, seeking feedback from people with lived experience of disability and disability-advocacy organisations to refine engagement approaches and remove barriers.

- Promote inclusive participation, ensuring that communication materials clearly state that accessibility supports are available and encouraging community members to request any additional assistance required.

This approach aligns with the Shire’s Disability Access and Inclusion Plan (DAIP) and reflects our commitment to creating a community where everyone can contribute to shaping local decision-making.

Legislative & Policy Context

Community engagement within the Shire is guided by the following legislation, ensuring that processes are transparent, accountable, and respectful of community rights.

- *Local Government Act 1995 (WA)*
- *Planning and Development Act 2005 (WA)*
- *Disability Services Act 1993 (WA)*
- *Dog Act 1976 (WA)*
- *Privacy Act 1988 (Cth)*

This Framework is aligned with the Shire’s internal policies, communication protocols, and social media guidelines. It also integrates with key strategic and corporate documents to ensure a consistent, whole-of-organisation approach to community engagement. These include:

- Strategic Community Plan
- Code of Conduct
- Organisational Values
- Customer Service Charter
- Risk Management Framework
- Disability Access & Inclusion Plan
- Corporate Branding Style Guide

Other standards are further defined in the following essential resources.

- IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation
- WA Public Sector Commission – Good Practice Guide for Stakeholder Engagement
- Guide to Best Practice Planning Engagement in Western Australia

Framework

Principles of Engagement

- **Inclusiveness** All community members have a fair opportunity to participate
- **Transparency** Engagement processes are open, and decisions are explained
- **Respect** Diverse views are valued and treated with respect
- **Timeliness** Engagement occurs early enough to influence decisions
- **Accountability** The Shire closes the loop and reports back on outcomes
- **Improvement** Engagement practices are reviewed and improved over time

Closing the Loop

Closing the loop with Elected Members ensures Councillors are fully informed of engagement outcomes before making decisions. This involves providing a transparent and representative summary of what the community said, how feedback has shaped recommendations, and what is or is not feasible to implement. It supports Elected Members in fulfilling their statutory decision-making responsibilities and strengthens the quality and accountability of Council decisions, reinforcing community confidence in the decision-making process.

Closing the loop with the community, on the other hand, takes place after decisions are made and focuses on honouring participants' contributions by explaining what was heard, how their feedback influenced the outcome, and why specific suggestions could not be adopted. This step maintains trust, demonstrates transparency, and encourages ongoing participation in future engagement activities.

Together, these two components ensure both the decision-makers and the community remain informed, respected, and connected throughout the engagement process.

Evaluation & Continuous Improvement

Evaluation is a vital part of the engagement process and helps ensure the Shire continues to improve its engagement with the community. Evaluation concentrates on the quality and trustworthiness of engagement, the extent to which community and stakeholder voices are heard, and how community feedback shapes decision-making.

To support consistent evaluation across the organisation, the Shire will:

Assess effectiveness – reviewing whether the engagement approach was appropriate for the project and aligned with the Framework's principles.

Review reach and representation – considering whether feedback reflected a broad cross-section of the community, rather than a narrow or vocal group.

Analyse influence – identifying how community input shaped recommendations, project direction or decisions.

Capture learnings – documenting lessons that can improve future engagement planning, methods and communication.

These evaluation elements link directly to the Framework’s Principles of **Transparency, Accountability, and Improvement**, and support the Engagement Process by ensuring that every project contributes to organisational learning.

The Community Engagement Framework will be reviewed every **three years**, or earlier if required, to ensure it remains current with legislation, policy and community expectations. Insights from project evaluations will inform updates and guide continuous improvement across the Shire’s engagement practice.

Roles & Responsibilities in Community Engagement

Successful community engagement relies on clear roles and responsibilities across Council and the Shire Administration – each group plays an essential role in ensuring engagement is genuine, transparent, and effective.

Council (Elected Members)

- Provide overall leadership and demonstrate commitment to community engagement, championing transparency and accountability.
- Listen to community views and incorporate these perspectives into decision-making, ensuring that decisions reflect both strategic priorities and community aspirations.
- Participate in engagement activities where suitable, such as community forums and/or reference groups.

Executive Staff (CEO & Directors)

- Foster an organisational culture that embodies the principles of engagement.
- Ensure that engagement practices are compliant and align with the appropriate legislation, policies and framework.
- Allocate resources (staff, budget, time, etc.) to enable effective engagement.

- Support all staff in planning and evaluating engagement activities.

Leadership Staff (Department & Team Managers, Supervisors, etc.)

- Integrate community engagement into project planning and service delivery, as well as ensuring these processes are reviewed and improved upon regularly.
- Approve engagement plans, ensuring they are realistic and well-resourced.
- Guide staff on applying the Framework and Toolkit.
- Ensure that outcomes of engagement are reported and considered in decision-making.

Shire Staff (Project Officers, Coordinators, Support Staff, etc.)

- Use the Framework and Toolkit when planning and delivering engagement.
- Identify stakeholders, select appropriate engagement methods, and manage risks.
- Communicate clearly and respectfully with community members.
- Record feedback accurately and contribute to the evaluation and reporting process.

Community Members & External Stakeholders

- Participate in engagement opportunities in good faith.
- Share local knowledge, ideas, aspirations, and concerns.
- Respect the views of others and contribute to constructive dialogue.
- Recognise that not all feedback can be implemented, but all contributions are valued and considered.

The Engagement Process

The engagement process is presented as a series of precise steps that promote a consistent approach across all projects. It is designed to provide support when planning and delivering effective community engagement projects, regardless of prior experience.

Step 1 — PLAN

- **Prepare Early** – Start engagement planning at the same time as project planning. Allow enough time for meaningful input, especially if Council decisions must meet statutory deadlines.
- **Define the Purpose** – Be clear about why you are engaging the community. Identify what is negotiable and what is fixed.
 - *Toolkit Suggestion: Engagement Plan Template*
- **Assess the Level of Impact** – Consider how significant the decision or project is for the community.
 - *Toolkit Suggestion: Impact Assessment Tool*
- **Identify Stakeholders** – List all groups and individuals who may be affected or have an interest.
 - *Toolkit Suggestion: Stakeholder Matrix and Stakeholder Groups Checklist*

Step 2 — DESIGN

- **Determine the Level of Engagement** – Ensure expectations are realistic and match the resources available.
 - *Toolkit Suggestion: Decide where the project sits on the IAP2 Spectrum (Inform, Consult, Involve, Collaborate, Empower)*
- **Plan Resources and Timing** – Identify the staff, budget, and time required. Ensure accessibility and inclusivity are built in from the start.
 - *Toolkit Suggestion: Timing Planner and Communications Brief templates*
- **Identify and Develop Engagement Methods** – Select methods appropriate to the audience, purpose, and resources (e.g. survey, workshop, pop-up, online forum).
 - *Toolkit Suggestion: Engagement Methods Matrix*

Step 3 — DELIVER

- **Deliver Engagement Activities** – Implement the methods selected and developed during the Design step. Provide clear, accessible, and timely information to the community.
 - **Toolkit Suggestion:** *Survey Development Guide & Communications Channels Guide*
- **Embody Principles of Engagement** – Treat all participants respectfully and consistently. Keep records of all responses received.
 - **Toolkit Suggestion:** *Accessible Checklist*

Step 4 — EVALUATE

- **Analyse and Report Feedback** – Gather input through surveys, workshops, submissions, or conversations. Collate responses by identifying themes and consider the reliability and representativeness of feedback.
 - **Toolkit Suggestions:** *Templates and Forms for Feedback, Workshop Notes, etc*
- **Evaluate and Improve** – Reflect on both the process and the value of feedback. Document lessons learned to support continuous improvement and share them with colleagues to strengthen future engagement.
 - **Toolkit Suggestion:** *Evaluation Checklist and Lessons Learned Template*

Step 5 — CLOSE THE LOOP

- **Report Engagement Outcomes to Council** – Ensure that Elected Members are fully briefed on results from engagement activities, highlighting how feedback has influenced recommendations. Explain both what is and is not possible to implement.
 - **Toolkit Suggestion:** *Engagement Report Template*
- **Report Back to the Community** – Share what was heard and lessons learned, advising how this influenced decisions. If feedback cannot be actioned, acknowledge it, explain why, and offer alternatives where possible.
 - **Toolkit Suggestion:** *“You Said, We Did” summary*

Overcoming Challenges in Community Engagement

While community engagement creates opportunities for better decision-making, it also comes with challenges. Recognising these challenges early and planning for them helps ensure that engagement is fair, inclusive, and productive.

Challenge: Hard-to-Reach Groups

Some groups – such as young people, older residents, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, and/or people with disabilities – may not engage through traditional methods. This can be addressed or mitigated by:

- Using varied access methods such as school visits, youth forums, translated materials, etc.
- Offering multiple ways to participate (online, in person, written).
- Using sampling techniques to capture responses from these sectors of the community.
- Partnering with community organisations that are already working with these groups.

Challenge: Over-representation of Certain Voices

Sometimes, a small but vocal group dominates the feedback, distorting the results. This can be addressed or minimised by:

- Actively seeking a balance of perspectives.
- Using representative methods such as surveys to capture a broader range of views.
- Being transparent about how feedback is weighted.

Challenge: Unrealistic Expectations

Community members may expect that their feedback will automatically determine the outcome. This can be addressed or mitigated by:

- Being clear from the outset about what is negotiable and what is fixed.

- Outlining the decision-making process, including our responsibilities under legislation.
- Explaining how feedback was used and why some suggestions were not adopted when closing the loop.

Challenge: Consultation Fatigue

If the community is asked for feedback too often, participation can decline. This can be mitigated by:

- Coordinating engagement activities across departments to avoid duplication.
- Combining consultations where possible (e.g. multiple projects into one survey).
- Focusing on the quality of engagement, as opposed to the quantity of responses.

Challenge: Trust & Credibility

Some community members may feel their views will not be taken seriously. This can be addressed or mitigated by:

- Demonstrating follow-through by reporting back (“You Said, We Did”).
- Involving respected community leaders or independent facilitators.
- Building relationships over time, not just for single projects.

Challenge: Resource Constraints

Time, staff capacity, or budget may limit what engagement can be done. This can be addressed or mitigated by:

- Matching the level of engagement to the scale of the project, ensuring this is managed from the early stages of both project development and engagement preparation.
- Sharing resources across departments where possible.
- Using the Impact Assessment Tool from the Community Engagement Toolkit (and other appropriate resources) to determine when a full engagement plan is required.

Moving Forward: Linking the Framework & Toolkit

This Community Engagement Framework sets out how the Shire approaches engagement with its community. It details our commitment, principles, responsibilities, and the step-by-step process to ensure engagement is consistent, transparent, and inclusive.

To support staff in applying this Framework, the Toolkit has been developed as a companion document. The Framework explains in greater detail how to design and deliver engagement activities, while the Toolkit provides practical resources such as templates, checklists, and matrices that staff can adapt to their projects.

Together, this creates a complete Framework package that supports a whole-of-organisation approach to engagement. This ensures that every department, regardless of size or function, has the confidence and tools to engage meaningfully with the community.

By following these documents, Council can continue to strengthen relationships, build trust, and ensure that the values and aspirations inform decisions of the people of the Shire of Donnybrook Balingup.