

Community

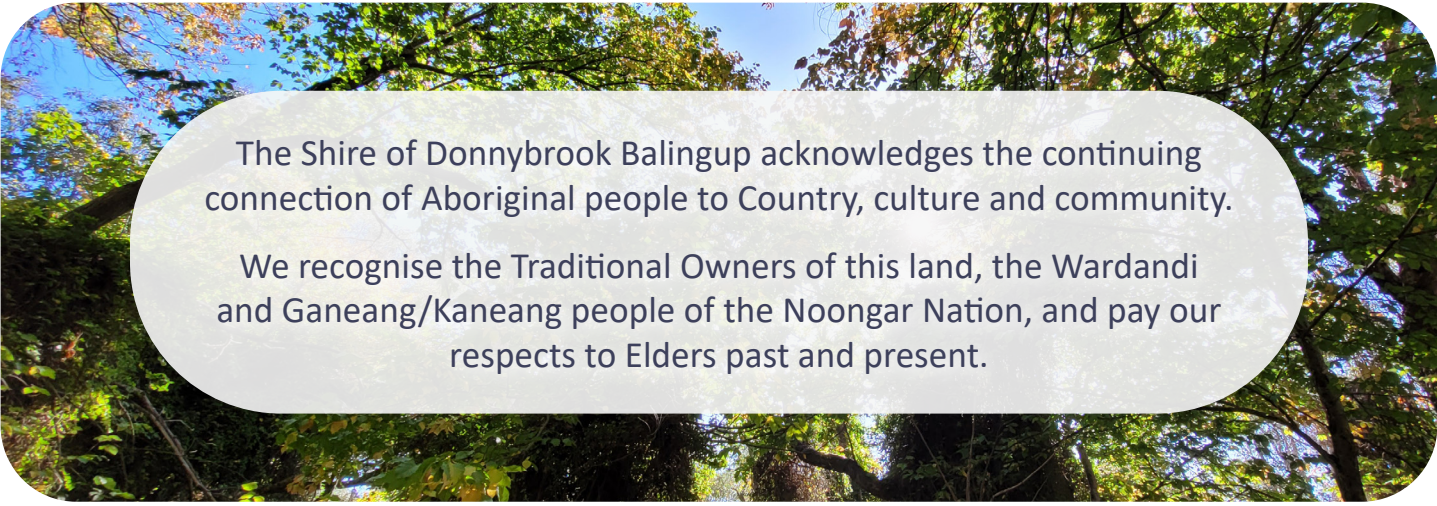
Engagement

Framework

2026



Shire of
Donnybrook Balingup



The Shire of Donnybrook Balingup acknowledges the continuing connection of Aboriginal people to Country, culture and community.

We recognise the Traditional Owners of this land, the Wardandi and Ganeang/Kaneang people of the Noongar Nation, and pay our respects to Elders past and present.

Contents	#
Introduction	3
Purpose & Scope	3
Principles of Engagement	3
Accessibility	4
Closing the Loop	5
Evaluation & Continuous Improvement	6
Roles & Responsibilities in Community Engagement	7
Council	7
Executive Staff	7
Leadership Staff	7
Shire Staff	7
Shared Responsibility – Closing the Loop	8
Community Members & External Stakeholders (you)	8
The Engagement Process	9
Step 1 — PLAN	9
Step 2 — DESIGN	10
Step 3 — DELIVER	11
Step 4 — EVALUATE	11
Step 5 — CLOSE THE LOOP	12
Overcoming Challenges in Community Engagement	13
Challenge: Stakeholders who are hard to reach	13
Challenge: Louder voices don't always represent the whole community	13
Challenge: Expectations vs. Reality	13
Challenge: Balancing engagement demand – consultation fatigue	14
Challenge: Building community trust and confidence	14
Challenge: Resource constraints and other limitations	14
Moving Forward: Linking the Framework & Toolkit	15
Legislative & Policy Context	15
Appendix – Version Control	15

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 Councillors and Shire staff in all departments will refer to 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.

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

Accessibility

Accessibility in community engagement extends beyond physical access and includes digital accessibility, clarity of communication, and the provision of non-digital participation options. The Shire will seek to ensure engagement activities are accessible to a broad range of community members, including those with limited digital access or capability, through the use of multiple engagement channels and clear, user-friendly communication. This applies across the full engagement process, from planning and promotion to delivery and feedback.

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

To this aim, the Shire will:



Provide a variety of options for engagement materials, prioritising accessible formats and channels such as easy-read summaries, large-print documents, plain-language content, and online formats compatible with screen readers. We will also seek further additional or appropriate alternative communication methods where necessary.



Ensure physical accessibility of engagement venues by selecting locations that follow universal accessibility standards, are close to accessible parking and public transport options, and are equipped with appropriate facilities such as accessible toilets, hearing-assistance technology, and presentation devices for visual aids.



Offer reasonable adjustments to meet individual needs where possible, including assistive listening devices, alternative meeting formats (online or via phone call), and opportunities for direct one-on-one conversations where group settings may not be suitable.



Plan engagement activities proactively, allowing sufficient notification time and ensuring the methods used don't present a disadvantage or other significant barriers to people with disabilities, carers/support workers, and the broader community.



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, with engagement materials clearly stating that accessibility supports are available and encouraging people to request or discuss any additional assistance they may need.

Closing the Loop

Closing the Loop ensures that both Elected Members and the community can clearly see how engagement has informed decision-making. It's also a core expression of the Shire's engagement principles in practice, particularly transparency, accountability, and respect. This step is critical to building trust and reinforcing the value of participation by ensuring that community members can see how their input has been heard, considered, and used to inform decisions.

Closing the Loop means clearly communicating:

- What the community said
- How feedback was considered in decision-making
- What will happen as a result
- Why some suggestions may not be feasible

This applies to both the community and Elected Members. The community should understand how their contributions shaped outcomes, while Elected Members must be equipped with a clear and balanced understanding of community perspectives before making decisions.

Closing the Loop also isn't a single action completed at the end of a project – it should occur at key points throughout the engagement process, particularly:

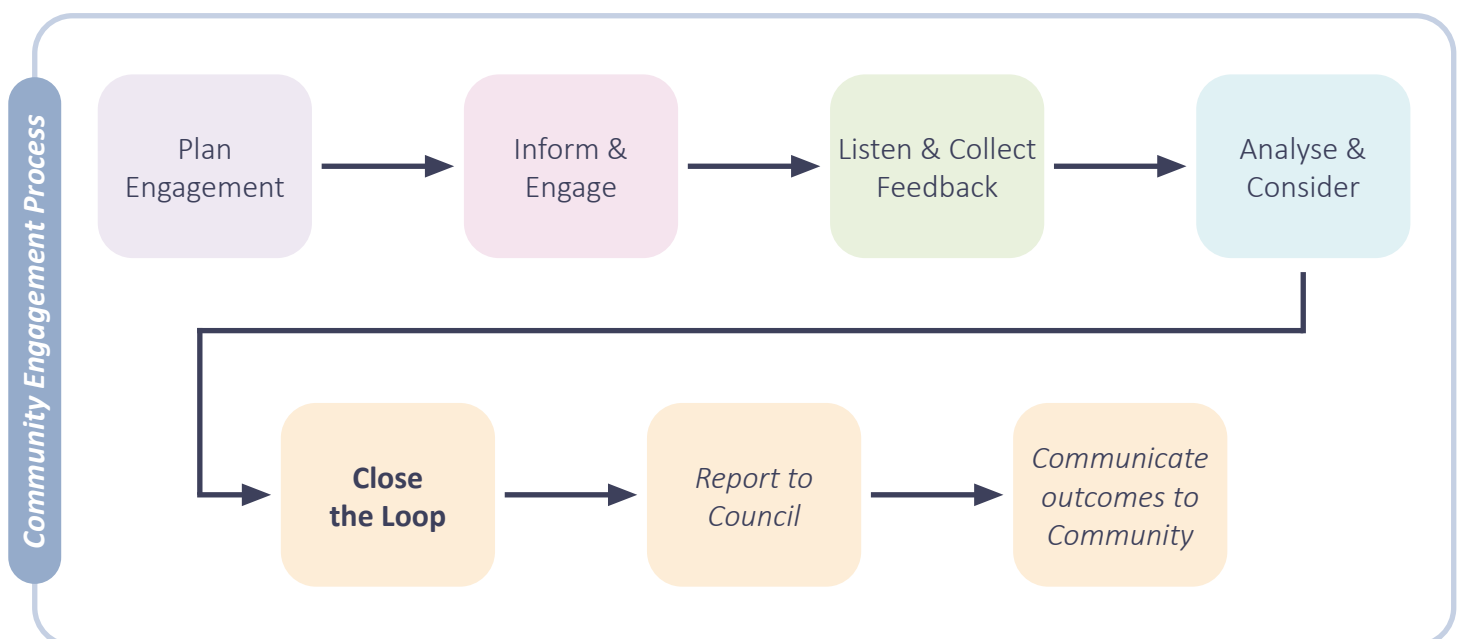
Before decisions are made, through reporting to Council

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After decisions are made, through communication back to the community

A consistent and transparent approach to Closing the Loop strengthens community confidence, supports informed decision-making, and encourages ongoing participation in future engagement activities.

Closing the Loop forms part of a broader engagement process, supported by practical tools and templates [★] to ensure consistent application across all projects.



Guidance on how Closing the Loop is implemented in practice is provided in the Engagement Process (Step 5) and supporting Toolkit resources.

Evaluation & Continuous Improvement

Evaluation is a vital part of the engagement process and helps ensure the Shire continues to improve how we connect with the community. By reflecting on the overall process, we can better understand the quality and trustworthiness of the feedback, 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

We will review whether the approach used was appropriate for the item, topic or project, and how it aligned with the Framework's principles.

Capture learnings

We will document lessons learned to improve future communications, engagement planning, methods and activities.

Analyse influence

We will identify how community input shaped recommendations, project direction or decisions, balancing the themes raised through engagement alongside the priorities and aspirations outlined in the Council Plan.

Review reach & representation

We will consider whether feedback reflected a broad cross-section of the community, or if more responses were received from a niche group.

Through these actions, the Shire remains committed to the principles of this Framework, prioritising transparency, accountability, and continuous improvement. This also supports the overall Engagement Process by ensuring that every project contributes to organisational learning.

The Community Engagement Framework will be reviewed regularly 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.

All staff, regardless of role, are responsible for applying the Community Engagement Framework and upholding its principles in their day-to-day work. This includes a shared commitment to transparency, accountability, inclusiveness, and respect.

Leadership positions have an additional responsibility to ensure these principles are consistently applied across teams, embedded in decision-making, and supported through appropriate planning, resourcing, and oversight.

Council

Elected Members



What we will do – our priorities

- 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.

How we will do it – our commitment

- Participate in engagement activities where suitable, such as community forums and/or reference groups.

Executive Staff

CEO & Directors



What we will do – our priorities

- 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.

How we will do it – our commitment

- 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.



What we will do – our priorities

- Integrate community engagement into project planning and service delivery, ensure these processes are reviewed and improved.
- Approve engagement plans, ensuring they are realistic, well-resourced, and align with the Framework principles.

How we will do it – our commitment

- Guide staff on applying the Framework and Toolkit.
- Ensure that outcomes of engagement are consistently reported and appropriately considered in decision-making processes across all projects.

Shire Staff

Project Officers, Coordinators, Support Staff, etc.



What we will do – our priorities

- Use the Framework and Toolkit when planning and delivering engagement.
- Identify stakeholders, select appropriate engagement methods, and manage risks while ensuring the Framework principles are consistently embedded from planning to delivery of relevant activities.

How we will do it – our commitment

- Record feedback accurately, contribute to the evaluation and reporting process, through to Closing the Loop.
- Communicate clearly and respectfully with community members.

Shared Responsibility – Closing the Loop

Closing the Loop is a shared responsibility across all levels of Council and the Shire Administration. From planning and delivery through to decision-making and communication, all roles contribute to ensuring that community feedback is accurately captured, meaningfully considered, and clearly communicated. This collective approach supports transparency, accountability, and trust in the engagement process.



Community Members & External Stakeholders (you)

What you contribute – *your role*

Community engagement relies on constructive participation from a broad cross-section of the community. By sharing your views, local knowledge, and experiences, you help Council understand community priorities and inform balanced, evidence-based decisions. Your involvement contributes to:

- ★ Better-informed projects, services, and strategies
- ★ Consideration of a range of community perspectives
- ★ Outcomes that reflect both community input and broader Shire responsibilities

How you can contribute – *your commitment*

- ✓ Take part in engagement activities in a genuine and respectful way
- ✓ Share your views clearly and, where possible, offer ideas or solutions
- ✓ Respect that others may have different opinions
- ✓ Read the information provided to understand the purpose and limits of the project
- ✓ Understand that Council must consider rules, budgets, and long-term plans when making decisions
- ✓ Be aware that all feedback is considered, but not every idea can be actioned

The Engagement Process

While community engagement can be done in many ways, the following steps promote a consistent approach across all projects and activities undertaken by the Shire. It establishes a minimum standard for community engagement while allowing flexibility to respond and adapt to the scope, scale, and context of each situation.

This process is designed to support effective community engagement from early concepts and project planning through to key milestones and final outcomes, regardless of prior experience.

Step 1

PLAN

Prepare Early

Start engagement planning at the same time as project planning. Follow this Engagement Process when planning engagement activities, adapting throughout each step as needed to suit the scale and complexity of the project.

Important: 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 ensuring all townsites and localities are considered in engagement planning. Aim to make use of local channels such as community groups, events or place-based engagement.

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 → website updates, social media, notices
- Consult → surveys, submissions, pop-ups
- Involve → workshops, focus groups
- Collaborate → working groups, co-design sessions

Plan Resources and Timing

Identify the staff, budget, and time required. Ensure accessibility and inclusivity are built in from the start.

Accessibility may include:

- non-digital options (paper, phone, face-to-face)
- mobile accessibility
- plain language and layout

Toolkit Suggestions: Timing Planner, Communications Brief templates

Remember:

Digital methods are not the only engagement method, plan realistic response timeframes to suit the method.

Identify and Develop Engagement Methods

Select methods appropriate to the audience, purpose and resources, ensuring that a range of accessible options are considered, including non-digital methods where appropriate.

Examples of alternative methods to use for effective engagement include surveys, pop-up workshops, and online forums

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 Suggestions: Survey Development Guide, Communications Channels Guide

Embody Principles of Engagement

Treat all participants respectfully and consistently. Keep records of all responses received.

Toolkit Suggestion: Accessibility 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: Feedback forms + templates, Workshop Notes

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, Lessons Learned Template



Step 5

CLOSE THE LOOP

Report Engagement Outcomes to Council

Shire Officers will 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 community feedback influenced decisions.

Ensure to communicate outcomes in a timely manner with consideration to accessibility, including summary formats such as “You Said, We Did.”

Toolkit Suggestion: “You Said, We Did” summary

If feedback cannot be actioned, acknowledge it, explain why, and offer alternatives where possible.

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: Stakeholders who are hard to reach

Some groups may not often participate in community engagement through traditional or default methods – this challenge often occurs when communicating with young people, older residents, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, and/or people with disabilities.

This can be addressed or mitigated by:

- Using varied access methods such as in-person visits to key locations (schools, community hubs), public forums, translated materials, etc.
- Offering multiple ways to participate, including online, verbal, in person or written.
- Using alternative sampling techniques to capture responses from these particular sectors of the community.
- Partnering with community organisations or reference groups that are already connected with these groups.

Challenge: Louder voices don't always represent the whole community

While all feedback is welcome, the responses may not always represent the views or needs of the broader community. A common example of this is when there is a small but vocal group that dominates the feedback, which can distort the results.

This can be addressed or mitigated 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: Expectations vs. Reality

Community members often hope to see change happen quickly and without constraints. As a result, some participants may expect that their individual feedback will directly determine the outcome of a project.

In practice, decisions are shaped by a wide range of factors – this includes broader community input, available resources, legislative requirements, and long-term strategic priorities. As a result, a gap between expectations and what can realistically be delivered can occur.

This can be addressed or mitigated by:

- Being clear from the very beginning 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:

Balancing engagement demand – consultation fatigue

When people are asked for feedback too often, they may lose interest or feel overwhelmed. While ongoing engagement is important, frequent or uncoordinated requests can reduce participation and make it harder to sustain community interest – this is especially relevant when engagement activities are not clearly connected to outcomes.

This can be addressed or 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:

Building community trust and confidence

Some community members may feel their feedback will not influence decisions, particularly when outcomes are not clearly communicated or the link between input and decisions is not visible. This can reduce trust in engagement processes and willingness to participate over time.

This can be addressed or mitigated by:

- Demonstrating follow-through by reporting back clearly and consistently (e.g. “You Said, We Did”)
- Explaining how decisions were made, including where feedback could not be implemented and why
- Involving respected community leaders or independent facilitators where appropriate
- Building relationships over time, not just for single projects

Challenge:

Resource constraints and other limitations

Certain constraints may limit what engagement can be done and how effective it is. Examples include time, staff capacity, budget restrictions (especially if a project relies on funding from an external source such as grants and sponsorships), or legislative requirements.

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 Framework sets the foundation for how the Shire approaches community engagement, supported by a practical Toolkit to assist staff in applying it consistently.

The Toolkit complements the Framework by providing templates, checklists, and resources that can be adapted to suit different projects. Together, they support a flexible, whole-of-organisation approach to engagement, ensuring all departments have the guidance and tools needed to engage effectively. By applying this Framework and Toolkit, the Shire can strengthen relationships with the community, build trust through transparent processes, and support decisions that reflect community values alongside broader responsibilities.

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 closely with key strategic and corporate documents to ensure a consistent, whole-of-organisation approach to community engagement. These include:

- Council Plan
- Code of Conduct and Organisational Values
- Customer Service Charter
- Risk Management Framework
- Disability Access & Inclusion Plan (DAIP)
- Corporate Branding

Other standards are further defined in the following essential resources:

- International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) – Spectrum of Public Participation
 - WA Public Sector Commission – Good Practice Guide for Stakeholder Engagement
 - Guide to Best Practice Planning Engagement in Western Australia
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Appendix – Version Control

Updates coming soon