Engagement Policy
2015 - 2018
Adopted 30 November 2015

City of Stonnington

PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to set a best practice framework to stakeholder engagement for an external and internal audience.

INTRODUCTION

The City of Stonnington is committed to engaging and considers this to be an important part of Council's business. The Community Engagement Policy formalises Council's commitment to actively engage stakeholders in the decision making processes of Council.

Engagement can enhance democratic processes by increasing the likelihood of decisions being reflective of broader needs and aspirations as well as being understood and supported.

This policy has been prepared to provide clarity, direction, consistency and structure to Council's efforts and focus on engagement.

SCOPE

The Policy has equal application to both internal stakeholders (i.e. staff and Councillors) and external stakeholders (i.e. the wider community, residents, special interest groups, organisations and businesses, government).

All City of Stonnington Councillors, staff and contractors implementing engagement shall be required to do so in the context of this policy.

The scope of this policy is structured around four key steps of Plan, Do, Use and Review, and is underpinned by the IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum (International Association for Public Participation) of Inform, Consult, Involve, Collaborate and Empower.

The triggers for considering engagement are:

- Where the community/organisation will be impacted by the project or decision.
- Where the community/organisation input can improve a project or decision.
- To identify community/organisation needs and issues.
- When required by law.
- To inform a review of a service, project or activity,
- To support continuous improvement.

METHODOLOGY

The development of the Engagement Policy 2015-2018 is the result of a collaborative process between Corporate and Community Planning, Council staff, and an external consultant. The process has involved:

- Evaluating the Consultation Strategy 2004.
- Reviewing Statewide, National and International standards and practices.
- Consulting Council Staff through workshops and meetings.
- Reviewing community feedback in relation to engagement.
- Presenting this Policy to Council for adoption.

POLICY STATEMENT

The City of Stonnington is committed to best practice engagement as an essential part of good governance and acknowledges the role of stakeholders in achieving the City of Stonnington's vision for the city.

POLICY COMMITMENTS

The City of Stonnington will undertake engagement under four key steps of Plan, Do, Use and Review. In line with these steps, the City of Stonnington commits to the following principles:

Connectedness
Engaging whereby a sense of belonging, identity and democracy is created and promoted.

Integrity
Determining the need for engagement, planning for an appropriate level and being transparent in the scope, purpose and outcomes.

Inclusion and respect
Providing universal access and real opportunity for all stakeholders and for all others interested, ensuring each has equal opportunity to participate.
Being mindful of extended holiday breaks such as school holidays, Christmas and New Year.

Reliability
Providing information that is accurate, reliable, easy-to-understand, user-friendly and in a range of formats.
Providing feedback on stakeholder comments or views and on how the information is used.

Timeliness
Undertaking timely engagement that is responsive to the needs of stakeholders and at appropriate stages of each project and decision-making. Unless legislatively required, external engagement will provide the following, excluding mailing time:
   - A minimum of two weeks to notify of a meeting or event.
   - A minimum of three weeks for the engagement period.

Council's commitment to engagement is reinforced in the Council Plan 2013-17 strategy and budget activities.

Benefits of engagement

The engagement framework leads to sound and robust engagement providing the following benefits:

- Meeting stakeholder needs
- Improved services
- Responsiveness
- Providing leadership
- Improved health and wellbeing
- Awareness
- Participation
- Inclusion and connectedness

- Decisions based on needs, aspirations and expectations
- Understanding and ownership of decisions
- Reduced delays
- Improved trust and partnership
- Fit for purpose processes
- Fit for purpose outcomes
- Meeting legislative and essential service requirements

ENGAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

The following sets out how Council will undertake engagement.

The framework shows that in undertaking engagement, the key steps are Plan, Do, Use and Review. It is within the steps of Plan and Do, that the level of engagement is selected.

Plan

- Ask: Do I need to engage? Who do I need to engage with?
- Develop a Communication and Engagement Activation Plan.
- Define timelines and resource requirements.
- Plan in detail the engagement activities

Do

- Implement the Communication and Engagement Activation Plan.
- Conduct activities.
- Record findings.

Use

- Compile and collate information gathered.
- Analyse information.
- Use the information to help inform a solution, a decision or contribute to continuous improvement.

Review

- Provide feedback to participants.
- Evaluate the process.

Decision making

Community engagement is part of Councils decision-making processes. Working within the engagement framework, Council needs to weigh up and balance stakeholder information, needs and aspirations with other factors, such as:
- Legislative requirements
- Councils Strategic Planning Framework
- Relevant research and previous engagement findings
- Financial considerations and fiscal responsibility
- Equity and diversity considerations
- Environmental, social, cultural and economic benefits and costs.

Roles and Responsibilities

Engagement is undertaken across many work areas within Council. The following provides an outline of the roles and responsibilities of the various responsible departments:

Advocacy, Performance and Improvement will:
- Identify best practice in engagement and influence continuous improvement within Council.
- Support project managers to plan, develop and evaluate engagement programs.
- Build engagement capability within Council.
- Identify annual commitments for engagement.
- Compile and manage an organisational calendar of engagement.
- Report quarterly on engagement to the Executive Management Team in line with budget activity reporting.
- Report annually on engagement to Council in line with budget activity reporting.
- Work with Communications on engagement projects as required.

Communications will:
- Support best practice and continuous improvement in engagement practices within Council.
- Support project managers to plan, develop and evaluate communications and marketing associated with engagement activities.
- Support engagement capability within Council.
- Work with Advocacy, Performance and Improvement on engagement projects as required.

People and Culture will:
- Support best practice and continuous improvement in engagement practices within Council.
- Support project managers to plan, develop and evaluate engagement programs.
- Support engagement learning and development capability within Council.
- Work with Advocacy, Performance and Improvement and Communications on engagement projects as required.

Project Managers will:
- Implement this policy.
- Make every effort to engage with all relevant stakeholders, as appropriate.
- Implement best practice engagement planning and delivery.
- Ensure input is recorded and considered.
- Ensure feedback is provided to participants.
- Evaluate engagement activities.
- Advise Advocacy, Performance and Improvement of all forthcoming engagement to enable these to be placed on a calendar of engagement.
- Work with Advocacy, Performance and Improvement and Communications on engagement projects as required.

The Executive Management Team will:
- Be accountable for the organisation's implementation of the Engagement Policy.
- Lead the organisation to further embed a culture of engagement.
- Appropriately resource engagement.
- Seek a quarterly report on the state of engagement at Council.

Council will (as stated in the Local Government Act, 1989):
- Act as a representative government by taking into account the diverse needs of the local community in decision-making.
- Seek an annual report on the state of engagement in Council.

LEGISLATIVE CONTEXT

Council is bound by legislation to engage with the community on some specific matters of public interest in particular. Engagement requirements sit within the following pieces of legislation:

Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006

This Act sets out 20 rights that reflect the four basic principles of freedom, respect, equality and dignity. The Charter requires Council, as a public authority, to take human rights into account when making decisions, providing advice and delivering services. This Act also enshrines the right of people to participate in public life.

Local Government Act 1989

This Act provides rights for people to make submissions in relation to Local Laws, Council Plan, Council Budget, changes to the valuing of land, Special Rate or Special Charges; sale and use of land, drainage works, road works and traffic diversions.

Best Value principles are embedded in the Local Government Act and serve to guide the philosophy of the way in which councils conduct their business. There are six principles, one of which requires a council to develop a program of regular consultation with its community in relation to the services it provides.

Planning and Environment Act 2007

This Act provides for rights for people to make submissions in relation to planning permits and planning scheme amendments.

Health and Wellbeing Act 2008

This Act provides for the involvement of people in the local community in the development, implementation and evaluation of the public health and wellbeing plan.

Road Management Act 2004

This Act provides for submissions in relation to the Road Management Plan.

CITY OF STONNINGTON CONTEXT

The following documents support the Engagement Strategy

Council Plan 2013-17

Council's Vision:
- Stonnington will be a connected community that fosters the hopes, wellbeing and aspirations of all people.

Key Strategic Objective:
- Community - A city where all people can be happy, healthy, safe and feel part of and contribute to the community.

Strategy:
- Continue to enhance community engagement and the involvement of the community in decision-making.

Budget Activity:
- Ensure the community has the opportunity to be engaged in decision-making processes through a variety of methods including Council meetings, ward meetings, workshops and forums, surveys, social media, and online consultation forums and polls.
- Ensure the community is well informed about Council decisions through targeted use and distribution of advertising, resident newsletters, media and digital communications.
- Provide accessible communications through a range of print, digital, audio, visual, multimedia, multilingual, and interpersonal channels.
- Engage the community on future development and land use.
- Deliver accurate and timely information to the community through a range of communication channels (print, media and digital) on Council's projects, activities and events, to maximise participation, awareness and education.

Council Plan 2013-17 - Strategic Resource Plan:

Governance:
- Be accountable and transparent in our business and decision-making processes.
- Undertake quality engagement with the community.

People:
- Encourage a culture that values community engagement and value added customer service.

Business Systems and Technology:
- Be an early adopter of new proven technologies that improve communication and engagement with the community, and improve service delivery efficiency.

Risk Management Policy 2013

Risk management is recognised as an integral part of good management practice and as an important aspect of corporate governance. Effective risk management supports informed decision making and encourages the identification of opportunities for continuous improvement.

The Policy and its procedure formalise and detail Council's approach to organisational risk management and provides a framework for the ongoing conduct of risk identification, assessment and minimisation practices across the organisation.

Integrated Communications and Marketing Strategy 2011 (ICMS)

The ICMS includes an engagement-related objective to: '…actively encourage community participation and engagement in Council decision making, by promoting opportunities for input into policies, strategies and services and by engaging in face-to-face activities.'

It provides a commitment from Council to Stonnington residents that 'We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge your concerns, and provide feedback as to how your input has influenced the decision, process or outcome.'

Council's consultation values include:
- Universal Access - including all members of the community and ensuring all have an equal opportunity to participate.
- Information Provision - giving accurate and reliable information that is easy to read and which supports informed comment.
- Timing it right so that information can inform policy, decision-making and planning.
- Responsiveness to ensure community needs are met. It is important to offer options and strategies which are in line with community needs and lifestyle choices.
- Respect - It is essential to let people know how their input will be used and to provide feedback about decisions.
- Evaluation of the community in relation to its objectives is essential for continuous improvement.
- Support - Adequate resources are required to support good process.

Customer Service Charter

Council's Customer Service Charter aims to achieve the highest levels of customer satisfaction by:

- Providing excellent standards of customer service in a professional manner;
- Listening and responding appropriately to customer needs in a timely manner;
- Treating customers courteously and with respect;
- Providing a helpful and friendly service experience;
- Ensuring that all our services are easy to access and inclusive;
- Providing accurate information;
- Sustaining a process of continuous improvement in service quality; and
- Ensuring privacy and confidentiality.

This commitment is undertaken considering fairness, equity, available resources, Council policy and legislation. Specific staff guidelines are available for all methods of contact with Council.

Learning and Development Strategy 2014-17

Council's Learning and Development Strategy guides the range of learning and development activities undertaken at Stonnington in both the short and long term.

The overarching focus of the strategy is on building skilled and capable workforce and strong people culture and includes three main elements: Culture, Capability and Process.

The Strategy identifies 'engagement' as a 'strategic learning priority' and states:
Actively considering stakeholders and their needs and perspectives in any process that involves others (internal and external) in problem solving or decision making;

using stakeholder input to make decisions; taking a partnership approach; having a positive and professional impact.

Other Plans and Strategies

Engagement is recognised in a range of other Plans and Strategies throughout the organisation.

INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS

IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum

The IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum has been developed by the International Association for Public Participation (IAPP).

The IAPP states that:

IAP2's Public Participation Spectrum is designed to assist with the selection of the level of participation that defines the public's role in any community engagement program.

The Spectrum shows that differing levels of participation are legitimate depending on the goals, time frames, resources and levels of concern in the decision to be made.

However, and most importantly, the Spectrum sets out the promise being made to the public at each participation level. The Spectrum is widely used and is quoted in most community engagement manuals.

The Spectrum provides the foundation for determining when, how and to what extent engagement will occur.

As a level of Government, the nature of the City of Stonnington's responsibilities to stakeholders means that the majority of engagement will occur at the 'inform' and 'consult' part of the spectrum.

While the Spectrum relates to 'public' participation, the meaning and purpose of the levels of stakeholder engagement also have internal application.

Further explanation of the spectrum is in the 'Definitions' section of this Policy.

DEFINITIONS

Engagement

Engagement is a process of applying various techniques with identified stakeholders to inform and discuss an issue with a view to learn, share, resolve and generate solutions that will ultimately assist with decision making about that issue. The level of engagement (ie. whether to inform, gather feedback or deliberate over opinions) will depend on the objectives of the engagement and the scope for decision making.

IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation

The IAP2 Spectrum has five components; the goal of each is as follows:

Inform
To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problems, alternatives and/or solutions.

Consult
To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decision.

Involve
To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public issues and concerns are consistently understood and considered.

Collaborate
To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.

Empowerment
To place final decision-making in the hands of the public.

Consultation

Consultation is a technique of implementing various methods to facilitate stakeholders to voice their opinion, and the gathering of this information as part of an engagement process. The International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) defines consultation as one phase along a continuum of public participation, with the purpose of; "obtaining public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions". (IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum, International Association for Public Participation, http://www.iap2.org.au/documents/item/84)

Stakeholder/s

An individual or a group of parties united by a common interest.
This could be the interest of being a resident, or associated with a formal role (e.g. a community group, a trader group, a government department). There is no limit to the number of stakeholders that can be involved in an engagement process.

Community

A group of people united by at least one common characteristic such as geography, shared interests, values, age, gender, experiences or tradition (eg. residents, youth, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds).
In this context, 'community' can reasonably be a stakeholder.

REFERENCES

- Engagement Policy Background Paper 2014
- http://www.iap2.org.au/
- Communication and Engagement Toolkit

FORMS/CHECKLIST

A Communication and Engagement Toolkit will accompany this Policy. The toolkit will include a range of templates.

REVIEW

This policy is to be reviewed every three years.
Corporate and Community Planning is responsible for the review.