

Community engagement strategy

City of Darebin

Final Draft October 2019

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Darebin City Council acknowledges the Wurundjeri Woi-Wurrung people as the traditional owners and custodians of the land and waters we now call Darebin and affirms that Wurundjeri Woi-Wurrung people have lived on this land for millennia, practising their customs and ceremonies of celebration, initiation and renewal. Council acknowledges that Elders past, present and emerging are central to the cohesion, intergenerational wellbeing and ongoing self-determination of Aboriginal community.

As part of this community engagement strategy Council will continue to seek guidance from Traditional Owners and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations, in the spirit of self-determination. We commit to working with the traditional owners, the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation, the Darebin Aboriginal Advisory Committee the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander agencies, and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in Darebin, to ensure their aspirations are met in our places, planning, activities and events.

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Community engagement in Darebin

Darebin City Council is committed to building a fair, inclusive and equitable city, particularly as it changes with population growth and action to address climate change. We know our diverse community is our greatest asset for building a greener, bolder, more connected city, which is why we put residents, business owners and the community sector at the heart of our decision-making. This strategy ensures we conduct our community engagement in a way that includes all voices in our community, and is open and transparent to ensure the community can trust the decisions we make as caretakers of this city.

Purpose and scope

This document outlines community engagement at the City of Darebin in two parts. The first outlines our strategy and the key principles that underpin our community engagement. The principles ensure our community engagement is purposeful, representative, and is easy to be involved in.

The second part provides a framework (a step-by-step guide and toolkit) to help staff plan good community engagement, and to ensure the decisions that result are shared back to the community. This part is based on the principles in the strategy above, and strong research methods to ensure it generates reliable and valid information that the community can trust.

This document covers strategic community engagement which generates input to our policy and planning decisions, for example, the design of local services and facilities or whole-of-Darebin policies. It does not relate to the day-to-day relationship building we undertake as part of our range of businesses, or our activities to build community awareness about challenges and changing practices.

Responsibilities

Our commitment to community engagement is outlined in our *Council Plan 2017-2021*, Goal 5.2 which states, “We bring the ideas of our diverse community into our decision-making”. Our equity, inclusion and human rights framework, *Towards Equality*, also outlines our commitment to creating a “fair city” by ensuring all people are able to participate in decision-making about matters important to them. This strategy also meets the requirements of the Victorian Government’s (draft) *Local Government Act 2019* and Victorian Auditor General’s Office recommendations for community engagement practices (VAGO 2017).

Definitions

Community is used here to include residents, businesses/workers, community leaders/representatives, and community groups and organisations in Darebin.

Community engagement is used here to describe processes for meaningfully involving the community in the decision-making processes of local government.

Deliberation is used here to mean processes that move beyond opinion giving, to consideration by a group using relevant information/evidence and multiple points of view.

Our challenge: strengthening representative government

Maintaining and improving the wellbeing of our communities, depends on effective and transparent decision-making which has taken into account the views of our community in an open and authentic way.

International research shows that the decision-making of governments is improved when communities are involved (Parvin 2018). It makes local government: respond better to the diverse needs of the community; design better services; and best of all, use the ideas of our community to respond to change. It also builds trust in government as people become involved in, and therefore see themselves reflected in, it.

Our community engagement strategy has two aims: to **strengthen representation** in decision-making, and, to make sure the **decisions Council makes are well explained to our community** (see Model, next page).

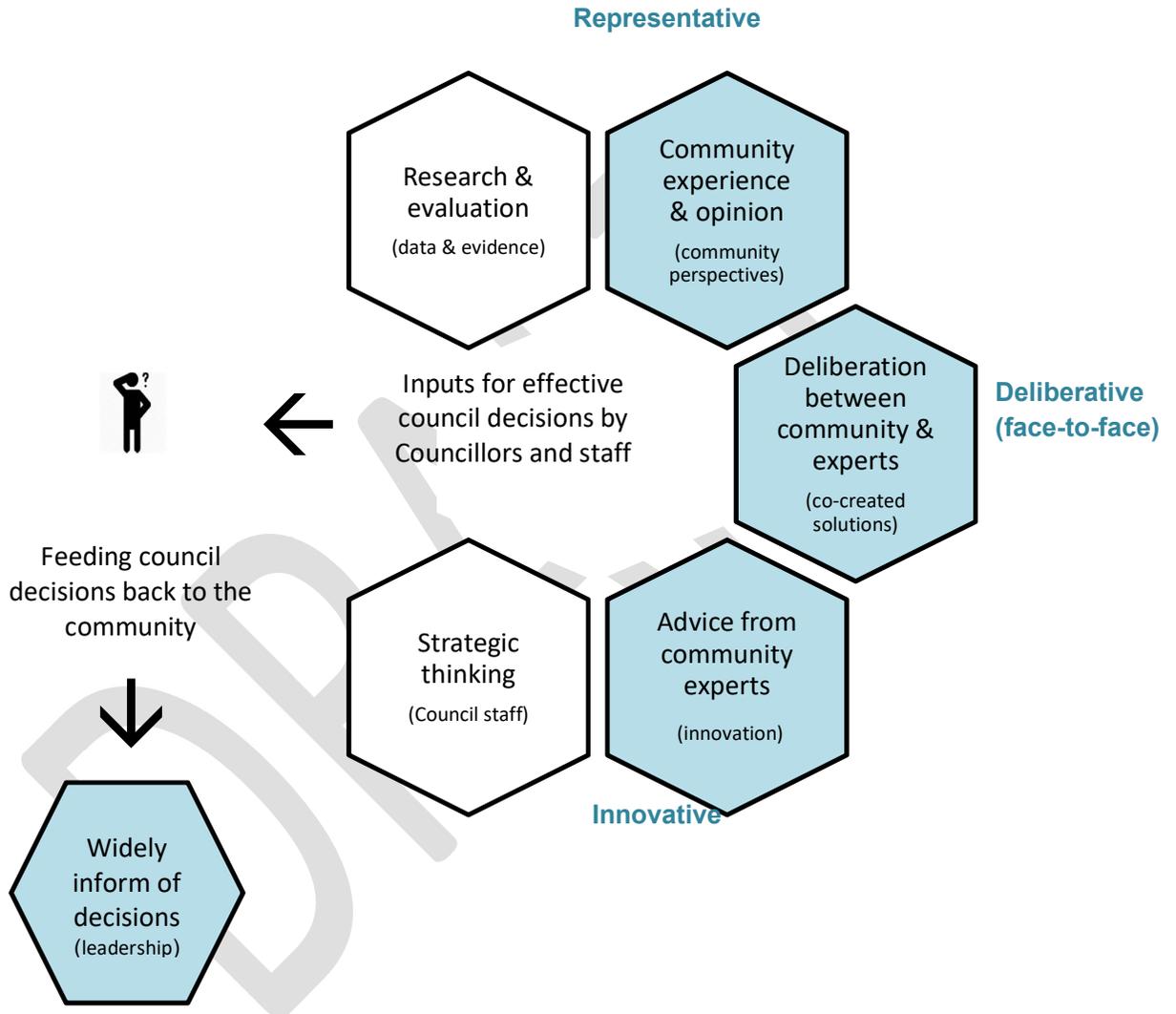
The first aim is to **strengthen representativeness** in decision-making by ensuring Councillors and staff have access to information that reflects the diversity of the needs and lived experiences in our community, not just the opinions of the loudest voices. There is a widening “participation gap” in who gets their views heard in government decision-making (Dalton 2017). If not thought through carefully, new methods of community engagement only gives people with the skills and resources more ways to have a say, further widening that gap (Dalton 2017). Focusing on representativeness will improve the *quality* of our community engagement, ensuring we generate a balanced set of perspectives to incorporate into discussions about action and outcomes. It is important that we provide more ways for a broader range of residents, businesses, and community representatives to have a say, and to experience and build an understanding of local government.

The second aim is to widely provide **open and transparent feedback** on decisions, to allow public scrutiny, and to make sure the community understands the reasons for our decisions (Parvin 2018). Change can be uncomfortable, which is why it's important that we take the time not only to conduct high-quality community engagement, but also to report back to the community about how and why our decisions were made.

Bolstering the representativeness of information and feeding decisions back to community is not always easy. But well-planned community participation means we can lead open and transparent conversations about policy challenges and options. It means we can deliver the types of services and facilities our community needs and wants, and addresses undue influence of skilled interest groups by balancing needs and perspectives. Ultimately, it allows our elected representatives to make decisions that create better communities, in increasingly complex environments.

Model: Inputs for our community engagement

38% of Victorians have tried to have a say with their council



78% report the work of councils is important to them

-  Inputs covered by this community engagement strategy
-  Inputs not covered by this strategy

Our principles

The following five principles underpin community engagement at Darebin. They are the guiding rules for all engagements.

Our community engagement is always:

1. **A genuine opportunity to shape the way our local government works** (respectful*). We set clear parameters for our engagements – to ensure participants have clear expectations of what they can influence and how their feedback will be used.
2. **Focused on providing input to solving challenges** (action oriented). Our starting point is always a challenge where community feedback will create better decisions.
3. **Representative** (focused on justice and equity*). We ensure all community members have opportunities to contribute and benefit, no matter where they live, preferences, abilities and cultures. We recognise there are barriers for some groups and will use novel methods, and build our relationships across our community, to reduce those barriers and ensure everyone's right to be heard.
4. **Our relationships are built on trust and understanding** (trust). We value the insights of our community and respect the time and effort they give towards informing our decision making.
5. **Accessible, easy, and enjoyable** (inclusive). Research shows many people in the population are willing to give their time but would prefer a one-off activity rather than an ongoing commitment. We focus on short, productive sessions that are enjoyable, culturally relevant, and meaningful experiences. We want those involved to learn about complex issues, hear a range of perspectives, and have their own experiences and needs heard.
6. **Fed back to the community** (integrity*). We are committed to sharing the findings with participants and to ensuring our decisions are reported back widely to the community.

We are committed to our community engagement being well planned, taking into consideration the time and resources it requires to do effectively. Our community engagement is conducted by qualified and experienced professionals (both internally and externally) who ensure:

- expectations and purpose are clear
- the methods we use are appropriate
- those running activities respectfully manage the views of different interests
- the work can be evaluated.

These commitments are built on the core values identified by International Association for Public Participation (IAP2 2019) and The National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (NHMRC 2007)*. This framework turns the “inform” of the IAP2 spectrum into an output – disseminating decisions made based on other community engagement inputs.

* Whether you are designing, conducting or funding a piece of research you have a responsibility (and legal obligation) to ensure that it is conducted in an ethical way. The *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research* outlines five important principles for conducting research (NHMRC 2007). Also see *Ethical Conduct in Research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and Communities: guidelines for researchers and stakeholders 2018* (NHMRC 2018).

How we do it

Community engagement planning at the City of Darebin sees expert teams working together across our organisation and utilising our broad relationships across our community.

Internally our staff draw on our:

- **Specialist research and engagement team** – who oversee this strategy and build general staff's community engagement capability. They are skilled at research methods, can help plan engagements, develop engagement tools and manage Darebin's survey program. This team holds data on previous engagements and are constantly building knowledge on what the community tells us. They also oversee the evaluation of community engagements and advise Council on best practice (what works and what doesn't).
- **Communications team** – who provide expert advice at both ends of community engagement: letting our community know about opportunities to participate, and, widely explaining the resulting decisions of Council. They oversee important communication channels to the community, such as Darebin Community News.
- **Equity and Wellbeing team** – who can help apply an equity lens considering people, place and experiences in the early planning and design of community engagement projects. The *Equity Impact Assessment* can help with thinking about who to engage, how to engage and communications strategies (see Box next page for link). They also have a range of staff who work closely with groups who are often not represented in Council's engagement process and can help reach out to particular communities (below).
- **Community registers and advisory committees** – that are made of community members, leaders and experts interested in giving their time to help Council decision-making, aligned with this strategy. These committees can help our staff plan engagement, particularly in groups our traditional methods have not reached, such as young people, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, and non-English speakers. Committees are regularly reviewed.
- **Engagement officers and staff across council** – who have, maintain and build relationships and connections with communities, interest groups, cultural groups, and businesses. These include in Equity and Diversity, Sustainability, Economic Development, People and Development, and Ageing and Disability. Relationship building is a key function of all Darebin business and there is a wealth of connection that can be drawn on for quality community engagement.

Our Framework

Our framework provides an easy-to-use, step-by-step approach to community engagement.

The steps of this framework will help staff consider:

- if they need to engage (do they have a challenge the community can help address? are they clear about what information is needed? and are they sure it will be used?)
- how they can generate robust, useful, representative data, and
- how they can report results of decision-making back to the community.

Staff can use the five steps of this framework to write up a *Community Engagement Plan* (or *Project Plan*) that outlines your: Objective, Background, Scope, Sample (the who), Method (the how), Outputs and Evaluation, and Communication plan.

- Step 1** – think about what information you need to create to solve your problem or challenge (objective, background and scope)
- Step 2** – identify the community “interests” you need to talk to (who to engage)
- Step 3** – identify the best method for your engagement (how to engage)
- Step 4** – get the right data from your engagement, including for evaluation and ensure the information is housed accordingly for future use (outputs)
- Step 5** – report back to the community (communications)

Need support?

Contact the Community Engagement and Demographics Unit

Contact the Equity and Wellbeing Team

Use the toolkit:

- Community Engagement Plan
- Equity Impact Assessment
- Darebin Inclusive Communications Charter
- Evaluation step-by-step guide
https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/9b27c2_ad648e11bdf84b659605ee2e47d4da64.pdf
- Communications Plan

Step 1: What information do you need? (Objective, background and scope)

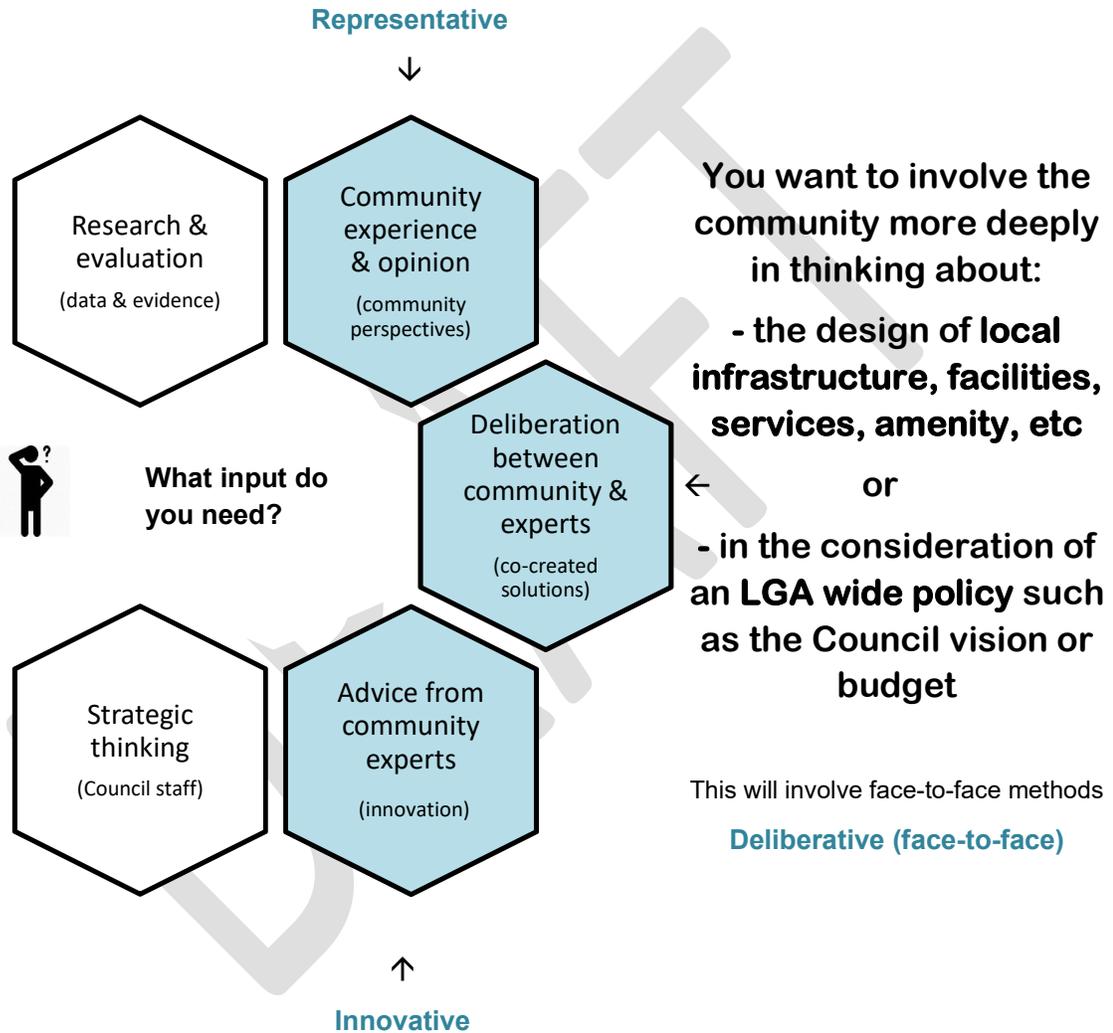
Step 1 will help you think about what information you need. It relates to the first two principles of ensuring your work is: **a genuine opportunity to shape the way our local government works**, and **focused on providing input to solving challenges**.

1. Good research starts with a clear purpose and objective. Start by thinking about whether you need to engage using the first two principles of the strategy. Consider:
 - a. Is it a genuine opportunity to shape the way Darebin is doing something?
 - b. Are you clear about what the community can control in the decision-making?
 - c. Have you set clear parameters so participants will have clear expectations of what they can influence and how their feedback will be used?
 - d. Have you got a clear challenge that you know community feedback will help create better decisions?
2. Clearly define the problem/challenge/issue you want to solve and write a background and objective for the engagement in your *Community Engagement Plan*. A background describes what you know about the problem already, and what gaps in knowledge the engagement will fill.
3. Look at the blue hexagons in the model on the next page, and think about what you need from the community. You can choose any hexagon (representative, deliberative, innovative), in any order, and you can leave out any you don't need. A few examples of how people have run different community engagements can be seen on page 16.

Model: What information do you need?

You want to find out the community’s lived experience or opinion or you want their feedback on a draft strategy or policy

This will involve surveys, polls or interviews (individual in depth or focus groups) – either online or in person – and must use a validated method that addresses bias (is representative)



You want experts in the community to come up with new ideas and ways of doing things

This could involve, for example:

- experts in technology, climate change, the community or arts sectors
- the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander board or Youth Citizen Jury
 - a review and public hearings by a panel of policy experts

Step 2. Who should you engage?

Step 2 will help you identify who you need to engage. It relates to the third principle **representativeness**.

1. Write a list of the interest groups that will be impacted by your decision and should have a say. Remember interest groups are broader than residents (see Box below), and there may be instances where you are wanting the input of organisations or innovators instead. Check every interest group on your list has information that you need to know as part of your engagement. You cannot ask one group about what another thinks, for example, asking park users why people don't use the park.
2. You need to apply the lenses of people, places and experiences to consider the diverse needs of our community and how they should be included in the engagement process. This may include considering gender, lifespan, disadvantage, cultural and geographic (i.e. suburb or north/south), and would vary depending on the purpose of the engagement. Diversity is complex because people have multiple overlapping socioeconomic positions, cultural backgrounds, preferences, identities and experiences (for example, having mental illness, being a carer or being socially isolated). Migrant groups, for example, are hugely different across backgrounds, generations, and economic positions. It is important to consider how differences might impact on your communication and engagement methods. Use the Equity Impact Assessment to unpack these considerations.
3. Once you have determined your 'who', think about ways you could reach them to tell them about the opportunity to participate. You (or your consultant) should develop a plan for communicating the opportunity to all your interests, and factor in the time and resources to do this. Speak to the Communications Team about how you might do this.

Interests you could consider include:

- residents
- residents in cultural, interest, identity or experience groups (migrant groups, parents groups, LGBTIQ+)
- different economic groups
- service users (park users, traders, library users, etc)
- community leaders and representatives (club or church leaders, managers of community organisations, neighbourhood houses, community workers, school leaders, resident action groups, etc)
- professional industry experts (for example climate change, etc)
- traders, businesses
- community, health or religious organisations
- Council advisory committees or similar

You can use Council Advisory Committees to help think about who and how to engage

Who don't we reach?

The international research shows better-educated and higher-income citizens with skills and resources are the most likely to be engaged (Dalton 2017; Parvin 2018).

An analysis of Darebin's engagements found that women, home owners, and those in the south of the Municipality, engage more. The least likely to engage are young people, renters, and those in the north. Those who speak a language other than English at home were well represented, but they may still be those with greater resources.

There are four things to consider to reduce the "participation gap" between those with and without skills and resources:

1. Reaching socio-economically disadvantaged groups requires **culturally appropriate methods**. It is important to think about the priorities people have for their time, what they are interested in, and what will suit them. Think about whether you can engage in the places they visit (schools, clubs, local parks, parent's groups, etc). Also think about whether you can attach engagement to welcoming activities they would enjoy. Being able to talk to others (either one-on-one or in groups), rather than filling out forms, will be better for many.
2. One of the best ways to involve people is to **personally ask them**. Networks are critical to find and engage people and you can use community representatives to help you. Council also has many engagement officers who can help to reach out to people and help them feel comfortable to be involved. People who are engaged in this way, will more likely feel like they have been listened to, and the process can be rewarding for them, as well as for Council.
3. **Engagement materials** need to be simple and in plain English, but also think about people who have low literacy or speak other languages. Written materials can be translated into community languages, but videos (particularly by community leaders), infographics and pictures should also be considered. Focus groups facilitated in languages (not translated as it breaks up conversation) may also be useful. There are a lot of myths about who in the community uses technology, and knowledge about this should be built up by Council, but it should not be discounted (it is vital for young people and some with disabilities, for example). Read [Darebin Inclusive Communications Charter](#) and [CALD Communications Research](#) for ideas for making communication more accessible and talk to the Equity and Diversity Unit and Communications.
4. Finally, there are **consultants who specialise in different aspects of diversity** and particularly those with low resources. The advantage of creating a project plan is that you can then seek out companies who have been successful at methods with interest groups you might be interested in.

Step 3. How should you engage?

Step 3 will help you think about the best method for your engagement. It relates to the fourth principle **accessible, easy and enjoyable**.

Research shows many people would be happy to be involved in shaping local government's work, but would prefer short, sharp, problem-solving sessions – preferably in the places they visit.

When planning a community engagement, you need to think about:

- a robust research tool that will generate representative data, and
- appropriate ways to deliver it.

There is huge scope for creativity in making research methods accessible and enjoyable experiences for different interest groups.

1. The next page provides some ideas for research methods, or if you are outsourcing, you can ask your consultants to make suggestions in your Request for Quote or Request for Tender. A few things to remember:
 - a. Whatever method you choose, your biggest issue will be bias in your sample, particularly if you are letting people self-select. Think about how you can get a representative sample, or add supplementary methods to capture those you suspect you will not hear from.
 - b. Surveys are one of the most difficult methods to get right. They take skill to design and test. Seek help from the Community Engagement and Demographics Team.
 - c. Deliberative methods that are face-to-face require skilled facilitation.
 - d. Use creativity to think about creating accessible, enjoyable experiences.
2. If you are doing the work in-house – get help from the Community Engagement and Demographics Team. If you are contracting out ask for suggestions for the best methods as part of your RFQ and remember to build-in time to negotiate. You could consider forming a short-term community committee to help oversee local engagement and reach.
3. Planning and effective engagement will take time. The more complex the method, and the more diversity you seek, the more time (and resources) you should factor into your planning. You will need time for the usual project management processes: planning, talking to other parts of Council, procurement (including contract negotiation), briefing and decision-making, and negotiating with a consultant. Consultants will also need time to set up a process for communicating the opportunity (particularly if using mainstream media which has lead times), and to find and invite participants.

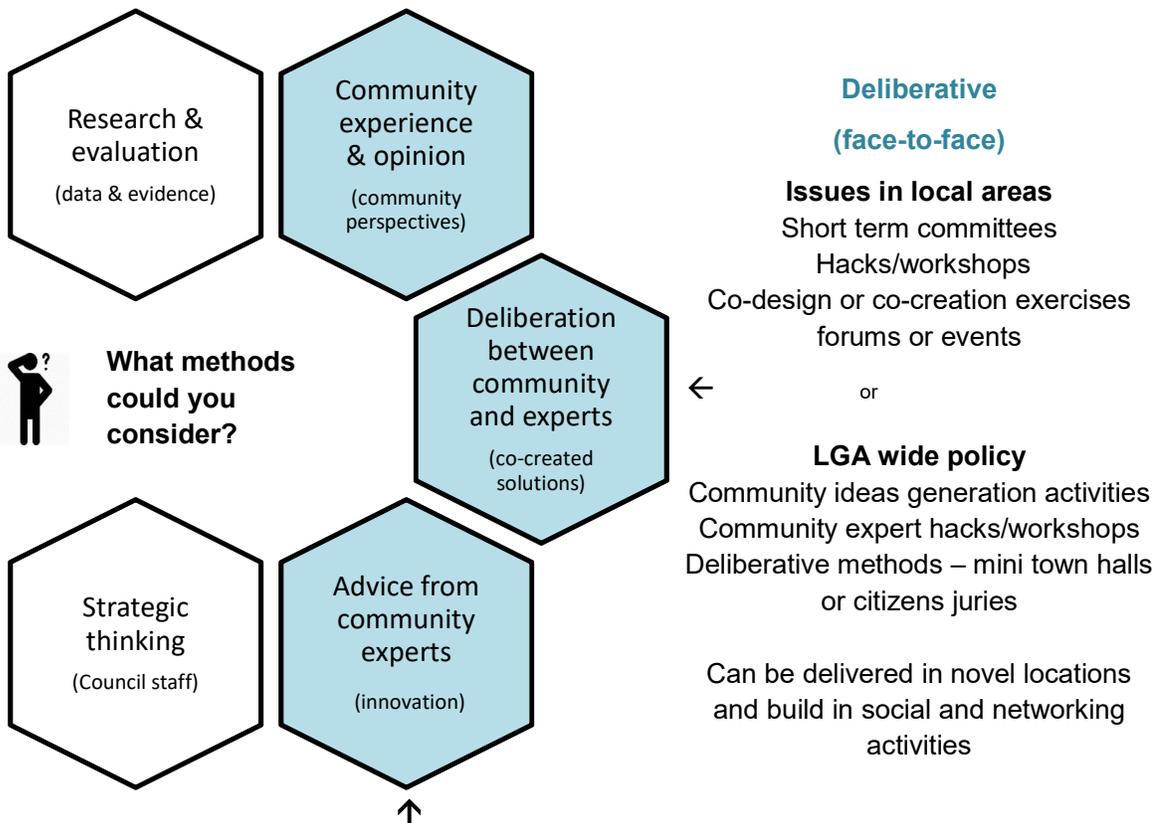
Model: Methods (how should you engage)

Representative

(face-to-face, online)

- In depth interviews
- Surveys face-to-face, online or paper/postcard
- Focus groups to get at the culture of a group
- Content analysis of social media (biased but good for identifying issues/opinions)
- Observation (of use for facilities, public spaces, etc)

Can be delivered through a raft of settings: household survey (most representative sample), pop ups, drop ins, listening posts, events



Innovative

Enable community advice on innovation

- Committees such as the Aboriginal, Youth or Disability Committees
- Short term committees
- Delphi studies
- Expert hacks, workshops, labs or roundtables
- Forums, or events
- Can build in networking activities as incentives to participate

A few examples

Using Council-formed committees to design engagement

The Yangara (DJ Lane) project (South Australia) was created by a City of Onkaparinga led partnership, to redevelop a local reserve in an area of high unemployment in an area of significance to the Kaurna Indigenous people (Pomagalska et al 2009). Council created a local leader's group which designed a series of events to involve the community, including BBQs, carols, art festivals, youth events and tree planting. A range of community organisations were also involved. At the events locals, including the Kaurna community, young people and children from the schools, designed the redevelopment, forming links with each other, and local groups and agencies along the way.

Using citizen experts to solve urban problems

Cities like Mexico have recognised they have many citizens that are capable of helping solve complex problems. They have created human laboratory spaces where expert citizens come together to "hack" problems. The *Laboratorio Para la Ciudad (Laboratory for the City)*, is part of an emerging worldwide trend of creating municipal offices focused exclusively on civic innovation to find solutions to urban problems. The Lab occupies a makeshift office on top of a downtown municipal building. Soon after moving in, its small staff transformed the building's rooftop into a garden, where they hold public meetings and forums for the creative design community. Mexico famously used citizens and their mobile phones to map its chaotic bus system to create information to coordinate it better.

Using all three forms of community engagement (hexagons) to create an innovative arts strategy in Darebin

To create an innovative arts strategy, Darebin council staff collated all research on arts activities, including on the economic and social benefits, creative and cultural infrastructure, internal services reviews, and participant surveys. From this research they designed a set of questions and interviewed ten arts leaders about the potential for innovative new directions. Five arts leaders were asked to provide "provocations" to imagine the future of the arts in Darebin to put to a "hack" with 80 creative sector experts at the Northcote Town Hall. The ideas from the hack were captured in a draft discussion paper, reviewed by our Arts Ambassadors, was then released on Your Say for broader community input. Once the community feedback was incorporated, a second hack was held with the creative sector to further refine the ideas. To date the work has led to a Festivals Strategy and once this is endorsed by Council, community consultations in local areas will co-design specific events, commissions and creative partnerships.

Step 4. What type of information should you generate?

Step 4 will help ensure you get the right information from your engagement, including the evaluation data needed to improve practice over time.

1. Make sure you, or your consultants, collect data and information from your engagement, including:
 - a. A description of the people involved: a count and demographics. Ask demographics last in surveys and use Census questions (if you change questions from Census standards, you can't test for representativeness), including at least:
 - i. age
 - ii. gender
 - iii. language spoken at home
 - iv. Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander
 - v. postcode
 - vi. others (such as housing tenure, income, disability, etc), if needed.
A link to Census questions (topics) is below.
 - b. An analysis of results grouped into themes, including agreement, issues, concerns and solutions, raised by who.
 - c. The consultant's assessment of what worked and what didn't (and why) so the organisation can continuously improve practice.
2. Make sure you are collecting data to evaluate whether your engagement was successful (met its objectives), and to determine lessons for improving engagement in the future. As well as the information above, you need information on:
 - a. the impact of the engagement on decision-making
 - b. lessons learned, including cost effectiveness of methods and improvements that could be made in the future (see Victorian Auditor-General Audit below).
3. Consider how you can be flexible once an engagement is underway. You may need to "pivot" because something doesn't work, something unexpected happens, you are just getting the "usual suspects", or another group or further investigation opportunity pops up.
4. Ensure your data is registered and warehoused so that it can be referred to and used again by Darebin.

Need help?

Evaluation Step by Step Guide

https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/9b27c2_ad648e11bdf84b659605ee2e47d4da64.pdf

Australian Bureau of Statistics Census questions

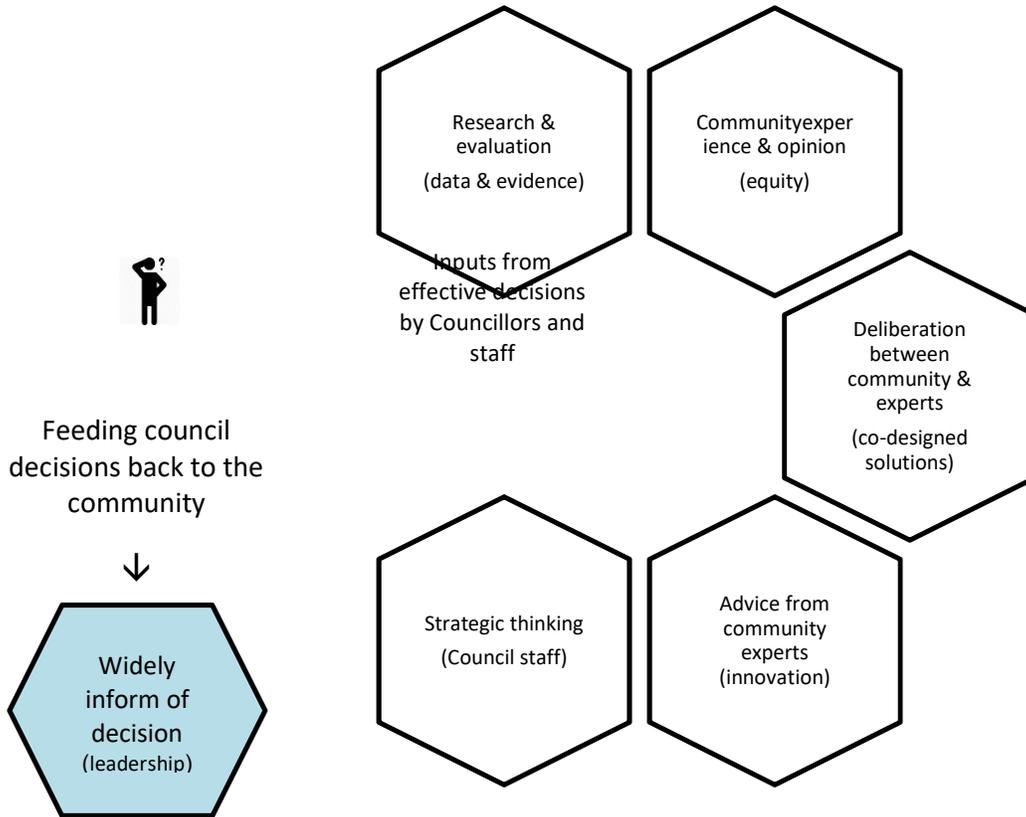
<https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/2008.0>

Victorian Auditor-General Public Participation and Community Engagement Audit

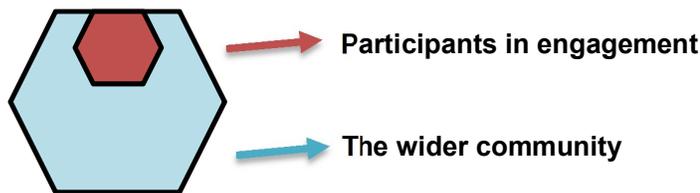
<https://www.audit.vic.gov.au/report/public-participation-and-community-engagement-local-government-sector>

Step 5. How should you feed back decisions to the community?

Step actions to the fifth principle of **feeding back decisions to the whole community.**

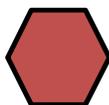


There are two types of feedback to consider:



Feeding back to participants

Returning results to participants is an ethical obligation, but it is also a way of thanking people, which is important for building relationships. Sending results direct is best, but you can also just tell participants where they can see the engagement report.



Direct

- Email a summary or full report
- Direct mail a summary or full report
- Run a face-to-face briefing or Zoom online meeting
- Telephone call

Feeding back to the wider community

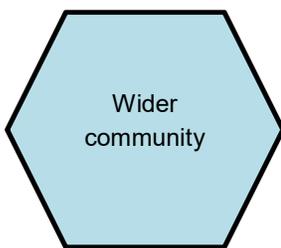
Feeding back to the broader community will require help from communications. With their help you can use the brief of information you wrote to underpin the decision-making to:

1. **Prepare a communications pack** that outlines:
 - the **reason** for your decision backed up by evidence (all hexagons)
 - **key messages** to explain decisions
 - **questions and answers** (Q & As) so Council staff and customer service teams are prepared for queries and to deal with any concerns
 - **your spokespeople** for media interviews
 - **third party endorsers** (independent identities) who can provide support and expertise

You will also need a strategy for **moderating community feedback online** and **updating key messages and Q and A's** to manage queries and concerns.

Important: If your issue is contentious, test your messages in a focus group or roundtable before you go public. Make sure Council is well informed and updated where applicable.

2. **Plan who you will target** to make sure you reach a wide audience, especially those directly affected. You will need a mix of targeted communications (such as direct mail to affected residents) and broadcast tactics (media coverage, social media campaigns). Breaking audiences into defined groups – such as traders or families with young children – will help you select communication methods to reach them. Always be ready to respond to questions or concerns immediately as they arise and use prepared Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ's) if needed.



Targeted

Trailers/ pop-ups in various locations (face-to-face presence)
Direct mail/ email to residents/traders
Use representatives to pass on the messages
Your Say, Council website
Launch/ announcement/ event

Broadcast

Media release; Media coverage (ethnic, suburban, metro)
Darebin Community News; Leader advertisements (Mayor's message)
Social media content/campaign
Streaming announcements e.g. Facebook Live

Need support?

Contact the Community Engagement and Demographics Unit
yoursay@darebin.vic.gov.au

Checklist and tools

Before you start:

Have you ...

1. **Pre-read about the problem of a participation gap in community engagement**
 - These articles will help you understand issues around community engagement and the perspective this strategy is written from:
 - <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/is-citizen-participation-actually-good-for-democracy/>
 - <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11158-017-9382-1>
2. **Prepared your Community Engagement Plan:**
3. **Selected an appropriate consultant** with the expertise for who you are wanting to engage
4. **Determined timelines and resource needs:** have you identified:
 - Whether you want to do the project in-house or by contract?
 - The resources (budget and staff) and skills needed?
 - Timelines (including factoring in time for financial approvals, contracting issues, procurement flow, briefing and approvals)?
 - Have you factored in the cost/resources for communications?

Afterwards:

Have you ...

5. **Prepared a final engagement report with all the information you need in it**
6. **Written a brief summarising all your inputs for effective decisions by council** – for use in decision-making and communications
7. **Evaluated your engagement activity** and spoken to the Community Engagement Team about the evaluation findings to build up knowledge within the organisation
8. **Lodged your report and data with the Community Engagement and Demographics Unit**

References

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