

BANYULE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT POLICY

July 2021

Banyule
CITY COUNCIL

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DEFINITIONS

Collaboration	Two or more people or organisations work together to achieve a goal.
Communication	Imparting or exchanging information or ideas, utilising a range of channels and mediums.
Community	A group of people, the members of which reside in the same geographical area or have a shared background, interest, affiliation or membership.
Community engagement	A genuine process of working with people to build understanding, strengthen relationships and inform decisions.
Consultation	Seeking feedback or advice on a select topic or project.
Council	Refers to Banyule officers who are responsible for the practical development and delivery of policies, procedures, programs, projects and services to ensure identified community needs are meet.
Deliberation	A method of engagement process with a select group of community members. The process focuses on a defined issue, weighs up options and provides recommendations to decision-makers.
Policy	A guiding document which sets out views with respect to a particular matter. Includes principles that sets direction for action.
Hard-to-reach	Individuals and groups that have multiple barriers to engagement and may require support to enable active participation in Council processes.
Process	A relationship between key steps, activities, tasks, policies and / or resources.
Public	Individuals who may not belong to a specific community relevant to the project, but they still have an interest in the project.
Stakeholders	Individuals or organisations, which affect, or can be affected by project decisions.
Toolkit	A resource developed to provide guidance and templates for Banyule employees to plan and evaluate community engagement initiatives.

Acronyms:

IAP2	International Association of Public Participation
VAGO	Victorian Auditor General's Office

Message from the Mayor



Local government plays a significant role in people's lives every day. We plan and deliver essential services in health, planning and building control, business and economic development, waste and environmental management, and human and community services. In doing this, we engage continually with people. It is important that every one of these interactions are meaningful, accessible and work towards positive outcomes for individuals and the wider municipality.

In addition to engaging with people daily, in the delivery of programs and services and sharing of up to date information regarding Council's work, it is critical that community and stakeholders also have input to Council's planning, decision-making and advocacy processes.

Transparent and well managed community engagement is essential to inform our policies, strategies, programs and projects. We recognise the value that the community and stakeholders bring to understanding problems and risks, and together crafting solutions that are unique to Banyule's needs.

We recognise the important role the provision of community engagement opportunities plays in enabling active citizenship. Quality community engagement opportunities enable people to have a say on matters important to them and help them shape their local community. This is key to empowering and strengthening our community.

We are committed to working with community and stakeholders to continually improve our municipality and believe that in doing so, together we can create a better Banyule.

Over the past twelve months we have been working with community and stakeholders to develop the Banyule Community Engagement Policy. The Policy will replace Council's existing Community Engagement Framework which we have used over the past number of years.

The Policy is designed to comply with community engagement requirements within the *Local Government Act 2020*. It will guide how Council plans, delivers and evaluates engagement opportunities that are highly valued by all, and provides the opportunities needed for all voices to be heard and to have a say on issues that are important to them. The Policy guides how the information provided by community and stakeholders is to be used to inform decisions and how this information is reported back so that participants know how their feedback was used.

Evidence-based decision-making results in improved service delivery because it is informed by knowledge of community and stakeholder needs and expectations. It is this commitment that underpins the development of this Policy and the supporting Banyule Community Engagement Toolkit – an internal resource we've developed to provide guidance and templates for Council officers to plan, implement and evaluate community engagement initiatives.

I look forward to working in partnership with you on many community engagement activities over the years to come, and together we will build a better Banyule.



Rick Garotti
Mayor of Banyule

Introduction

THIS SECTION COVERS:

What is community engagement?
What is the community engagement spectrum?
What is Banyule's commitment to community engagement?
What is the Banyule Community Engagement Policy?

01

1.1 Understanding Community Engagement

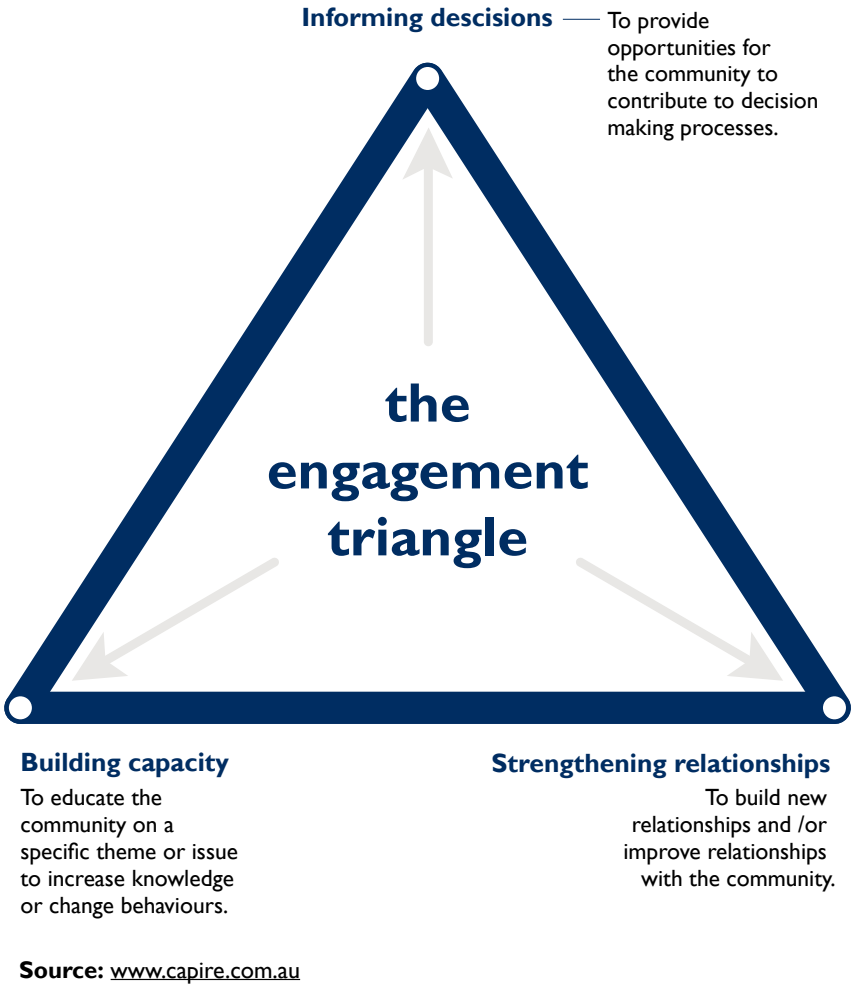
Community engagement refers to the many ways in which we connect with our community in day-to-day interactions and in the development and implementation of policies, programs, projects and services. High-quality community engagement enables us to make well-informed decisions at an operational and strategic level, as well as achieving effective and transparent governance. Genuine community engagement promotes dialogue and understanding between Council and our community.

Engagement covers a wide variety of Council-community connections, ranging from information sharing through to active participation in policy development, decision-making and advocacy processes (see Figure 1. Community Engagement Triangle).

Our practice of community engagement aims to result in stronger relationships and shared understanding, commitment to and capacity for working together towards mutually beneficial outcomes. Our definition of community engagement is:

A genuine process of working with people to build understanding, strengthen relationships and inform decisions.

Figure 1: Community Engagement Triangle



Source: www.capire.com.au

1.2 Understanding the Community Engagement Spectrum

To help guide understanding around the different levels of community engagement the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) created the IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum. IAP2 are the global body advancing the practice of community and stakeholder engagement through education, advocacy and partnerships.

The Spectrum is designed to assist with the selection of the level of participation that defines the public's role in any community engagement program. It 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 table below details the IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum as adapted by the Victorian Auditors-General's Office.

Figure 2: Levels of public participation

Levels	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Objective	To provide balanced and objective information to support understanding by the public.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work with the public to ensure concerns and aspirations are understood and considered.	To engage with the public on each aspect of the decision, including the development of alternatives and a preferred solution.	To create governance structures to delegate decision-making and/or work directly with the public.
Commitment	To keep the public informed.	To listen to and acknowledge the public's concerns.	To work with the public to exchange information, ideas, and concerns.	To seek advice and innovations from and amongst various public parties.	To work with the public to implement agreed-upon decisions.
Description	**Participation** The first two public participation levels – *Inform and Consult* – typically occur when a decision has already been made, and government wants to either communicate that decision to the public, or seek opinions on the decision.		**Engagement** The third and fourth public participation levels – *Involve and Collaborate* – have two way information flows, and include sharing information within and across stakeholder communities during the decision-making process. When undertaking Engagement, decision makers commit to using stakeholder feedback to inform the decision and shape the outcome. Activity that occurs at the Collaboration level is also sometimes referred to as partnering.		**Empower** The fifth public participation level – *Empower* – is also often referred to as co production, where decisions are made jointly between government and the community. This is typically when decision-making authority has been delegated to a group including members from both the government and the community industry.

Source: www.audit.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/20150130-Public-Participation-BPG.pdf

1.3 Our Commitment to Community Engagement

We are committed to engaging with our communities. Through community engagement, we inform, listen to and enable you to have a say on issues important to you. Evidence based decision-making, which draws upon research, statistical data and the voice of community and stakeholders, results in the design of improved service delivery and outcomes because it is informed by knowledge of community needs and expectations.

Not only does engagement empower and strengthen the community through active citizenship, we use the feedback gathered through engagement activities in planning for services, making decisions- and advocating on behalf of our municipality.

The development of our Community Engagement Policy (the Policy) is based on our existing engagement framework, internal and external engagement, best practice research and Council's project management approach.

Our community engagement commitment is to:

Nurture mutual trust, goodwill and respect between Council, community and stakeholders

Inform, involve and engage our communities and stakeholders, and establish processes to facilitate community participation in shaping and influencing decisions affecting them

Promote and practice good governance through accountability, transparency and responsiveness.





1.4 Purpose of Community Engagement Policy

The purpose of the Policy is to document and communicate Banyule's commitment to, principles for and practice approach to the provision of high-quality community engagement that is valued by the community and stakeholders.

The Policy, together with the Community Engagement Toolkit provide guidelines, advice and resources for Council officers to navigate the design, provision and evaluation of engagement opportunities, and the utilisation and sharing of community engagement findings.

Within local government settings it is recognised that there are six different types of engagement practices:



Strategic – to inform strategic decisions related to policy, plans or programs



Statutory – to obtain feedback to inform statutory approvals related to policy, plans, programs.



Research – to obtain evidence to review or design services programs



Dialogue – to enable an ongoing dialogue with the community



Transactional – to respond to queries or concerns



Awareness – to create awareness through local media or other avenues.

This Policy is to primarily be used to underpin strategic and statutory engagement and result in the development of engagement plans and practises that meet the needs of any given project and enact our community engagement core values and principles.

The table below provides examples of the types of engagement avenues that are utilised to deliver on engagement activity that does not relate to strategic or statutory engagement.

Engagement type	Example avenues include
Research	Desk top reviews, benchmarking and data analysis.
Dialogue	Festivals/events, direct service provision e.g. maternal child health visit, youth group activity and direct contact with Councillors.
Transactional	Customer service enquiries, request for service, pet registration, hard rubbish bookings, kindergarten bookings and paying rates.
Awareness	Council website, Banyule Banner articles, mail outs, mailing lists, newsletters, social media posts and press releases.

For information on policies governing the other types of engagement please refer to Section 4.1. Internal Strategic Context.



Approach

THIS SECTION COVERS:

What are the core values underpinning Banyule's community engagement approach?
What are Banyule's principles for community engagement?
What are Banyule's stages of community engagement?
What is inclusive community engagement?

02

2.1 Community Engagement Core Values

IAP2 specify a series of core values that should be used to underpin community engagement. Banyule's Community Engagement Policy builds on these core values.

1. Public participation is based on the belief that those who are affected by a decision have a right to be involved in the decision-making process.
2. Public participation includes the promise that the public's contribution will influence the decision.
3. Public participation promotes sustainable decisions by recognising and communicating the needs and interests of all participants, including decision makers.
4. Public participation seeks out and facilitates the involvement of those potentially affected by or interested in a decision.
5. Public participation seeks input from participants in designing how they participate.
6. Public participation provides participants with the information they need to participate in a meaningful way.
7. Public participation communicates to participants how their input affected the decision.

Source: www.iap2.org.au



2.2 Community Engagement Principles

Banyule's engagement principles have been developed through engagement, research and consideration of industry standards, , including Local Government Victoria's guidance material on deliberative engagement. Our engagement principles underpin how we design and deliver community engagement, across all stages of engagement and are as per the *Local Government Act 2020* and Victorian Auditor General Office's (VAGO) *Better Practice Guide: Public Participation in Government Decision-making*.

↓ **Figure 3:** *Banyule's Community Engagement Principles*

Principle	Description
Responsiveness	• Potential impacts of a project on community and stakeholder are identified, discussed and addressed. • Challenges and opportunities related to participation in engagement opportunities are identified and addressed. • Input is responded to in a timely and constructive manner. • Decisions based on evidence occurs.
Transparency and integrity	• Ensuring that those affected understand the scope of the engagement, the decision-making process and any constraints on the process. • Addressing community and stakeholder concerns in an honest and forthright way and communicating results in an understandable manner.
Openness	• Embedding in all engagement processes an openness to appropriately understanding and incorporating the views of those affected by decisions. • Providing access to all relevant information about a project in a manner that participants can understand, so that their contributions may be fully informed.
Accountability	• Being clear about the scope and objectives of engagement opportunities. • Being clear about the contribution participants will be asked to make and the responsibilities associated with this. • Providing appropriate time and resources to ensure that those affected can participate in a meaningful way. • Demonstrating that results and outcomes are consistent with the commitment made at the outset of the engagement.
Inclusiveness	• Making every reasonable effort to include community and stakeholders affected by a project. • Making reasonable adjustments where necessary to remove barriers to participation and ensure an inclusive approach. • Providing appropriate time and resources to ensure that those affected can participate in a meaningful way. • Being aware and taking account of the needs of diverse communities to be able to participate in a meaningful way.
Awareness	• Being aware and taking account of legislation that should shape the engagement approach e.g. Human Rights.

Source: *Adapted from* The Victorian Auditor General Office's (VAGO) *Better Practice Guide: Public Participation in Government Decision-making* our engagement principles www.audit.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/20150130-Public-Participation-BPG.pdf

2.3 Community Engagement Stages

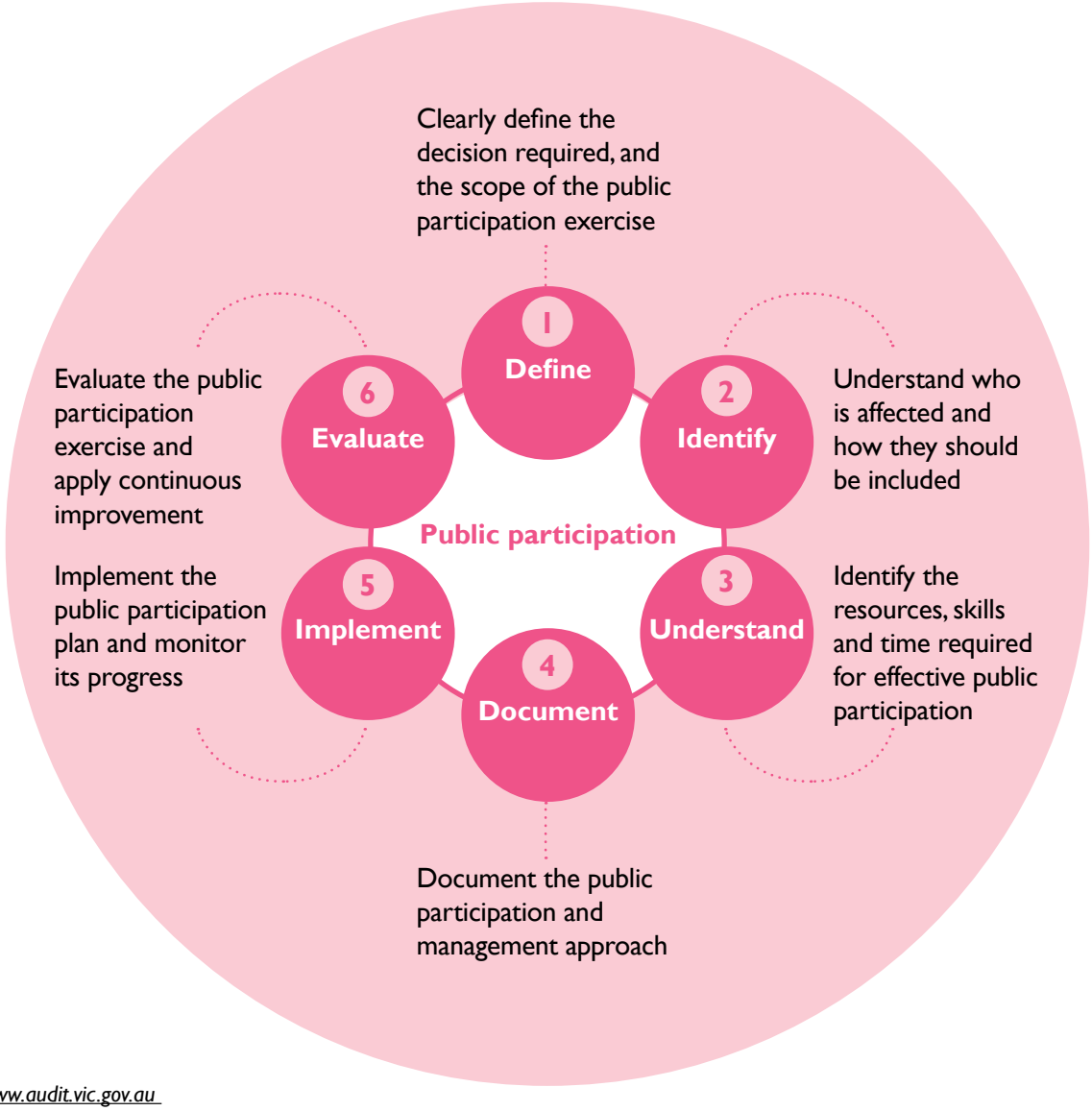
We apply our community engagement principles as we move through all stages in an engagement process, from start to finish. The figure below details our principles, engagement stages and the key actions at each of those stages

↓ **Figure 4:** *Engagement Principles, Stages and Actions*

Engagement principles	Engagement stage	Key actions
Responsiveness **Transparency and integrity** **Openness** **Accountability** **Inclusiveness** **Awareness**	 **Identify**	Identify the purpose of the engagement.
	 **Understand**	Understand the community and stakeholders, who they are, their interests, values and opportunities for engagement.
	 **Design**	Design an appropriate engagement approach.
	 **Deliver**	Deliver genuine and respectful engagement.
	 **Review**	Review and interpret the engagement information and data.
	 **Utilise**	Use the outcomes of the engagement to inform the project. Provide feedback on the engagement process, findings, outcomes and decisions.
	 **Learn**	Learn by measuring the effectiveness of the engagement. Share the learnings from the engagement.

Our stages align with 'engagement elements' specified by the Victorian Auditor General Office, by which councils may be audited on.

Figure 5: *VAGO elements*



Source: *www.audit.vic.gov.au*

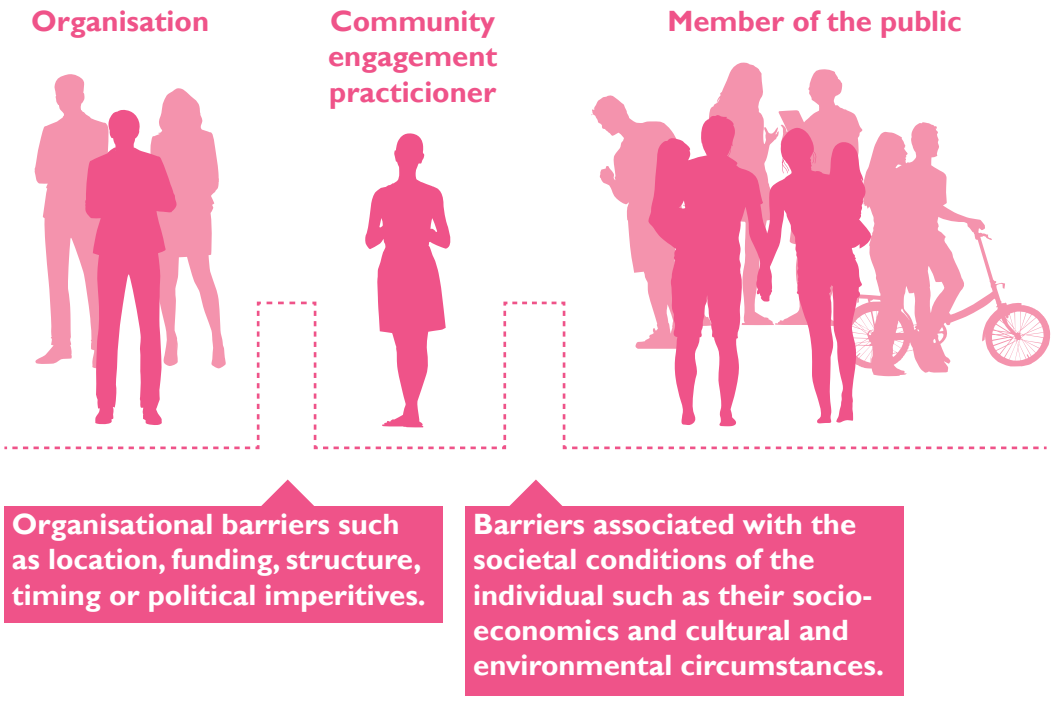
2.4 Inclusive Community Engagement

We recognise that good community engagement involves providing the right opportunities, at the right time and in the right way for people to have a say on issues that are important to and/or affect them.

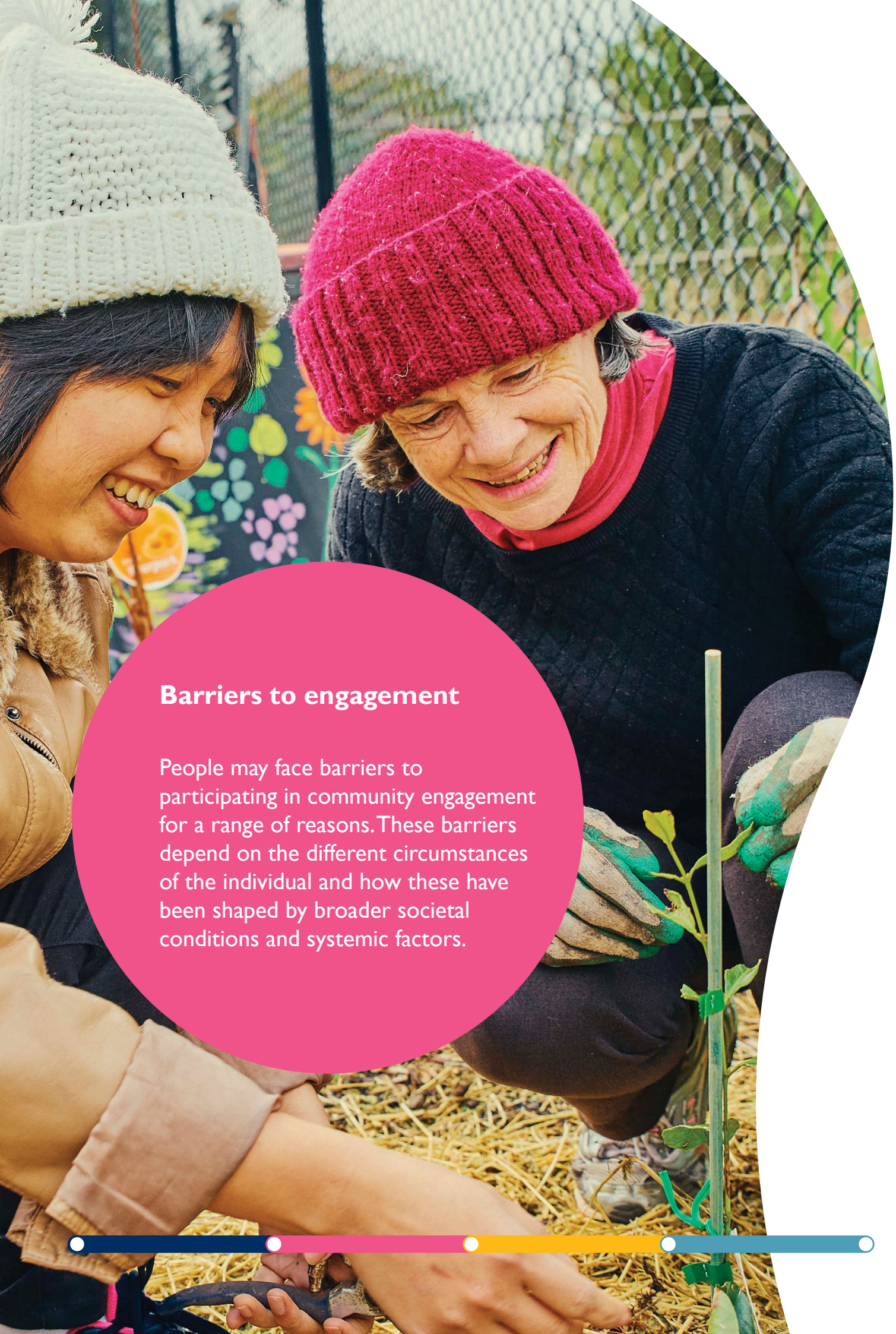
We recognise that in every engagement program there are people who may find it more difficult to participate due to individual circumstances and experiences. Societal conditions, such as socio-economics and cultural and environmental circumstances can greatly shape and impact an individual's ability, willingness and sense of safety to participate in community engagement opportunities.

An inclusive community engagement approach is about recognising these circumstances and designing an approach to help address barriers to participation. An inclusive engagement approach focuses on addressing the barriers between Council and our community. There may also be barriers within Council such as location, funding and timing.

Figure 6: *Barriers to engagement*



Source: *www.capire.com.au*



Barriers to engagement

People may face barriers to participating in community engagement for a range of reasons. These barriers depend on the different circumstances of the individual and how these have been shaped by broader societal conditions and systemic factors.

These can have an impact on an individual's ability and feelings towards participation in engagement activities and can be considered across three different categories, these include:

Personal Resources	Motivation, Attitude and Perception	Cultural Considerations
• Limited education and capacity • Limited money • Physical and mental health issues • Limited mobility • Geographic isolation • Disability and sensory impairments • Limited confidence • Limited social networks • Limited time	• Limited knowledge of benefits of engagement • Limited knowledge of engagement activities • Limited interest in the subject • Limited understanding of the subject • Consultation 'fatigue' • Unmet expectations • Perceived or real concerns around ramification of participation	• Language and literacy • Values and beliefs • Cultural and gender-based divisions and structures

Engaging the harder-to-reach

There are different groups in different communities who may find it more difficult to participate in engagement activities. Some of the groups often considered as harder to reach due to their respective barriers to engagement are:

- Homeless people
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- People with a disability
- Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD)
- Established migrant communities
- New migrant communities
- The bereaved or traumatised
- People with health issues
- People in prison
- Residents in public housing
- Parents and carers
- New residents
- Hearing, speech or vision impaired people
- People living in rural or regional areas
- International students
- Professionals and business owners
- Lesbian, gay, bi, trans, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ+) people
- Young people
- Older people
- Children

In presenting these groups, we recognise that not every individual in these groups may be harder to reach. The circumstances of each individual within these groups may vary depending on the topic, location, timing or past experiences and our engagement approaches therefore need to be adapted accordingly.

When designing and implementing engagement approaches, we are committed to addressing barriers and ensuring the voices of those who may be harder to reach are included.

Our People

THIS SECTION COVERS:

What is the role of Council Officers and Councillors in delivering the Community Engagement Policy?

03

3.1 Role of Councillors and Council Officers

Many people at Council have responsibility for ensuring the implementation of the Policy and also for potentially participating in project specific engagement activities developed in accordance with this Policy.

Councillors are responsible for adopting the Community Engagement Policy, endorsing projects, plans, strategies, policies, services and advocacy initiatives informed by community engagement findings, and for championing our community engagement commitment in their interactions with Banyule constituents. Councillors will often also be identified as stakeholders within engagement plans and therefore be involved in project specific engagement activities.

It is also a requirement of the Local Government Act 2020 that the role of the Mayor is to lead engagement with the municipal community on the development of the Council Plan (s18c)

Senior Managers and Executives are responsible for approving engagement plans that have been developed in accordance with the Policy. Depending on the level of complexity a project is assessed at, will determine what level of 'approval' is required. Senior Managers and Executives are also responsible for making and approving recommendations/decisions on a project which has been informed by engagement findings.

Council officers who are the Project Managers responsible for delivering community engagement are responsible for ensuring that quality engagement is planned, resourced, delivered and evaluated. The Project Manager works in collaboration with the Community Engagement Team and Communications Team to ensure their community engagement is designed and undertaken in accordance with the Policy.

Our **Community Engagement Team** are responsible for ensuring the Policy is up to date, implemented and reviewed. They are also responsible for ensuring Council officers undertaking strategic or statutory engagement have a good understanding of and are resourced to work in accordance with the Policy.



Our Strategic Context

THIS SECTION COVERS:

How do community engagement findings inform Council's strategic documents?

When is Council required to undertake community engagement?

04

4.1 Internal Strategic Context

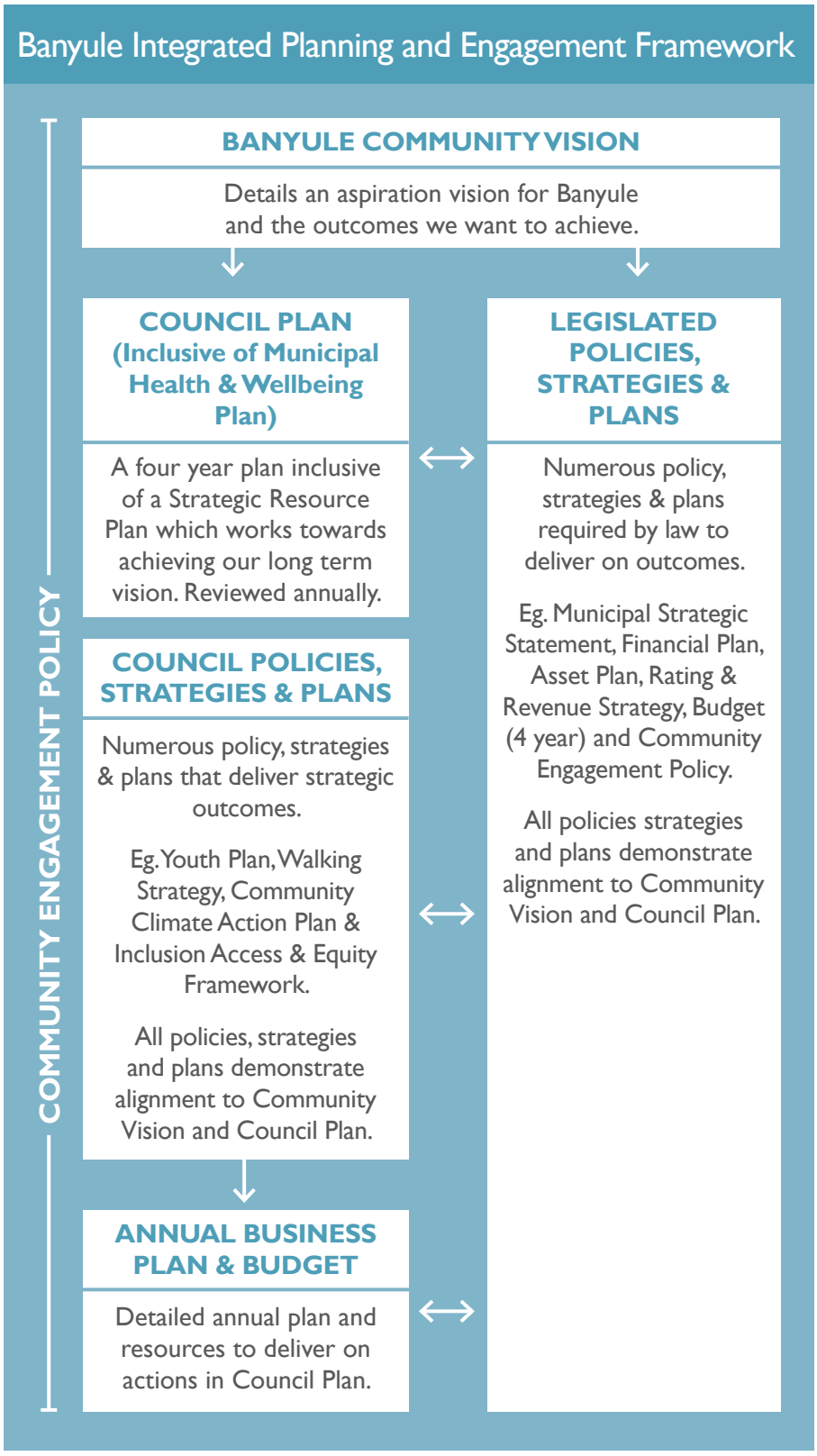
Community and stakeholder input into decision-making strengthens governance through stronger decision-making, however, it is not possible in every decision-making process.

Council is responsible for determining when to engage and the level of influence the community and/or stakeholders should have in the process. This level of influence may be determined by technical requirements, timeframes and available resources. Instances where we may only be able to provide feedback on the outcome of a decision-making process include emergency management, public risk issues, internal policy development, response to legislative requirements or time sensitive matters.

As shown in Figure 7, there are key strategic planning documents within Council. These documents work together to achieve the aspirational vision for Banyule. Figure 7 demonstrates the work of Council and how we collaboratively work with community and stakeholders.

Importantly, the development of each of these documents is underpinned by community engagement. This means that engagement approaches can be designed and implemented for each project to ensure the whole of our municipality as well as cohort and stakeholder specific engagement opportunities and methodologies are delivered.

↓ **Figure 7:** *Banyule Integrated Planning and Engagement Framework*



Further specific plans, strategies and frameworks that impact the development of engagement approaches include:

- Banyule Service Promise: applies to transactional and day to day engagement.
- Communication Strategy: applies to 'informing' engagement not attached to strategic and/or statutory engagement plans.
- Project Management Framework: applies to the development of specific project plans that engagement plans sit within.
- Banyule Style Guide: applies to all publication material produced to support the promotion and implementation of activities within an engagement plan.
- Inclusive Banyule framework guides the way that Council works to promote and foster access, equity, participation and rights, and the need for this to be built into the engagement plan.

4.2 External Strategic Context

There are several pieces of Victorian legislation, standards and charters that describe when a council must engage with their community and stakeholders. A selection of those relevant to Banyule are described below.

Local Government Act (2020)

Describes the objectives, roles and functions of local government in Victoria. It specifies that a Council must adopt and maintain a community engagement policy that gives effect to the following community engagement principles:

- a community engagement process must have a clearly defined objective and scope
- participants in community engagement must have access to objective, relevant and timely information to inform their participation
- participants in community engagement must be representative of the persons and groups affected by the matter that is the subject of the community engagement
- participants in community engagement are entitled to reasonable support to enable meaningful and informed engagement
- participants in community engagement are informed of the ways in which the community engagement process will influence Council decision making.

The Act specifies that the community vision, council plan, financial plan and asset plan must be developed or reviewed in accordance with its deliberative engagement practices. It also states that councils must make a local law in accordance with its community engagement policy.

Planning and Environment Act (1987)

Describes the procedures for preparing and amending planning schemes, obtaining permits under planning schemes, enforcing compliance with planning schemes, and other administrative procedures. As part of this, the Act sets the overarching notification requirements, however, in some instances planning scheme amendments and planning permit applications may be exempt from the notification requirements.

The Local Government Amendment (Performance Reporting and Accountability) Act (2014)

Requires each local government authority to report on the existence and application of community engagement policies and guidelines.

Public Health and Wellbeing Act (2008)

Outlines ways in which councils are expected to plan for the health and wellbeing of their communities. A Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan must provide for the involvement of people in the local community in the development, implementation and evaluation of the public health and wellbeing plan.

Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities (2006)

The Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act is a Victorian law that sets out the basic rights, freedoms and responsibilities of all people in Victoria. The Charter is founded on the following principles:

- human rights are essential in a democratic and inclusive society that respects the rule of law, human dignity, equality and freedom
- human rights belong to all people without discrimination, and the diversity of the people of Victoria enhances our community
- human rights come with responsibilities and must be exercised in a way that respects the human rights of others.

As a public authority, councils have an obligation to act in a way that is compatible with the human rights described in the Charter.

Child Safe Standards, Victorian Commission for Children and Young People

Standard Seven of the Child Safe Standards focuses on strategies to promote participation and empowerment of children. These strategies include:

- supporting children and young people to understand their rights, contribute to child safety planning and raise concerns
- promoting and encouraging children's participation in decision-making
- valuing and respecting children's opinions
- seeking children's views about what makes them feel safe and unsafe
- establishing an environment of trust and inclusion that enables children to ask questions and speak up if they are worried or feeling unsafe.

