2025 - 2029

Community Engagement Framework

YOUR SAY BUSSELTON

City of Busselton
Geographe Bay

Acknowledgement of Country

The City of Busselton acknowledges the Traditional Custodians, the Wadandi People, on whose land we are living and pay our respects to their Elders, past, present and emerging.

Council commitment

We believe that a strong community starts with open, honest and respectful conversations. We are committed to creating an environment where everyone feels comfortable sharing their ideas, concerns and feedback. The Council's goal is to ensure appropriate consultation is undertaken with residents, local organisations, and all community members to help Elected Members make informed decisions that reflect the needs and interests of the people we represent.

Our commitment to community engagement includes:

Active Listening

We will consistently seek out and listen to the feedback, concerns, and ideas of our community members, ensuring that all voices are heard, respected and considered in the decision making processes.

Transparency and Accountability

We agree to provide clear, accessible information about Council meetings, decisions, and processes. We will remain accountable to the community by keeping residents informed and by actively seeking their input when applicable.

Inclusive Participation

We will strive to create meaningful opportunities for all community members to engage with Council decision making processes, particularly ensuring that hard to reach voices are included in discussions.

Collaboration and Partnership

We are committed to working together with community organisations, businesses, and residents to address challenges, celebrate successes, and ensure the wellbeing of the entire community.

Continuous Improvement

We will regularly evaluate and improve our engagement efforts, ensuring they are effective, relevant, and responsive to the changing needs of our community.

Introduction

The Council's goal is to ensure sufficient and genuine engagement with community members and other key stakeholders to enable feedback to be considered as part of strategic decision making processes.

The City of Busselton Community Engagement Framework reflects the Council's commitment to engaging with transparency and accountability, listening to all voices in the community, creating meaningful opportunities for participants, and ensuring the City continues to regularly review and evaluate its engagement practices. This Framework outlines how officers and elected members will work to build and maintain positive relationships with the community, and to ensure that they are kept informed on matters that will affect them or are important to them.

A reference to "community" means all community members: groups or individuals that have an interest in the activities of the City of Busselton. This includes residents, groups, organisations, business community members or anyone with a vested interest in the outcome of a decision.

The levels of engagement included in the Framework are based on established approaches outlined in the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2), which are used widely across the Australian Local Government Sector. Using these approaches, the City will seek to engage with stakeholders in a meaningful way, so that decisions contribute to the building of a place where environment, lifestyle and opportunity thrive.

This Framework applies to the City of Busselton Council, officers and consultants engaged by the City. It should be read in conjunction with the City's Community Engagement Policy. This Framework was developed and endorsed in February 2025 in alignment with CEO KP1- Communication and Objective 18.1 of the Council Plan 2024-2034.

Review of the original framework

The previous Community Engagement Framework was adopted in 2021, after significant input from the community via both surveys and in-person feedback opportunities. A desktop review of the framework was carried out in 2024, in line with Objective 18.1 of the Council Plan 2024 - 2034. In early 2024, the City undertook a community perceptions survey, gathering feedback about communication and engagement, among other priority areas. The City received 1,363 responses which enabled elected members and officers to better understand the community's future priorities and any current concerns. Feedback received through this survey did not raise concerns with the general approach or practical methods used by the City to engage, but instead showed a level of dissatisfaction when decisions of the Council did not reflect community sentiment and opinion.

It is understood from the community feedback received that the role and purpose of community engagement processes in Council decision-making can be unclear, so education about this, as well as stronger communication feedback loops explaining why decisions have been made, have been incorporated into this updated Framework.

An elected member workshop was conducted in December 2024 to gain a mutual understanding and determine priorities for community engagement, which further informed this Framework review. This Framework was endorsed in February 2025 and will be in place until 2029, at which time another review will be carried out.

What is community engagement?

Community engagement for the City of Busselton means connecting with community groups, organisations and individuals for the purpose of exchanging information, building shared understanding and making informed decisions.

Engagement is a process where the City works alongside the community to involve them in decisions that affect or interest them. It's not about meeting all community expectations all the time, but rather about building strong relationships that allow the Council to make informed decisions and ensure that the City's programs, services, and projects truly support the community. Effective community engagement fosters trust, empowers residents, and leads to solutions that reflect the community's values and needs. Engagement can take different forms, and the approach will vary depending on the situation. The City of Busselton's engagement efforts will aim to be guided by a clear process, shaped by context, and focused on being transparent, respectful, and timely.

Depending on the project or proposal, the impact on community and how much influence community has on the final decision, engagement may be undertaken for the purpose(s) of:

- Informing community
- Consulting with community
- Involving community in decision making
- Collaborating with community about a particular decision
- Empowering community to make a final decision*

Under the Local Government Act 1995, the only decision making power that rests entirely with the public is the election of Council members during the Council Election process.

Principles of community engagement

The following principles guide the City in achieving its engagement objectives.

Accessibility

- Make it easy to for people to get involved by considering different needs and removing barriers to access information.
- Ensure information is easy to access, accurate and simple to understand.

Listening

- Listen to the community and explain how their feedback will help the Council make decisions.

Purpose

- Be clear about the purpose of any community engagement exercise, including any limitations or constraints.
- Ensure community engagement activities are undertaken with transparency and without bias.

Representation

- Encourage broad participation from all sectors of the community.

Opportunity

- Provide enough time and opportunities for people in the community to participate.

Resourcing

- Ensure the right resources are in place to allow engagement processes to be effective and meaningful.

The purpose of engagement in decision making

Community engagement is undertaken to inform, consult or better understand the community's point of view on matters that affect or impact them.
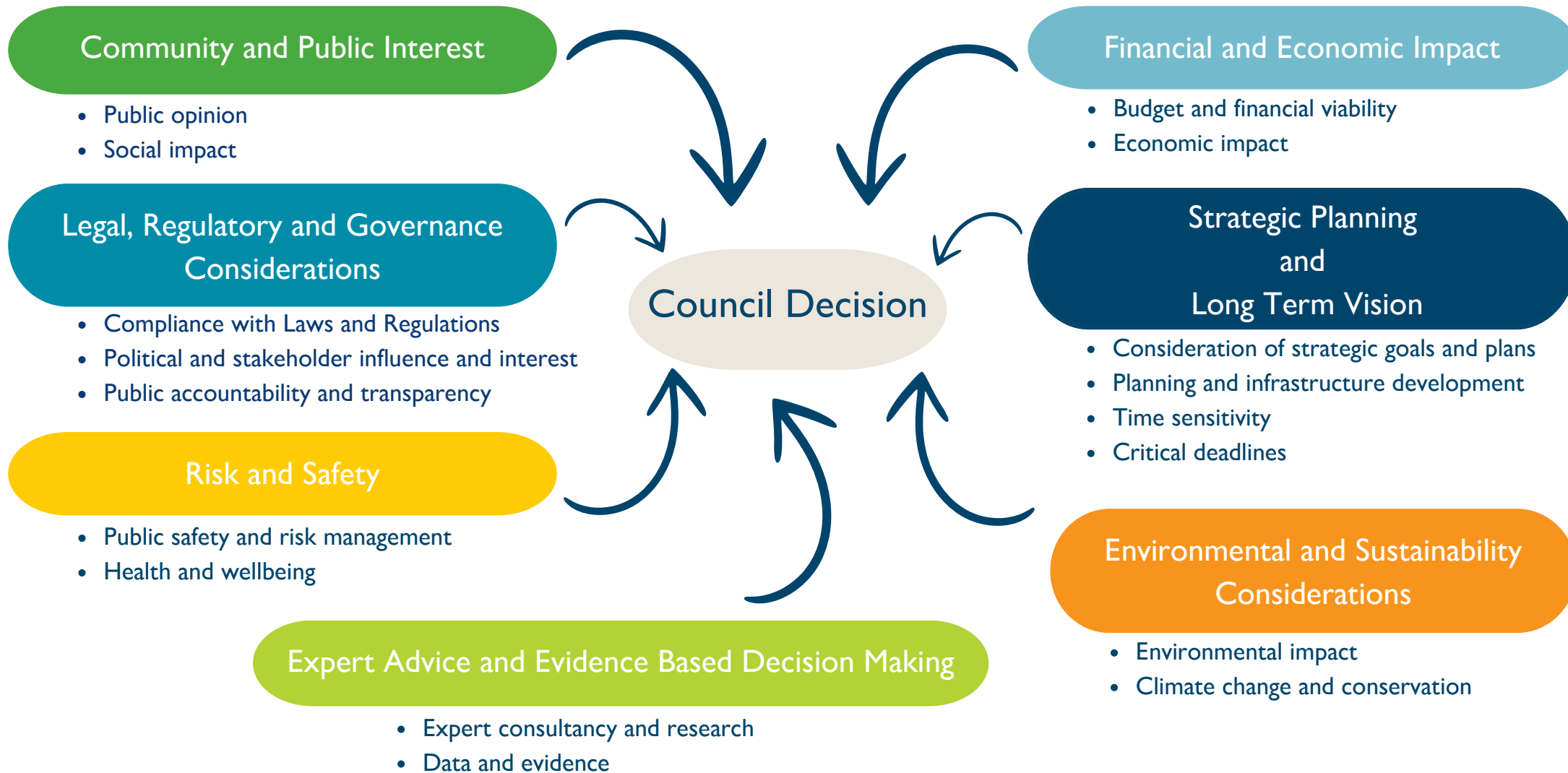
The City engages with the community to ensure they are informed and have the opportunity to participate in the development of policies, plans, and services. However, by fulfilling their responsibilities under the Local Government Act 1995, City of Busselton elected members are not bound to act in accordance with the wishes of a particular group or groups. The role of the elected members is to represent the best interests of all electors, ratepayers and residents. This requires them to form their own views based on all the information presented to them, including professional advice from officers, feedback from the community and Council debate.

Not all decisions of the Council will align with community feedback, but community engagement is considered invaluable in its ability to inform the decision making process, ensuring that the final decisions made by the Council are equitable, sustainable and well-informed.

Council decision making

Factors that influence Council decisions:

Community and Public Interest
- Public opinion
- Social impact

Legal, Regulatory and Governance Considerations
- Compliance with Laws and Regulations
- Political and stakeholder influence and interest
- Public accountability and transparency

Risk and Safety
- Public safety and risk management
- Health and wellbeing

Expert Advice and Evidence Based Decision Making
- Expert consultancy and research
- Data and evidence

Council Decision

Financial and Economic Impact
- Budget and financial viability
- Economic impact

Strategic Planning and Long Term Vision
- Consideration of strategic goals and plans
- Planning and infrastructure development
- Time sensitivity
- Critical deadlines

Environmental and Sustainability Considerations
- Environmental impact
- Climate change and conservation

Roles in engagement

Everyone in our community has a role to play in engagement to help enable the best outcomes. The roles of community, elected members and city staff are outlined below:

Community

- Stay informed and get involved in community engagement opportunities that matter to you and your community.
- Review the materials and resources shared during engagement opportunities.
- Be open to new ideas and respectful of the perspectives of others.
- Follow the process and respect the timeline provided for each engagement.
- Understand that the final outcomes may not always align with your personal preferences, but the process aims to serve the broader community's needs.

Elected Members

- Support the implementation of the Community Engagement Policy and Community Engagement Framework.
- Uphold the Engagement Principles.
- Be open to all ideas and respectful of other people.
- Act with integrity, avoid bias and where required, declare interests.
- Promote engagement opportunities.
- Review the outcomes of community activities which are presented as part of the decision making process.
- Consider the results of community engagement in forming opinions and making decisions.

City Staff

- Be educative.
- Uphold the Engagement Principles.
- Consult the Community Engagement Officer about appropriate engagement approaches, before initiating projects or making decisions.
- Partner with the Community Engagement Officer to design a genuine and meaningful process.
- Attend community engagement training.
- Act with integrity and avoid bias.
- Conduct engagement that is transparent and inclusive.
- Communicate clearly, explaining the steps in the decision making process.
- Enact the Plan, Do , Report, Review Engagement Model (see page 12).
- Engage in a timely and informative manner to encourage meaningful participation.
- Provide support to community members throughout the engagement process and guide participants on how they can contribute effectively.
- Encourage discussion and understanding of all viewpoints.
- Fully consider findings of the engagement process and ensure they are reported and considered when developing recommendations.

Who we engage with

The City will identify the groups of individuals and/or organisations that may be affected by or have an interest in an issue or project. We will then decide on the best ways to reach and gather feedback from these groups, considering any potential barriers to engaging with them.

The role each group plays in the decision making process will depend on their level of interest, influence, and how much they may be impacted by the final outcomes. Examples of groups are indicated below:

- Residents, ratepayers and service users
- Hard to reach people in the community
- Business owners
- Community groups
- Decision makers
- Project partners
- State Government agencies / regulators
- Land developers
- Peak body / industry groups / local government associations and networks
- Traditional Owners
- Special interest groups
- Key influencers and subject matter experts
- Media

Who we engage with

Hard to reach groups

To ensure engagement is inclusive, it's important to specifically consider groups that are harder to reach. These groups may not engage as often due to factors like social or physical isolation, language barriers, low digital skills, lack of time, or physical or cognitive disabilities.

Hard to reach groups identified in the City of Busselton may include:
• Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CaLD) communities
• Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
• People with a disability
• LGBTQIA+ community
• Youth
• Families with young children
• Absentee landlords
• FIFO workers

The engagement approach may need to be tailored to provide these groups with the best opportunity to participate.

Our engagement model

At the City of Busselton engagement is a four-step process:
- **Plan:** prepare a Community Engagement Plan
- **Do:** prepare for engagement and engage
- **Report:** close the feedback loop
- **Review:** assess the effectiveness of the engagement initiative

The first step in preparing for community engagement is to develop a Community Engagement Plan. This will guide the implementation of engagement activities and is used by officers at the City of Busselton, with leadership, advice and support from the Stakeholder Relations team. The next step is to deliver the engagement through activities that are inclusive and accessible to all.

> Engagement should be genuine, clear in its purpose and ensure the community is provided with the opportunity to participate, where appropriate, and be listened to.

Once engagement is complete, any feedback needs to be analysed to identify themes and perspectives that will inform decision making. If required, a report is then prepared for Council detailing the outcomes of the engagement process. At the end of the engagement process the City will close the loop with participants and, where applicable, the wider community. The last step is to review the effectiveness of each engagement activity. This will help improve the City's community engagement processes.

The Community Engagement Toolkit is used by officers to carry out the engagement model in more detail. Training is made available periodically to internal and external staff.

How do we ensure best practice?

The City of Busselton's Community Engagement Framework is based on the International Association for Public Participation's (IAP2) Public Participation Spectrum.

The IAP2 levels of engagement table provides an overview of:
• Indicative guidelines on the timing of implementing the different engagement types.
• Council's commitment relative to each engagement type.
• The role of community relative to each engagement type.
• Examples of the various tools that may be suitable for each engagement type (City officers can source more information on engagement tools in the Community Engagement Toolkit or through the Community Engagement Officer).

Generally, the City will use the level (or levels) of engagement which correlates best with the level of influence an individual, group or organisation has on the outcome of a decision. The more a stakeholder group will be affected by the proposed project, the more important it is for them to be included and encouraged to participate in the engagement process.
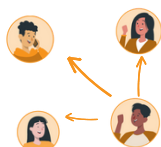
IAP2 Level of Influence

Engagement Level	Most Appropriate When	Level of Influence
Inform	Low impact or routine decisions - when the decision has minimal impact on the community, or the primary goal is to keep the public informed rather than seek input.	Low
Consult	When decisions are being made that will have a broad or moderate impact on the community. Feedback is needed to understand public preferences, concerns or opinions and better inform the decision making process.	Low
Involve	Community input is necessary to identify any potential issues early in the process. Community members' insights, concerns and ideas can directly inform the planning, design and/or decision making process.	Medium
Collaborate	Council or City Officers mutually share the decision making process. Collaboration is used when issues and solutions are not clear, and Council seeks to work in partnership with others to find solutions. A Collaborate level of engagement typically occurs in a Local Government setting when the public group or organisation is a partner in the project and the City hopes to find mutually agreeable solutions.	High
Empower	Community is provided with the skills, information, authority and resources to make the final decision. This occurs when delegated decision making authority is passed on to the community. *	High

*Under the Local Government Act 1995, the only decision making power that rests entirely with the public is the election of Council Members during the Council Election Process.
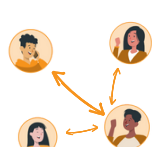
IAP2 table

The International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) is the recognised standard for community engagement and is used broadly across the Australian Local Government Sector. The table below is an example of the IAP2 model and how it may be used at the City of Busselton.
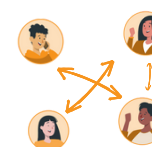
	Inform	**Consult**	**Involve**	**Collaborate**	**Empower**
Engagement Type	One-way communication, providing information that will assist stakeholders understand something that is happening or has happened.	Two-way communication designed to get feedback on ideas and alternatives to inform Council's decision making.	A participatory process designed to identify issues and views before plans are developed or policies drafted. Community has input and ample opportunity to influence outcomes on multiple occasions throughout the process. Decision making remains with Council.	Joint decision making - working in partnership to identify all issues, alternatives and preferred solutions. Like Involve but at the Collaborate level community or a section of, are directly engaged in making final recommendations for Council's consideration.	Often the level of Empower sits with the Elected Members only. The Council may, within the bounds of the Local Government Act 1995, determine to defer the decision making responsibility to stakeholders and duly endorse the final decision.
Timing	Before, during and after a decision has been enacted by the City.	After a draft proposal has been developed; before Council decision making.	Before, during and after draft development; before Council decision making.	Before, during and after draft development; before Council decision making.	Before and during the development of a proposal; before Council endorsement of a decision.
Council/City's Commitment	Share information about a decision or outcome.	Gain feedback to better understand stakeholder concerns and preferences AND to explore options.	Involve community in the process so ideas, concerns, and aspirations are reflected in the options developed and final outcome.	Collaborate with community so their advice and recommendations are included in the final decision AND the final decision will be one made together.	If a delegation is made, the Council will implement what is decided – subject to approvals, legislation and monetary limits.
Role of Community	Listen	Contribute	Participate	Partner	Decide
Example of tools and activities	Advertisements Media/social media Website Signs/maps/Models Newsletters/fact sheets Public displays Emails/mail out Presentations Flow charts	Submissions Your Say Busselton Online polls/surveys Public meetings/Forums/ Seminars/presentations Community Access Sessions Council meetings Open days/Pop-up events Face-to-Face Council sessions	Meetings Your Say Busselton Reference groups / Local community groups Workshops	Reference / advisory groups / Consultative and steering committees Workshops	Elected Member representation Participatory budgeting Ballots

Choosing an engagement level

Factors to consider when analysing the level of impact includes:

- Cultural significance of the project or proposal.
- Proximity to the project or proposal.
- Change in service provision or access / use.
- Proposals that may significantly alter the form or functionality of land or buildings within town centres, foreshores and other areas of significant public interest (generally in the form of proposed changes to planning controls).
- Special interests (e.g. environmental groups).
- Financial implications (cost to ratepayers) of the project or proposal.
- Impact on lifestyle / amenity.
- Safety and wellbeing.

Council in the community

Council in the Community is a new initiative enabling Elected Members and City officers to hear directly and informally from local community members, community groups and businesses. This program will provide the opportunity for sharing of information, gaining feedback and building trusted relationships, with the aim of further enhancing transparency and accountability in relation to decision making and projects.

Elected Members will be encouraged to attend community markets, events and functions to promote key priorities and objectives of the Council Plan 2024-2034. The establishment of the program sees Elected Members meet the community where they are, increasing their ability to hear community ideas and suggestions. This may include 'Council in the Community' market stalls and attendance at City events and functions. Market stalls may also be attended by City officers, there to discuss current projects or engagement opportunities.

The commitments within this Framework shall not in any way fetter any Elected Member's ability to conduct their communication roles and responsibilities directly to or with the public.

Closing the loop

Part of the engagement process involves reviewing and evaluating all feedback received during the consultation period. This feedback can be used to assist in the decision making process and identify community's thoughts and attitudes towards a project. Once a decision has been made or a project completed, we will 'close the loop' by making contact with the people that have participated in consultation or we informed of a project, letting them know the final outcome. Updates will also be made to the City's engagement platform and the website, as required. If further public communications are required officers will follow regular processes that can include, social media and publication of public notices.

Conclusion

This Framework aims to guide the City's elected members, staff and external consultants through the process of planning and implementing engagement initiatives. It underpins both the City's commitment to creating a harmonious environment through open, honest and respectful dialogue. The structure and process outlined in the Framework align with principles and objectives of the City of Busselton Community Engagement Policy and are based on the IAP2 engagement model. This Framework reflects the community's values around quality engagement. It also reflects an understanding that context will determine when engagement is undertaken and at what level; how it will be undertaken and with whom. The Framework will be administered by the City of Busselton Stakeholder Relations team and regularly reviewed to meet the changing needs of community and developing engagement trends and technologies.