

Strathbogie Shire Council

Community Panel

August 2022



Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands on which we strive, the peoples of the rivers and the hills of the Strathbogie Shire region who walked these lands for generations.

We pay our respects to the elders of the past, and the speakers of the first words, who lived in harmony with this country.

We acknowledge the elders of the present, who seek to regain their culture, and to teach the elders of the future their law, their history, and their language.

We pay our respects to them and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples today.

We honour their spirit – and the memory, culture, art, and science of the world's oldest living culture through 60,000 years.

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Background

Strathbogie Shire Council has worked closely with community advisory committees over many years to educate Council on community issues and to help guide us to deliver better services, plans and strategies.

Community representation on these committees was strong. Members were appointed through a public application process and there were eight to nine committees made up of passionate community members.

However, in more recent times attracting members to these committees has been less successful.

This is not a reflection on the committee members.

This has occurred as Council Officers navigate greater expectation for broad community engagement and, more recently, the requirements of the Local Government Act 2020.

Council now has just four advisory committees regularly meeting. Of these one is legislatively required (Audit and Risk Committee), and two are cross-organisation committees being the Waterways Advisory Committee and the Greening Euroa Steering Committee.

The conclusion of the 2019-2022 Community Engagement Strategy provides Council with an opportunity to review the current advisory committee structure and the way we engage with our community to create an improved approach.

This paper outlines a new approach to ensure best practice engagement into the future. There is no change to legislatively required committees.

Engagement with advisory committees

Council officers conducted a survey with current and past members of advisory groups. We received 16 responses to this survey, of which 50 per cent were from members of active groups. From this we learnt:

- Most responders had been involved in their group for between three to five years
- Most responders (3.81 average of possible 5) were satisfied with their involvement.
- Most responders (3.69) felt the group's membership was representative of the Strathbogie Shire community.
- Responders did not feel (2.56) the wider community was aware of their group's operation, role and achievements.
- Most (3.31) felt their group had been influence.
- Most (3.31) felt their group had been productive.
- Most (3.81) felt the facilitation of meetings had enabled all members to contribute.
- Most (3.13) felt they had received adequate feedback about the outcome of their advice.
- Most (3.47) believed their group was operating in accordance with its TOR.
- 56 per cent of responders said their group was operating well
- 19 per cent said their group needed more skin in the game.

- There was strong support (63 per cent) for drawing on the expertise of technical experts
- 44 per cent felt inviting feedback from the broader community on some issues would make sense
- 38 per cent felt less frequent regular meetings and intensive workshops with the broader community.
- 38 per cent thought it was time to modernise advisory group structures.

The solution: Establishing a Community Panel

A community panel or standing panel is a group of people who are brought together to collaborate with Council on many issues over a long period of time.

Participants include a broad cross section of people from throughout the community with different interests. The panel also allows Council to create a representative group of our community when deliberative engagement is required.

A community panel provides advice on a range of different topics, issues, projects and strategies. For example – township-based problems can be solved by bringing in the panel participants who live in that area and asking them to provide local knowledge and advice. On shire-based projects the entire panel will come together to deliberate, share information and gather input.

Our panellists then act as advocates to participation in the community. The panel does not replace broad community engagement. We will always provide opportunities for the broader community to have its say.

However, panellists will help in encouraging participation and, perhaps more importantly, generating understanding and trust in the process and Council's decision making.

The detail: How it will work

Purpose

The purpose of the panel is to provide a flexible, as needed, and inclusive engagement forum for community members to:

- discuss and contribute to strategic topics of community interest and impact
- contribute to council decision-making by sharing their views on topics of community interest and impact
- represent the collective views of their communities.

Membership

Community members are eligible to become a member of the Community Panel (with no upper limit on numbers) if they are 16 years of age or older and meet at least one of the below criteria:

- live in Strathbogie Shire
- work in Strathbogie Shire
- study in Strathbogie Shire
- are a business owner in Strathbogie Shire
- are a Strathbogie Shire ratepayer.

Community members are not eligible to become a member of the panel if they are:

- under 16 years of age
- an elected member of the Strathbogie Shire Council

- employed by Strathbogie Shire Council

Best practice suggests that community panels should be retained for no longer than two years and only half the group refreshed at any one time. The panel would be supported by the Communications and Engagement Team.

Registration and appointment process

Community members will register to join the panel through Council's online community engagement platform Share Strathbogie.

During registration, members provide a limited range of personal information and select their preferred topics of interest. This will allow Council to invite members to topic-specific engagement activities.

It will also allow Council to randomly select participants to a representative sample of our community to participate in deliberative engagement forums.

Representativeness

At times, Council will seek members who represent the diversity of demographics, interests and knowledge within the community. This is to ensure engagement is, where possible, representative of the whole community. Representativeness may include:

- age
- gender
- culture
- geography

When engagement opportunities are offered and Council receives a large amount of interest from panel members, Council will ensure that all participants are offered fair opportunity to take part through random selection.

Member responsibilities

- Panel members are responsible for attending engagement opportunities, providing constructive feedback and representing the views of their wider community networks.
- Members are not to utilise the panels to pursue individual interests or complaints.
- Panel members are expected to act respectfully to others in forums and be open to different perspectives and experiences.
- Members are to declare any actual or perceived conflict of interest with the Community Engagement Team before participating in engagement opportunities

Council responsibilities

- Council is responsible for administering and facilitating engagement forums, closing-the-loop with community after engagement sessions and conducting an annual review of the program.
- Council staff will act respectfully towards all panel members and be open to different perspectives and experiences that different panel members bring.

- The contribution of panel members to the community will be acknowledged by Council in its annual reporting.

Role of Councillors

Community engagement forums are an important place for Councillors to listen to and understand community sentiment. This improves Council's ability to make better decisions that are in the best interests of the community.

A schedule of engagement activities for the panels will be provided to Councillors prior to forums occurring. Councillors may attend engagement forums, at their discretion, to listen to discussions and answer questions directed towards them.

Councillors will not lead discussions or facilitate forums. However, there may be forums where a presentation by a Councillor/s may be valuable and required for the topic/s being discussed.

Reporting of the panel discussions will be provided to all Councillors after engagement has occurred.

Process

Members will be invited to attend engagement opportunities as and when needed and based on their selected topics of interest.

Engagement types and mediums will vary and include a mix of digital and/or face-to-face (when possible).

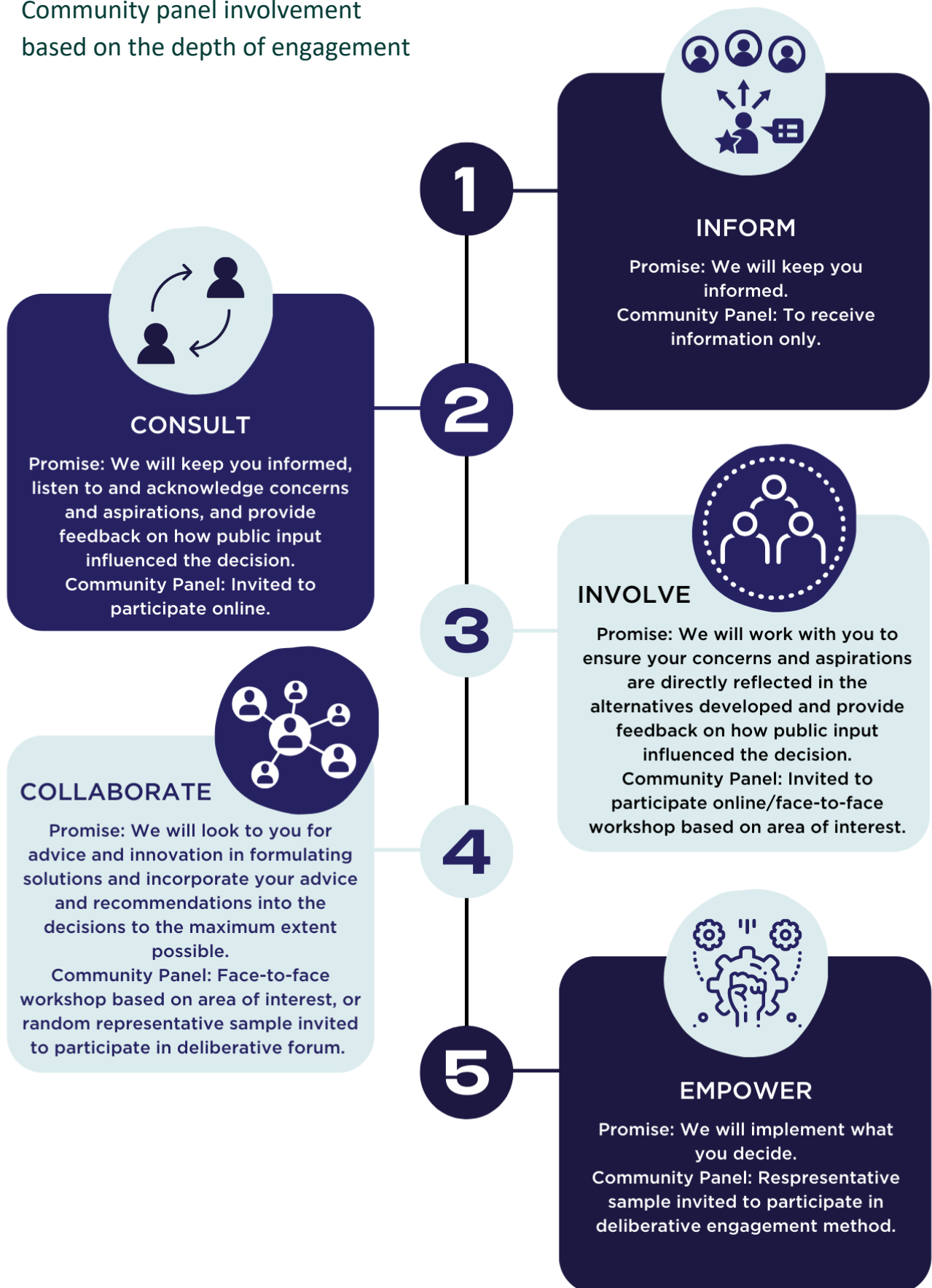
Where large numbers of people select a particular topic of interest, digital engagement will be the preferred medium.

Council will provide at least two weeks' notice for engagement events and provide members with relevant information leading up to and/or during the engagement.

After the engagement has been completed, Council will 'close-the-loop' with participants, advising members how their feedback influenced or will influence decision making.

The table over the page provides examples of how the Community Panel will be engaged based on the depth of engagement.

Community panel involvement based on the depth of engagement



Meeting requirements

Members will be invited to join a panel on strategic topics as and when needed. The panel will not have regular meetings but will convene on an "as needed" basis.

Engagement activities will be varied and be offered both online and face-to-face. This could include activities like webinars, surveys, focus groups, online polls, deliberative processes, workshops or interviews.

Participants can be involved as much or as little as they like. For these engagement activities participation will be voluntary.

Panel members will receive regular emails inviting them to participate in our engagement activities on www.share.strathbogie.vic.gov.au.

We will draw on panellists with relevant interest in expertise on a range of topic-based engagement opportunities throughout the year. Topics discussed by a panel may include (but are not limited to):

- Animals
- Arts, Culture and Heritage
- Business and Economy
- Planning
- Community
- Disaster Management
- Environment, Sustainability & Climate Change
- Governance
- Health and wellbeing
- Indigenous
- Parks and recreation
- Sport
- Transport and movement
- Tourism
- Resource Recovery

Deliberative engagement

At times, Council may randomly select individuals to participate in deliberative engagement forums where numbers are limited and must be representative of the broader Strathbogie Shire Community.

In line with best practice engagement, these deliberative engagement opportunities will be independently facilitated. In these instances, participants will be paid (remuneration is set out below).

It is envisaged the entire panel will be asked to attend one independently facilitated, face-to-face meeting each year to:

- Receive a report on Council's performance against the Council Plan and make recommendations on the actions Council undertakes to progress work towards our Council Plan's strategic focus areas for the year ahead.

Decision making

Feedback from panel members will provide Council with a range of valuable information that will be considered in various decision-making processes. This information will be used by Council staff to inform Council policies, strategies, programs and other plans that impact our community.

Feedback provided by panel members will be de-identified, collated and reported to Council as part of reporting processes. Final decision-making authority is held by Elected Representatives.

Remuneration

Panel members will be awarded a payment of \$50 per person per day for deliberative engagement forums attended in full duration. Attendance at all other engagement activities will be voluntary.

Contact

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