

Community Consultation Model



CARDINIA

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INTRODUCTION

Cardinia Shire Council has prepared developed a community consultation model for the Shire.

The following pages provide details of the consultation process and a framework for community consultations to take place.

This model aims to give the community a clear view of the importance of consultation in democratic governance. It also aims to be a practical document that will assist Council to undertake effective consultation in Cardinia.

Every Council report should include a section on internal and external consultation to ensure that proper attention has been given to this area of making decisions. This paper is to ensure that the consultation genuinely reaches people affected by a decision and they have every opportunity to impact on Council decision making and to foster a consultative culture.

The information in this document is based on models developed by Socom Response with other Councils. In particular, Moreland City Council has successfully adopted the model into all their processes and the new City of Melbourne Council has adopted a model designed by Socom as a means of consultation.

This document includes a proposal for a program to assist further development of a consultation model for Cardinia and its implementation into the community.

1. CONSULTATION MODEL

1.1 DEFINITION OF CONSULTATION & DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE

Consultation for this document is defined as a process of two way, informed communication between the Council and the community on an issues prior to Council making a decision on that issue.

Democratic governance involves community participation and input into governance and decision making. Consultation is a vehicle for obtaining this input and it enhances the decision making process. It fulfils a need to ensure that views can be identified and communicated. Consultation does not impact on the Council's role to make decisions and its accountability for its decision making. It does not imply government by referendum.

1.2 AIM OF THE CONSULTATION MODEL

The aim of the consultation strategy is to create and foster a consultative culture within Cardinia Shire Council.

1.3 KEY PRINCIPLES

The following principles form the basis of the Consultation Model. They have previously been adapted by Moreland City Council and Melbourne City Council, from work undertaken by Wellington Council (NZ).

INCLUSIVENESS

- Consultation will encourage the participation of people affected by or interested in a decision.
- Affected and interested parties will be given equal opportunity to participate in the consultation
- Affected groups and interested parties can select their own representative to work with Council.
- Consultation will be sensitive to the needs of particular groups to maximise their ability to contribute.
- Council will actively seek out people for consultation.

FOCUS

- Consultation will be purpose-driven.
- Chosen consultation methods will be appropriate for the task.
- A clear statement about what the consultation is to achieve will be provided.
- A clear statement about the role of Council and the role of participants in the consultation will be made
- Internal coordination will ensure Council ownership of the consultation.

RESPONSIVENESS

- Council will consider and respond to contributions from all participants.
- Consultation will be transparent. All people involved will have a clear understanding of how their feedback and comments are to be used.
- Council will maintain openness and take new ideas on board and alter the course of actions if required.
- Council will ensure respect for the diverse range of interests that may be represented during a consultation.
- Council will make reasonable attempts to resolve conflicts, if they arise, and reach a suitable solution.

PROVISION OF INFORMATION

- Information relating to the consultation will be readily available to allow participants to make informed and timely contributions.
- Information relating to the consultation can be accessed easily by everyone involved before key decisions are made.
- Relevant Information will be presented in an easily understood format.
- In some instances full details about an issue may not be fully disclosed to the public because of its commercially sensitive or personal nature.

IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION

- All consultations will be evaluated after the decision-making to which they contributed is complete.
- Participants will receive feedback about inputs received and how the final decision was reached.
- If a difference occurs between the input and the final decision the reasons for this will be clearly documented.
- As part of its commitment to the effectiveness of a consultation, Council's associated decision making process will be evaluated once a final decision has been made.

1.4 LEVELS OF CONSULTATION

The principles are generic to all consultation processes, but there are clearly different levels of consultation to meet different requirements.

Democratic local government, with its very broad charter, needs to consult across all levels which may range from consultation about the future use of a specific site in the municipality, to consultation on the community's view of a statewide, nationwide or even international issue which impacts on the community and therefore requires a Council position.

The levels illustrated in Table One on the following page, are based on the City of Melbourne Community Consultation framework. These levels will require different approach to consultation. The general principles should be used to develop these approaches and the different functional areas should be involved in the development of specific strategies.

1.5 TOOLS OF CONSULTATION

There are a number of ways in which we can commence a dialogue with the community. These are outlined in Table Two on page 8

1.6 CONSULTATION MATRIX

The Council and the community need to determine which tools are appropriate at which levels of consultation. The template for the matrix appears as Table Three on page 9.

TABLE ONE

Examples of the different levels of decision making requiring different approaches to consultation are:

<p>Site Specific</p>	<p>Matters about a particular site, such as a change in use. Excluding matters to be decided under the Planning and Environment Act</p>
<p>Area improvement</p>	<p>Matters that affect people in a neighbourhood, or Township , eg traffic management or Township Strategy</p>
<p>Service planning for the entire municipality</p>	<p>To develop or improve a service. The service could have an impact on the whole municipality</p>
<p>Policy Development</p>	<p>To develop or improve policies for Council's position on particular matters. Policies may affect the whole municipality</p>
<p>Key strategic issues/ Major development facility</p>	<p>Projects of such a size that they impact on the finances or future of the whole municipality, eg Health Plan</p>
<p>Strategic plan for the Shire</p>	<p>Establishing the decision-making framework of Council. Includes the Council Plan.</p>

TABLE TWO - TOOLS OF CONSULTATION

Ads in the Local Newspapers	Ads in the news section of the local papers are an important means of advising the community about the matter under consultation and how they might have their say.
Web Page	Information will be placed on the Internet at www.cardinia.vic.gov.au .
Connect Cardinia	This is the regular publication of Council. It can carry articles about a policy or issue. If it is used for consultation, then the article must inform and encourage feedback. The newsletter is an important vehicle to report the results of other consultations.
Write a Letter	This is a personally addressed letter to all affected households. It outlines the issues and invites comment. It always indicates where the comment should be directed within Council.
Township Committees	Township Committees are a valuable means of receiving feedback on a range of issues. Where a Township does not operate there may be an alternative representative group in existence that could perform this role. Where the issue is localised and it may be only selected or individual Committees that are consulted.
Media Release	This involves issuing media releases and conducting interviews with local journalists. If it is part of the consultative process, the Council spokesperson should always indicate to the media representative that feedback from the community is valued. The media release will be made available to local newspapers and community newsletters.
Survey	This is a statistically correct survey of particular attitudes, beliefs or information. It is almost always conducted by independent survey specialists and may be done by phone, written survey or door knock of individual households.
Letterbox Drop	This is a non-addressed leaflet or flyer that summarises the issues and invites feedback to Council. The flyer indicates how that feedback can be given. These will only be used in the affected area.
Personal Briefings	These are held at the request of a member or members of the local community to discuss a particular issue with a responsible officer. They may include a councillor.
Focus Groups/Review Groups	These are discussion groups of around 15-20 people, usually led by a trained person (facilitator). The participants are invited because they are residents or because they have a particular interest, involvement or stake in the subject being discussed. The group may be comprised of professionals or residents with particular skills and competencies relevant to the particular issue. The purpose is to find out the range of opinions that exist on a particular topic. Focus groups cannot measure how widely those various opinions are held in the community.
Public Meeting/Information Session	This may be held at a community venue, at the site of the matter under consultation, or at the Council offices. Invitations will be sent by one or more of the following methods: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ad in the local papers - Letterbox drop - Media

TABLE THREE - DRAFT CONSULTATION MATRIX

	Ad in local papers	Web page	Connect Cardinia	Write	Township Committee	Media release	Survey	Letter drop	Personal briefing	Focus groups	Public meeting
Site Specific	2	3	3	2	3	4	5	4	3	5	5
Area Improvement	2	2	2	3	2	4	5	4	3	3	5
Service Planning	1	1	2	4	2	3	4	4	3	2	4
Policy Development	1	1	1	4	1	2	3	3	3	3	4
Key strategic issues – Major Projects	1	1	1	4	1	2	3	3	3	2	3
Strategic Plans	1	1	1	4	1	2	2	3	3	2	3

1=Every time 2 = Will in most circumstances 3=may depending on the program 4=on the odd occasion 5=in the rarest of circumstances

2. SCOPING A PROJECT FOR COMMUNITY CONSULTATION

A successful consultation requires the following steps:

2.1 RESEARCH

- Identify the range of issues that may be involved
- Identify any policies or strategic plans of council that may impact on any of these issues
- Identify the issues that are core to the consultation
- Identify any residents groups that may have an interest in any of the issues
- Remember that the existence of such a group is a reflection of a past perceived failure by council to address residents concerns. Understand what those failures have been
- Establish what the responsibilities of council are in relation to each of the core issues that have been identified.

2.2 SETTING THE FRAMEWORK FOR THE CONSULTATION

- Define the purpose of the consultation
- List the specific aims of the consultation
- Define all the internal stakeholders who may have an interest in the consultation
- Define all the external stakeholder groups or individuals that need to be included
- When an issue is likely to be controversial always include an independent expert who can develop credibility with both sides
- Using the consultation matrix define the most appropriate entry point for working out how to reach these audiences. Is it a policy, a major project or a strategic plan. Or does it relate to locality, a specific site or a neighbourhood issue?

2.3 PLAN THE CONSULTATION PROCESSES

- Using the matrix identify how you will reach each of the audiences
- Establish the order you will use to reach them
- Prepare a timetable for consultation that is realistic
- Establish that you have the necessary budget for the consultation
- Prepare the initial information on which the consultation will be based
- Circulate this information or provide access points to it for all the stakeholders you have identified
- Complete the consultation checklist to ensure that you have completed all aspects of your planning

Only now are you ready to start a two way conversation with your community!

2.4 DURING THE CONSULTATION

- You will succeed if you keep the community focussed, acknowledge side issues and then return them there – to the side and be flexible if something arises that is core and you have not planned for it
- When you have completed the consultation close the loop. Tell all those who have been consulted about the outcomes

2.5 DOCUMENTING THE CONSULTATION

- Amend the consultation checklist to incorporate the internal protocols and relevant elements of the project management template
- Load the matrix and the checklist onto word templates

3. THE CONSULTATION CHECKLIST FOR USE BY OFFICERS

The consultation checklist puts the aims and principles of the strategy into concrete form. It provides a framework for the officers and a reminder of key points of the consultation process. Listed below are the boxes on the checklist and the principles behind their inclusion.

<p>1. What is the aim of the consultation?</p>	<p>This question addresses the principle of focus to ensure that consultation is purpose-driven and the type of consultation is appropriate to the task.</p> <p>The essential first step is to ensure that the consultation is targeted and appropriate. There must be a clear statement about what the consultation is to be achieved.</p> <p>The checklist will remind officers about the importance of developing SMART – sensible, measurable, achievable, realistic and timed – objectives to ensure that the consultation can be properly evaluated at the conclusion of the process.</p>
<p>2. Have the main groups been identified?</p> <p>3. Have the secondary groups affected been identified?</p> <p>4. Do the groups identified adequately reflect the range of views?</p>	<p>These questions meet the principle of inclusiveness.</p> <p>The way the consultation is set and administered encourages the participation of the appropriate groups who are to be affected by a decision.</p> <p>A consultation maybe about a sports centre and the main groups affected by the centre will be the sports groups using the centre.</p> <p>The secondary groups may be nearby residents or businesses affected by the development.</p> <p>A funding decision for one centre may affect funding at another centre.</p> <p>While it is not possible to predict the impact of decision on every group, it is critical that a conscious process is developed to identify groups affected.</p>

<p>5. Will the consultation be advertised widely?</p> <p>6. Will the main target group be reached by the advertising?</p> <p>7. Will the secondary target group be reached by advertising?</p> <p>8. Will your plan reach the main target group directly?</p> <p>9. Will your plan reach the secondary target group directly?</p> <p>10. Are you going to meet your target groups?</p>	<p>These questions meet the principles of inclusiveness.</p> <p>Affected groups will be actively encouraged to participate and have equal opportunity to do so. Advertising is one such means to ensure the participation of those affected by the decision are aware of the consultation and the way to participate in that consultation.</p> <p>To make sure there is a real commitment to consider and respond to the community, an active campaign of going out to the community may be part of the strategy. Examples could include a stall at a shopping centre actively canvassing views on issues, distribution of surveys in affected areas. Advertising is essentially a passive way to encourage participation. These questions ask the officer to think about active ways to gain opinions.</p>
<p>11. Will you ensure that those to be consulted have sufficient information to make informed comments?</p>	<p>This question meets the principle of provision of information. People who are to be consulted must be given sufficient information to assist them to provide informed input. This could take the form of maps, diagrams, briefing papers etc.</p>
<p>12. Will you inform people as to how the information which they provide is to be used?</p>	<p>This question meets the principle of responsiveness. It also relates to focus. Council must ensure that its decision-making processes are such that they genuinely incorporate consideration of the information gained from consultation, ie the decision has not been already made. This in turn must be communicated to the participants in the consultation process. People are entitled to know to what use Council will put the information which they provide.</p>
<p>13. Will you teach people from non-English speaking backgrounds?</p>	<p>This question also goes to the principle of inclusiveness. This question is a reminder to officers of the importance of considering people from non-English speaking backgrounds. Every consultation must contain a process for consultation in the non-English speaking community. The use of Language Link and translations is encouraged in this process.</p>

<p>14. Will you use the appropriate communication tools to reach your target audience?</p>	<p>This question addresses the principles of provision of information. It is imperative that information is provided in a variety of ways. The internet, the Council Newsletter, newspaper advertising page, brochures, posters and surveys all provide information. Officers should consider a range of publications and never rely on one means for consultation. In any advertising, issues of timing are important to allow people time to respond on their own terms.</p>
<p>15. Are there feedback forms to fill in?</p> <p>16. Have you prepared mailing lists from this consultation for further research if needed?</p> <p>17. Have you developed an evaluation process?</p>	<p>These questions introduce the importance of evaluation and implementation.</p> <p>Proper evaluation is the key to sound consultation. It is based on the setting of SMART – sensible, measurable, achievable, realistic and timed – objectives at the beginning of the process.</p> <p>By setting SMART objectives, the process of evaluation is straightforward and lays the basis for future consultation.</p> <p>Indeed it is a cyclical process where consultation leads to evaluation which is the basis for future consultation. Consultation becomes an integral part of the decision making process.</p>
<p>18. Approval of the checklist</p>	<p>The checklist is given to the relevant Director who may approve the consultation process outlined in the checklist. Major consultations will need the approval of the Communications Task Group.</p>

4. RESOURCING A CONSULTATION

4.1 RESOURCING

- All significant consultation exercises are carefully costed.
- In the interests of equity, Council will consider assisting groups who would otherwise be unable to contribute. The manner of this assistance will differ depending on the consultation and the resources available.

4.2 TIMING

- Adequate time is allowed for participants to contribute and unexpected issues to be raised. Consultation will be started as early as possible to allow time for community involvement and comment.
- Reasonable deadlines will be set for participants to respond and for the completion of tasks.
- Sufficient time is allowed so that there is flexibility to debate and investigate any unexpected and important issues that arise.

4.3 TRAINING

- Staff must be trained in appropriate consultation techniques.
- Training must be focused to acquaint staff with the principles of good consultation, implementation of sound consultation and evaluation of the consultation.

This Consultation Strategy provides citizens, staff and Councillors with a framework within which they can plan, carry out and implement consultation activity. The associated checklist provides a means to implement the strategy.