



## Victorian Local Governance Association

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### Local Government Consultation and Engagement

## Definitions

Here are some definitions developed by the VLGA and the Local Government Division for terms typically used by local governments when consulting with their communities.

The context for this is as follows: local governments exist to govern their communities; good governance is achieved when local governments are responsive to communities' needs and communities are engaged and participate in governance activities. Consultation is the means by which local governments inform themselves of communities' attitudes and opinions.

### Governance

Democratic governance exists when a government governs for and on behalf of its community. Good democratic governance occurs when governments govern as a result of being elected by an informed and engaged electorate. Citizens exercise their rights and responsibilities by being informed and engaged.

The sector has developed a Code of Good Governance that includes features of legitimacy of government representation, policy enactment community participation, accountability and democratic leadership. This is a dynamic code which is open to constant reviews.

### Engagement

Engagement is achieved when the community is and feels part of the overall governance of that community. It is informed, connected and feels it has a role to play. Activities that can be part of engagement are:

- Gathering and provision of information
- Consultation
- Participation

Councils should be committed to ensuring that all groups have equal opportunities to participate and be involved. Councils should take active steps

to ensure that traditionally marginalised groups have the opportunity to participate and be engaged.

Councils that work at engaging their communities through ongoing activities and policies (eg: festivals, "know your parks" etc) create an environment in which more effective consultation can occur.

Engagement, by this definition, is an outcome.

It occurs when there is good ongoing information flow, consultation and participation between a council and its community.

Consultation can therefore be seen as part of the overall concept of engagement.

Community engagement is a characteristic of democratic governance.

### **Participation**

Participation means that the community is involved in governance activities.

### **Consultation**

The process of informed communication between the council and the community on an issue prior to the council making a decision or determining a direction on that issue.

#### Key elements

- It is a process, not an outcome.
- It recognises the council has the mandate to be the decision-maker and refers to the process by which the authority gathers information in order to make a decision. Consultation impacts on a decision through influence, rather than power.
- The definitions both stress the point that consultation is about input into decision-making, not joint decision-making or decision-making by referendum.