Community Engagement Policy Review

Summary Report



City of Monash

16.03.26

capire

Giving every person a voice.

Capire Consulting Group
The Commons
Wurundjeri Country
Level 4, 54 Wellington Street
Collingwood VIC 3066

Hub Anzac Square
Yuggera Country
Level 6, 200 Adelaide Street
Brisbane QLD 4000

(03) 9285 9000
info@capire.com.au
capire.com.au

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Unless otherwise stated, all feedback documented by Capire Consulting Group and any person(s) acting on our behalf is written and/or recorded during our program/consultation activities.

Capire staff and associates take great care while transcribing participant feedback but unfortunately cannot guarantee the accuracy of all notes. We are however confident that we capture the full range of ideas, concerns and views expressed during our consultation activities.

Unless otherwise noted, the views expressed in our work represent those of the participants and not necessarily those of our consultants or our clients.

Definitions

The following lists the key definitions for common terms used in the design and delivery of community engagement as stated in Monash City Council's Community Engagement Policy (2020).

- **Community:** Refers to the people who have a stake and interest in the City of Monash and includes people who: Live, work, study or conduct business or are involved in local community groups or organisations in the municipality, Visit, use or enjoy the services, facilities and public places located within the municipality.
- **Community engagement:** Community engagement is a planned process with the specific purpose of working with individuals and groups to encourage active involvement in decisions that affect them or are of interest to them.
- **Consultation:** The activity of seeking input on a matter.

VERSION	AUTHOR	AUTHORISED	DATE
1	Eliza Knox, Merryn Appleby and Erin Searle	Emily Mellon	06/03/2026
2	Eliza Knox	Emily Mellon	16/03/2026

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1. Introduction

1.1. Report purpose

This report presents a summary of the engagement approach and key findings from Monash City Council's (Council) community engagement to inform the review and refresh of the Monash Engagement Policy (Engagement Policy).

1.2. Project background

Council's Engagement Policy 'establishes a clear standard of engagement, having regard to the significance, complexity and anticipated level of impact associated with decisions made regarding major projects, policies, strategies and service planning'[1].

Aligning with the Local Government Act 2020 (The Act) requirement for Victorian Councils to adopt and maintain a community engagement policy, Council endorsed their Engagement Policy in 2020. Following community engagement in 2024 and 2025 for their Integrated Planning documents, Council is reviewing, refreshing and updating the existing Engagement Policy.

[1] Monash Community Engagement Policy, City of Monash, 25 August 2020, https://www.monash.vic.gov.au/files/assets/public/v/1/edms/about-us/governance-laws-rules/laws-rules-policies/monash-community-engagement-policy.pdf

2. Engagement overview

2.1. Engagement purpose

The engagement purpose was to hear from community members who have, and have not, participated in community engagement with Council over the last two years to inform the review and refresh of the Monash Engagement Policy.

2.2. Engagement objectives

The engagement objectives were to:

- Understand the enablers and barriers to meaningful and informed engagement from the perspective of people who live, work and play in Monash.
- Gain insights from a group of community members with diverse demographics, perspectives and engagement experiences.
- Gain insights from the community to inform the content of the Engagement Policy including, principles, definitions and language used to ensure that it is meaningful and accessible for the community.

2.3. Engagement level

The International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) Spectrum is an industry-recognised tool to help decision-makers understand the different levels of public participation and influence in decision-making processes[2]. The Spectrum outlines five levels of the public's influence in decision-making.

Figure 1 shows that this engagement sat at the Involve level of the Spectrum. Council's goal was to work with focus group participants to ensure their concerns and aspirations regarding Council's community engagement are understood and considered when reviewing and refreshing the Engagement Policy.

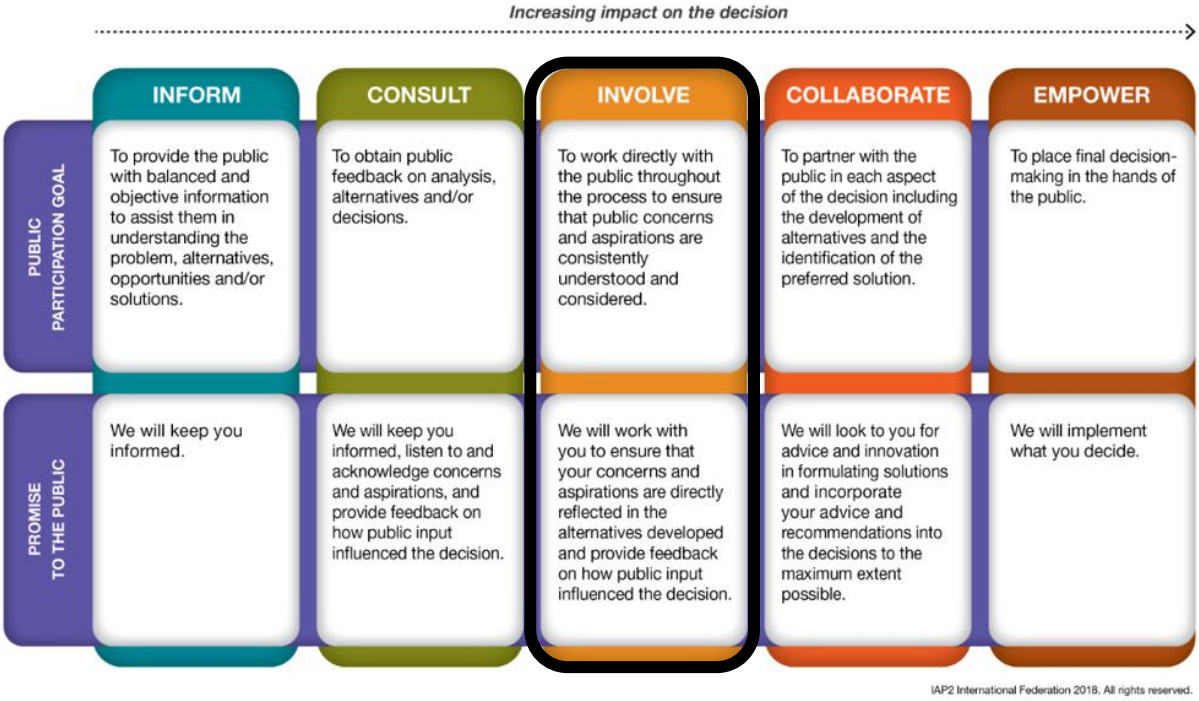


Figure 1: Indicative level of influence using the IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum[3]

[2] See https://iap2.org.au/
[3] iap2.org.au/resources/spectrum/

2.4. Engagement negotiables and non-negotiables

There were clear negotiable and non-negotiable elements (what can and cannot be changed). These are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1: Engagement negotiables and non-negotiables

TOPIC	NON-NEGOTIABLES	NEGOTIABLES
Monash Community Engagement Policy	• Council needs to adopt and update the Community Engagement Policy.	
Language in the Monash Community Engagement Policy		• Updates to the language and expressions used in the Engagement Policy to ensure that it is meaningful and accessible for the community. – This could include ensuring the Engagement Policy reflects the needs and wants of the Monash community.
Engagement Principles	• As outlined in Section 56 of the Local Government Act 2020, the Engagement Policy includes engagement principles and commitments that will inform Council's community engagement processes.	• Engagement principles and commitments that reflect the needs and wants of the Monash community. • This could include how the principles are expressed or additional principles and/or commitments.
Definitions		• How Council defines 'Community Engagement' in the Engagement Policy. • Definitions included in the Monash Community Engagement Policy.
Planning, implementation and evaluation of community engagement	• Engagement processes that are run by statutory requirements and the State Government. • This includes engagement processes for planning and building permits, and undertaking deliberative engagement for the Community Vision, Council Plan, Financial Plan and Asset Plan.	• Changes to how Council plans, runs and evaluates community engagement, as included in Section 4.10 of the Engagement Policy. • Enablers and barriers to meaningful and informed community engagement. • When Council engages with the community, including for which type of project and at what stage(s) of projects.

2.5. High-level timeline

Figure 2 shows the high-level timeline of engagement promotion, participant selection and delivery. See Sections 2.6, 2.7 and 2.8 for further details about the engagement promotion, participant recruitment and engagement delivery, respectively.

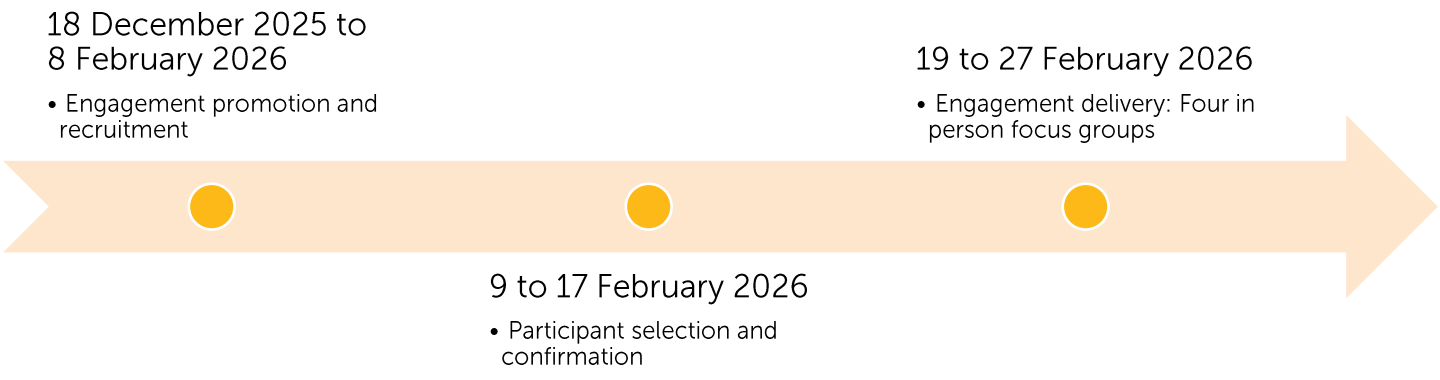


Figure 2: High-level timeline of the engagement process

2.6. Promotion

Promotion of the focus groups occurred from 18 December 2025 to 8 February 2026.

To align with the engagement purpose and objectives (see Sections 2.1 and 2.2), it was important to reach and recruit a diverse group of Monash community members.

Table 2 outlines the methods used to promote the focus groups to reach people who live, work and/or study across the Monash municipality, including people who have and have not engaged with Council in the last two years.

Table 2: Methods used to promote the focus groups

PROMOTIONAL METHODS	DESCRIPTION AND DETAILS
Shape Monash 	On 18 December 2025, Council published the Shape Monash webpage: https://shape.monash.vic.gov.au/community-engagement-policy-2026 This webpage outlined the project, engagement opportunity and expression of interest form for people to register their interest in participating. All further promotional methods invited community members to visit Shape Monash to register their interest in participating.
Poster 	Posters were displayed in Monash library branches. Posters were displayed at the Immunisation Service on 28 January 2026. The poster is included in Appendix A: Promotional poster.
Emails 	Council sent emails to the following: • 200 Monash Grant recipients on 23 January 2026 • 16 current and former Disability Advisory Committee members • 13 Gender Equity Advisory Committee members • 10 LGBTIQA+ Advisory Committee members • 13 Multicultural Advisory Committee members Additionally, two emails were sent to Shape Monash subscribers: • 19 December 2025 to 7,462 recipients • 5 February 2026 to 7,310 recipients
E-newsletters 	The opportunity was promoted in the following three e-newsletters: • Monash Mail – 18 December 2025 to 18,116 recipients – 7 January 2025 to 24,411 recipients – 5 February 2026 to 24,225 recipients • Positive Aging Lifestyles e-news on 29 January 2026 to 838 recipients • Library e-news • Monash Multicultural and Settlement Services e-news to 25 stakeholders on 12 January 2026
Social media 	The opportunity was posted in the 'Pathways to Carers' WhatsApp group with 35 members

2.7. Participant recruitment

2.7.1. Expression of interest form

All promotion methods outlined in Section 2.6 invited community members to visit the Shape Monash webpage and register their interest in participating in one of the four focus groups.

Prospective participants were incentivised with the offer of a $50 gift voucher to recognise, encourage, and appreciate community members' time. Each person who was selected and participated received the voucher at the end of the focus group.

The Expression of Interest (EOI) form included demographic questions and two questions asking for input into what Council is doing well in relation to community engagement, and what Council could do better. The EOI questions are included in Appendix B: Expression of interest questions.

2.7.2. Participant targets and selection

A total of 272 Monash community members expressed their interest in participating in a focus group.

To support the diversity of focus group participants, demographic targets were set based on the EOI questions (Appendix B: Expression of interest questions) and the Monash population, according to the 2021 Australian census. Due to aiming for 20 participants per focus group, the targets were based on selecting 100 community members to allow for natural drop-off between the recruitment process and focus groups. Appendix C: Participant targets, selected participants and participants outlines the participation target and selected focus group participants based on the Monash population in 2021.

2.8. Focus group details

To meet the engagement purpose and objectives and allow in-depth conversations, four in-person 90-minute focus groups were run, as outlined in Table 3. The focus group agenda is outlined in Appendix D: Focus group agenda.

In total, 66 community members participated in a Focus Group.

Their demographics compared to the participant target and participants selected are outlined in Appendix C: Participant targets, selected participants and participants.

Table 3: Focus group details

NUMBER	DATE	TIME	LOCATION
1	Thursday 19 February 2026	5:30 pm – 7:00 pm	Glen Waverley Civic Centre
2	Monday 23 February 2026	6:00 pm - 7:30 pm	Clayton Hall
3	Thursday 26 February 2026	6:00 pm - 7:30 pm	Glen Waverley Civic Centre
4	Friday 27 February 2026	10:00 am - 11:30 am	Oakleigh Chambers

2.9. Engagement limitations

All community and stakeholder engagement processes have limitations. The limitations of this engagement process are outlined below.

- Council made the effort to reach a diversity of community members to promote the focus groups and participant targets were set to increase the diversity of focus group participants. A total of 41% of participants spoke a language other than English at home. As outlined in Appendix C: Participant targets, selected participants and participants, based on the Monash population from the 2021 Australian census, there was under-representation in 20 - 24 and 25 - 29 year olds, men, Mount Waverley residents and Greek and Cantonese speakers. Additionally, no one younger than 20 years of age participated.
- Only in-person focus groups were offered, with no opportunity for community members to participate online or in a hybrid manner. Therefore, this may have excluded the opportunity for some community members to participate.
- Focus group participants volunteered to share their views and opinions. These findings do not represent a statistically valid sample of the Monash community. Therefore, Capire cannot say with confidence that the views collected represent the views of the Monash community.

- Focus groups can be prone to biases, such as conformity and dominance bias or moderator bias. To mitigate this, the focus groups were designed to include both individual and group reflection, as well as small group activities with different facilitators; however, like in all methods, some biases may still remain.

3. Findings

This section summarises the engagement findings, including two questions from the EOI form and the focus groups.

3.1. Key themes

Throughout the engagement, participants shared ideas, concerns and expected principles and values to guide Monash's community engagement. These insights have been grouped into key themes shown in Figure 3. It is important to note that these themes connect and interrelate; when implemented well, each theme can strengthen another or diminish others when implemented poorly.

Sections 3.2 to 3.5 outline the key findings from the engagement process, providing detail for the key themes as well as some additional findings.



Figure 3: Key themes that emerged across the engagement

3.2. Doing well and what can be improved

Whilst expressing their interest in the focus groups, community members were asked what Council is doing well and what it needs to get better at. This section shares the feedback gathered from the EOI form. It shows insights into what community members think individually prior to the focus group, i.e. when not provided with an introduction to the definition and practice of community engagement, as was done at the start of the focus groups.

3.2.1. Thinking about community consultation delivered by Council, what are we doing well?

When considering what Council is doing well, community members shared the following related to community engagement.

- Regular information about change and communications inviting people to engage. This includes regular emails, Shape Monash notifications, social media, using Place Makers and sporting clubs, online Council meetings, Monash eNews, the monthly newsletter which is engaging and on recycled paper. It was also noted that Council is responsive to enquiries via email and telephone.
- Engagement opportunities across various projects, however it is unclear which decisions do not include engagement opportunities.
- Council asks for diverse input from those interested and impacted to make inclusive and informed decisions, whilst actively listening and being respectful, open-minded and positive during consultations.
- Providing various casual and formal opportunities, including surveys on Shape Monash, in-person listening posts, email, social media, 'walk up' opportunities at community events, workshops and focus groups.
- It was recognised that Shape Monash provides a digital platform for residents to voice their opinions on different projects. There was appreciation for the accessibility and convenience of it such as including project timelines.
  - An example was the survey on the hard rubbish collection, which was easy to understand with clear options and allowed for further clarification.
- Considering the feedback of renters and culturally and linguistically diverse community members.
- There was appreciation for this focus group opportunity, including the inclusion of an incentive, promotion and lead in time for the expression of interest and an easy registration process.

Positive feedback unrelated to community engagement, thus out of scope, is included in Appendix E: Out of scope feedback

3.2.2. Thinking about community consultation delivered by Council, what does Council need to get better at?

When considering what Council can do better at, community members shared the following related to community engagement:

- Increase and improve meaningful, timely and accessible communication to encourage people to participate in engagement opportunities and to help community members learn about projects that impact them.
  - Suggested communication methods included using social media and nextdoor.com, shopping centres and train stations, social media polls with a survey link, neighbourhood houses, digital print, improving distribution of Council-produced newsletters, particularly to groups, SMS and Portals.
  - Additional suggestions covered promoting opportunities in different languages, using plain language and Artificial Intelligence (AI) to improve communication efficiency, and providing more details about a proposed project and timeline such as the existing policy or document.
- Improve transparency and respect, including clarity on what is negotiable (if anything), level of influence and how feedback will affect decisions, disclose all information relevant to the engagement.
- Close the loop through publishing the engagement outcome, changes due to community feedback and why, and measuring the effectiveness of communication.
- Increase opportunities for community engagement, including decisions that impact current and future generations, projects that relate to community needs, care of the reserves and parkland and significant infrastructure investment projects.

- Make community engagement opportunities more accessible and inviting for community members from diverse backgrounds, such as older residents, new residents, multicultural groups and those who do not use technology.
  - Suggestions were more face-to-face opportunities, while not replacing the online opportunities, more engagement with and between community groups, schools, businesses and youth, improving the use and navigation of Shape Monash, and using native languages.
  - Suggestions regarding focus group were to allow people to select their preferred location or date when expressing their interest, having more people in focus groups so that participants reflect the wider community and offering interpreters, noting that some interpreters are playing the language and power games
- Listen and act based on what is shared, not only from one group or voice, and including learning to adapt to community needs and wants.
- Allow for controversial options rather than vague inputs that don't have a substantial influence on project outcomes.
- Early genuine engagement, rather than a box-ticking exercise where outcomes are predetermined. It was recommended to undertake consultation at various levels and stages.
- Not allowing engagement opportunities to get overly political or influenced by individuals who don't represent everyone.

Feedback unrelated to community engagement, thus out of scope, is included in Appendix E.

3.3. Engagement expectations

The following findings are drawn from the four focus groups.

Participants were asked to reflect and discuss what Council should keep in mind when engaging the community, and what the community expects from Council before, during and after they conduct engagement, including what they do not want to see or experience.

Feedback unrelated to community engagement, thus out of scope, is included in Appendix E: Out of scope feedback

3.3.1. What to keep in mind and expectations

- Be respectful, neutral, open minded and act based on community needs, concerns and feedback raised, ensuring the engagement is meaningful and helping people feel listened to.
- Wide-reaching, simple, inclusive and inviting promotion that reaches the right audience who is impacted or interested in the project, thus sometimes all residents.
  - Clear project and engagement information including the purpose, problem, impact, timeline, scope, benefits, data, and options.
  - Use multiple languages, including letters and resources in different languages.
  - Use multiple communication methods/channels. Suggested communication methods: leaflets, letterbox drop, social media, the monthly newsletter, email, signage at the supermarket.
  - Use bite-sized information to hook people in.
  - Use neighbourhood houses, neighbourhood watch, cultural leaders and clubs.
  - Provide the written URL, QR codes, email address and phone number for options to engage.
  - Consider the barriers of communicating with the target audience.
- Be transparent by closing the loop- sharing the engagement outcome and how the decision was made.
  - Include engagement statistics and other evidence included in the decision-making process.
  - Undertake and publish an evaluation of the engagement such as who was engaged, how many and the outcome.
- A mix of engagement opportunities online, in person and over the phone to engage everyone (or diversity) impacted or interested, including those with lived and past experience, migrants and new residents, owners and renters, small businesses, traders and big corporations, the homeless, neurodiverse people and all age groups

(including older people/aged care and children), genders, beliefs, abilities, expectations, ideas, cultures and ethnicities, languages spoken, communities and demographics.
  - Consider the barriers of engagement for the target audience.
  - Engage at different times of the day.
  - Engage different locations across the municipality.
  - Undertake engagement at various locations including places with car parking and where people are.
  - Consider cultural sensitivities.
  - Include options in other languages, such as using interpreters, focus groups in another language and translating council meetings.
  - Recognise where there is a loud majority or quiet majority.
  - Utilise libraries as they can reach isolated residents.
- Make it easier and convenient for people to engage and provide feedback. For example:
  - Improve the accessibility of Shape Monash by moving the current projects to the top, having suburb portals to allow people to see local projects and engagement opportunities, and including forum walls for people to interact.
  - Having the option for people to dial in their phone number for Council to ring them back, instead of waiting
  - Reply to emails.
- Consider when to consult and the level of engagement on a given initiative, ensuring decisions are not solely made by Council bureaucracy or party-aligned councillors.
  - Be clear about what triggers community engagement, for example, the budget or impact.
- Engage over multiple phases of a project, including early engagement before there are two options or projects commence.
- Build relationships and be proactive to support ongoing engagement and trust. Ideas for ongoing engagement include:
  - Use an ongoing panel or task group that could change depending on the interest and impact.
  - Ongoing polls, sanity checks and updates such as checking back on projects to evaluate success.
  - Regular focus groups to help Council hear ideas.
  - Ongoing arts projects to keep it interesting and new.
  - Support new residents and migrants to connect with the community such as by working with real estate agents to provide a welcome pack.
- Accountability by Council and staff, both micro and macro examples were provided such as calling back community members after an enquiry and being realistic about Council's financial budget.
- Consider the safety and privacy of participants.
- Provide the space for people to consider out of the box options by not narrowing solutions before hearing ideas.
- Provide the opportunity for residents to provide thoughts on where money should be spent including by suburb.
- Increase clarity and communication about the boundaries between federal, state and local responsibilities in relation to projects and engagement.

3.3.2. What participants do not want to see or experience

- Engagement for the "show" when decisions are already made, or surprising residents with the decision.
- Information only being provided in English.
- Hidden documents, policies, or links.
- Council steering people down a particular path or holding residents to ransom to meet a personal agenda.
- Wasting paper.

- Making assumptions without hearing from the source or affected group.

3.4. Engagement experience

Participants were asked to consider the experience of community engagement in relation to three common community engagement methods: Market stall (pop-up), online survey and a focus group or workshop. For each of these methods, participants discussed the following questions:

1. What would help or invite you to engage with Council? *For those who have engaged, think about why you engaged. For those who haven't engaged, think about what would help you to.*
2. What would prevent or hinder you from engaging?
3. What would you like that experience to be like? (feel, see, hear)

3.4.1. Overarching themes

The overarching themes related to engagement experience are outlined below.

PROMOTION VIA MULTIPLE CHANNELS

- Participants emphasised the importance of promoting surveys and events in multiple languages across a range of channels.
- In-person promotion could include at pop-ups, bulletin boards and eye-catching posters, including at non-Council locations.
- Online promotion could include newsletters, Shape Monash emails and social media.
- Leverage existing networks, such as through community leaders, playgroups and kindergartens.
- Make physical invitations to participate that are visually interesting, colourful or feel personalised for example, from the mayor.
- Do targeted promotion at relevant locations for the audience for example, parks for dog walkers.

TARGET AUDIENCE

- Ensure Council gets the right people in the room for specific topics for example, homeowners and traders.
- Where there is a defined target audience, Council should be clear and transparent about why upfront.
- Participants also encouraged proactive engagement with young people to ensure their perspectives are included.

OFFERING MULTIPLE TIMES AND LOCATIONS TO ENGAGE

- Offer multiple dates, times and locations so people have a variety of options on when and where they engage, including outside of business hours, during the weekend, mid-mornings and afternoons, to cater to a variety of people, including shift workers.
- Participants shared that evening sessions may work well for people who are employed but some older people may not want to travel at night.

REPORTING BACK

Participants want their input to be meaningful, which includes understanding how their input impacts decision-making.

- Surveys and events should outline the next steps for the project and how information will be used.
- Participants emphasised the need to report back on what Council has heard once engagement has closed. The report back should state who was engaged and how the feedback was used, including justification as to why feedback was or wasn't used.
- Participants stressed the importance of ensuring participant queries are followed up and feedback is directed to the appropriate person for action.

- Provide the option for people to sign up for updates, which would include the report when the engagement closes.
- Have follow-up events to report back, such as events with councillors.
- For surveys, tailor report-back timeframes to the survey length. Where possible, provide an initial update soon after closing, for example, within a week. Participants noted that they understand that the final outcomes may take longer.
- Consider real-time participation updates for example, upon survey completion, participants could see the response count.

INCENTIVES AND RECOGNITION OF TIME

There was a desire to be acknowledged and compensated for time, proportionate to the time commitment. Participants suggested free coffees, food samples, show bags and/or gifts for kids at market stalls. Incentives for completing online surveys and gift cards for focus groups and workshops.

3.4.2. Pop-up (Market stall)

Feedback regarding the experience of a pop-up or market stall is summarised below.

STALL SETUP AND SIGNAGE

- Participants highlighted the importance of having a visible and approachable stall that invites people to participate.
- There should be clear signage and wayfinding to the market stalls, with visual communications explaining the purpose of conversations so passers-by understand what staff are seeking input on.
- Offer multiple ways to engage such as having iPads available, QR codes to surveys and information for people to take away and consider in their own time. There were also suggestions for an anonymous suggestions box for stronger opinions.
- There were mixed views as to whether Council uniform, branding or signage would make participants feel more or less invited to engage.

LOCATION AND ACCESSIBILITY

- Locate stalls at popular locations such as parks, the library, at events or festivals. Another participant shared that market stalls should be in a relevant location for the project. There was another suggestion to locate market stalls near playgrounds to cater for parents. One participant shared that they do not want to speak to someone at the train station.
- Participants shared that there should be physical accessibility around the stall for people who use a wheelchair or have other needs. For example, Council should provide chairs for those who might not be able to stand and talk.
- A couple of participants also commented on the sensory accessibility of the stall setup; for example, they would prefer no background noise and don't want the area too noisy or crowded.

APPROPRIATE STAFFING

- There was a strong emphasis on the need for staff at stalls to be experienced, knowledgeable and personable.
- Participants stressed the importance of the staff's body language needing to be approachable, friendly and welcoming. With staff not sitting behind tables but rather using clipboards to roam and pro-actively approaching people to have a chat.
- Participants shared the need to feel heard and for staff to practice active listening, relaying back what they've heard. Participants said they would disengage if they felt dismissed by staff.
- Participants shared that it would prevent them from engaging if staff are being mission-oriented, seemed to have a hidden agenda, or the discussion sounded like a sales pitch.
- Staff should have strong conversational skills and use hooks to draw people in, for example, 'Do you care about [insert topic]?' or 'What is your view on [insert topic]?'.
- There was a request for staff to be respectful and conscious of people's time and offer different lengths of time to talk, for example, 'Do you have two minutes to chat?'.

- Participants shared that if there is inadequate staffing and everyone is busy in conversation, they are less likely to wait to have their say.
- Participants also shared that it is nice seeing diverse staff at stalls, especially seeing staff speaking different languages or translators, so people can speak their language of preference. Some participants shared they would like to see staff who reflect their own demographic.
- There were mixed views as to whether it would prevent or invite people to engage if councillors are present onsite, with one participant sharing they would prefer experts.

3.4.3. Online survey

Feedback regarding the experience of a survey is summarised below.

SURVEY STRUCTURE AND USABILITY

- The survey itself should be user and mobile-friendly, fun and contain imagery.
- Participants requested the option to save their responses midway through completing the form, so they can complete the survey in their own time and think things through.
- Participants should not have to answer all questions; questions should be optional.
- Multiple-choice questions should include an option for 'none of the above', 'not applicable', 'prefer not to say', 'I don't understand' or 'other' with an open-text option.
- Participants shared that following multiple-choice questions it is useful to have a qualitative question.
- There should always be an open-text question for additional feedback.
- Qualitative questions should allow for more than 25 words.
- One participant requested more 'yes' or 'no' questions.
- One participant shared that scaling questions can be difficult for example, from 1 through to 10.

PRIVACY

- There was a request to understand why certain questions are asked, particularly those related to demographics or requests for personal details.
- Some participants shared that they may not want to complete a survey for privacy reasons and that providing personal information should be optional.

QUESTION FRAMING

- The person completing the survey should easily understand the questions being asked and the purpose for the question.
- The survey questions should be concise in plain English, framed neutrally without bias and contain no double negatives.
- If a complex term is being used, Council should provide a definition and an example of the term in use to increase respondents' understanding.

ACCESSIBILITY: MULTIPLE FORMATS AND WAYS TO ENGAGE

- Offer support for people with limited digital access or literacy to complete the survey and have their say. Some of the suggestions included providing iPads or printed surveys at pop-ups, doorknocking with the survey, printed surveys in the mail with return post or offering Council support over the phone to complete the survey.
- Provide the purpose of the survey in the email title.
- Provide easy digital access via a QR code or clickable links.
- Translate surveys into multiple languages to address language barriers and improve participation.
- Use larger font sizes in surveys for accessibility.

ENGAGEMENT FATIGUE: SCOPE FOR INFLUENCE AND TIME COMMITMENT

- There was a strong emphasis on online surveys being as short and easy to comprehend as possible. Participants shared that there are lots of projects and surveys going around, and people are experiencing survey fatigue.
- Participants shared they are more likely to engage if it feels as though there is scope for community influence, a clear purpose and the survey is a topic of interest or relevant to them.
- Participants emphasised it will prevent people from engaging if the survey feels like a tick box exercise.
- Participants highlighted the importance of knowing how long the survey will take before completing it, for example, 'this survey will take five minutes'. One participant stated that survey should include a maximum of ten questions and take a maximum of ten minutes.
- It was strongly suggested that it should be clear what the survey is about, with information in the front end about the project context, project impacts and survey purpose.
- Participants also shared that lots of information at the front end can be off-putting for participants or if you need to know a lot of background information to answer the questions.

APPROPRIATENESS OF TOPIC

Views were mixed on whether sensitive or complex topics are best addressed through in-person conversations, interviews or online surveys. One participant suggested that online surveys could include an option to request personal follow-up contact.

PROACTIVE ENGAGEMENT

Council should proactively engage before decisions are made, for example early surveys to understand community priorities.

3.4.4. Focus group or workshop

Feedback regarding the experience of a focus group or workshop is summarised below.

MOTIVATION TO PARTICIPATE IN A FOCUS GROUP OR WORKSHOP

Participants shared their motivations for engaging in in-person events. Key motivations for participating include,

- Connecting with others in the community, feeling inspired and having valuable interactions.
- Representing a group or someone with lived experience.
- Fulfilling a sense of civic duty.
- Interest in the topic or when the project directly impacts them.
- Projects involving policy-related matters.
- Opportunities to meet their local Councillor.
- Topics such as budget spending, roads, bins and parking.

ACCESSIBILITY: VENUE CHOICE AND ATTENDANCE LOGISTICS

- Select venues which have parking and are easy to access by public transport, for example, soccer clubs and kindergartens. If possible, Council should provide a bus to reduce participants' travel logistics.
- Confirm the venue's accessibility, including the venue's acoustics and wheelchair access.
- Consider making sessions hybrid so participants can join online for increased accessibility.
- Consider having a focus group in a language other than English or provide interpreters.

CLARITY AND TRANSPARENCY

- At multiple stages of the project, from promotion to the session itself, participants emphasised the importance of Council being transparent about the level of influence participants will have so they can decide whether to take part.
- Participants desired clarity about how a project will impact people now and into the future.

- Participants requested a clear remit for the discussion, a clearly defined topic and an explanation of the value and potential impact of community input.

PRIOR TO THE SESSION

- Prior to the session, participants requested information about timing, what to expect, and who would be running it.
- Make it easy to sign up and register for events and offer options for those who may have technological barriers.
- Background material, such as FAQs or a glossary of key terms, should also be available on the website so participants feel prepared.
- Council should follow up with participants before the event to remind them about the upcoming session.
- Participants noted it is helpful to know the group size in advance for example, a small group of around 20 may feel more comfortable to some than a group of 100.

IN-BETWEEN SESSIONS

- Provide a platform for participants to interact between sessions that is moderated by Council staff.

DURING THE SESSION

- Participants highlighted the importance of a respectful and welcoming environment.
- Suggestions included allowing time to mingle at the start of the session and mixing participants throughout activities to encourage interaction.
- Participants value warm-up activities and opportunities to reflect and brainstorm.
- Include professionals, experts, and community leaders in sessions so participants can ask questions and feel supported.
- The venue should provide catering including tea, coffee and food.

3.5. Final discussion

At the end of the focus groups, participants were asked to share any final thoughts, such as what is important to them, and what values should guide how Council engages with the Monash community to inform the development of the Engagement Policy.

Some participants highlighted a key value or idea that had been discussed, while others shared additional ideas or a question. Responses are summarised below.

TRANSPARENCY AND VISIBILITY

- How decisions are made, including honest communication about projects without a public relations spin.
- Showing how spending aligns with community priorities, sharing community engagement results and underlying data, explaining how and why decisions are made.
- Publicly evaluating engagement processes to support learning and improvement.
- Sharing updates on policies as a result of engagement.
- Real-time proactive feedback loops and data that is pre-emptive of issues and emerging issues. Technology could play a role.

RESPECTFUL ENGAGEMENT WITH ALL MONASH COMMUNITY MEMBERS

- Aim to encourage and include more community members to participate and consider how to engage harder-to-reach groups who are eager to share. This includes those who live in isolation, people with different abilities such as low sight, and those who do not speak English.
- One size does not fit all community members, and cultural sensitivities such as different languages and cultural needs are important to consider.
- There was an idea to develop an explicit methodology/framework to inform the diversity of stakeholders to engage.

- Ensuring all suburbs have an equitable opportunity to be heard from and benefit from engagement and Council projects.
- There were opposing views regarding the input of renters and owners. A couple of participants shared that everyone should have equal opportunities, whilst there was also the view that rate payers should have greater weighting.

INTEGRITY AND AUTHENTICITY

- In the project, engagement process and decision making, in the best interest of the municipality.

NORMAL HUMAN VALUES

- Have normal human values such as being kind, considerate, having integrity and helping people feel like they are heard and included.

RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

- Build relationships before engagement processes to build trust and bridge gaps between Council and the community, including Councillors.
- Encourage and educate high school students about Council.

OTHER

- A couple of participants noted that it would have been appreciated if the participants received the current Engagement Policy or agenda before attending the focus group.
- Questions included if Council is getting enough community engagement, how AI could affect engagement processes, if planned processes mean spontaneous ideas are ignored, if participants will get feedback on this process, how similar engagement policy requirements are to NSW and if Council's community engagement definition is set in stone.

4. Recommendations

The report provides a summary of the ideas, concerns and expectations of the 272 Monash community members who expressed interest in participating in the engagement, and the 66 participants who took part in the focus groups to inform the refresh of Monash Community Engagement Policy.

The recommendations for Council in the development of the Engagement Policy are:

1. Use the key themes identified in this report, along with participants' expectations about what matters in engagement, to inform the principles and commitments in the Community Engagement Policy. In particular, policy guidance insights regarding relational and inclusive participation, cultural safety and accessibility, and transparency are critical and relate to the full life cycle of engagement – from planning, to reporting back and evaluating success.
2. When reviewing and developing the content for the Community Engagement Policy, consider and adopt the language included in the findings of this report, as it has been written using verbatim notes, where appropriate.

Regarding the implementation of the Monash Community Engagement Policy, the recommendations for Council are to:

1. Consider how the more detailed guidance in this report can actively shape Council's engagement framework, tools, and training to translate insights and preferences into practical improvements to engagement methods and processes across all engagement phases (planning, delivery, reporting).
2. Communicate with participants about how the findings from the focus groups informed the Community Engagement Policy review and refresh.

5. Evaluation

Engagement processes must be monitored and reviewed to assess whether objectives are being achieved and feedback on the participant experience is gathered and used to inform improvements. Evaluation for this engagement is undertaken in two ways:

- Focus Group evaluation survey: Following the focus groups, all participants were asked to complete an evaluation survey. The outcome of this survey is outlined in Section 5.1.
- Objectives: The project team will meet to discuss, reflect and evaluate the effectiveness of the engagement process against the engagement objectives.

5.1. Evaluation survey

Following the focus groups, participants were invited to complete a short evaluation survey to reflect on their experience. A total of 24 participants completed the evaluation survey.

Overall, as highlighted in Figure 4, participants had a positive experience, with most respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that the sessions were informative, well-facilitated and provided meaningful opportunities to contribute.

When asked for comments, there was appreciation that the focus groups were well run, and provided an opportunity for meaningful discussion, to hear different perspectives and to contribute to Council's work. Some comments identified opportunities to strengthen future engagement activities. These included suggestions to provide materials prior to the session and to clearly demonstrate how community feedback informs policy outcomes.

> *'I thought the session was well run and it was great to have a facilitator at each table to keep the conversation going and on track.'*
>
> *'Apart from impacting change of policy, it was a wonderful time to get to know others in my area and a little more about Monash City! Grateful 🙏'*
>
> *'Be good to see a summary of changes between the existing and revised policy - that will help us see if our 'data' actually did inform the revision.'*
>
> *'...very positive experience. I like an idea that one of the other participants suggested was to send out the previous policy and perhaps the questions asks so we could better prepare.'*

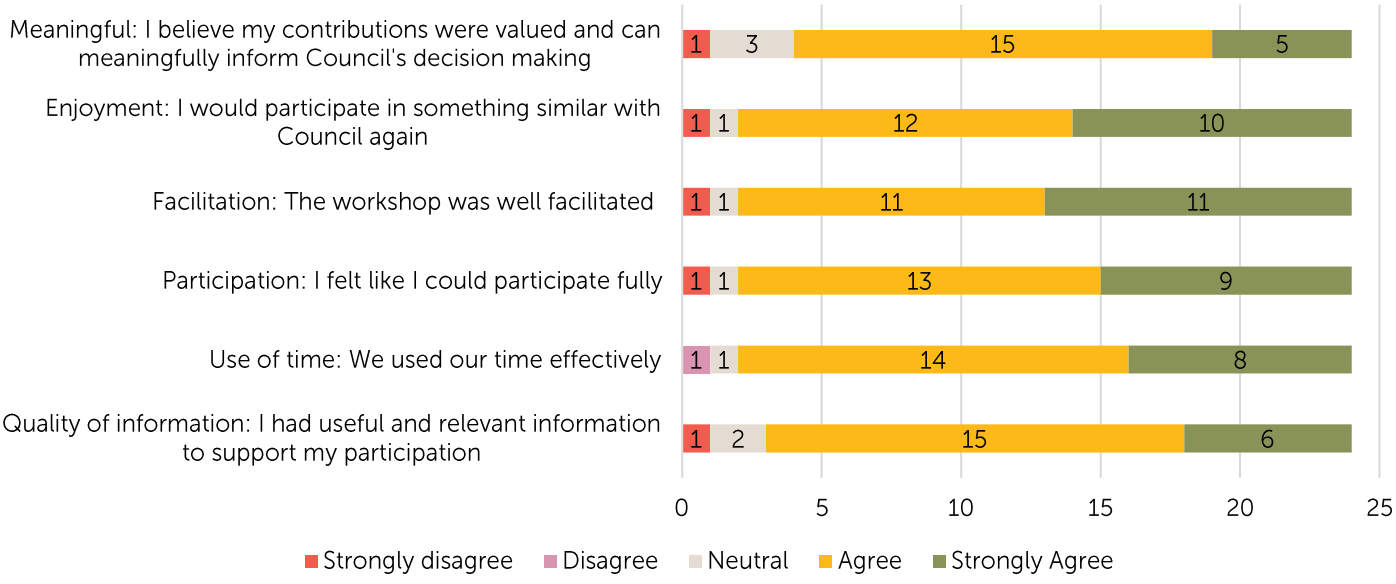


Figure 4: Participants' responses to evaluation questions about their focus group experience (n=24)

Appendix A: Promotional poster



Shape our Community Engagement Policy

We're inviting people to take part in a focus group to shape Monash Council's new Community Engagement Policy.

Participants will receive a $50 gift card as a thank you.

Register your interest before 6 February
shape.monash.vic.gov.au

Appendix B: Expression of interest questions

About you

This helps us understand who we're hearing from and if we are reaching a diverse range of voices.

1. Your first name
2. Your last name
3. Your phone
4. Your email
5. Your age
   a. Younger than 19
   b. 20-24
   c. 25-29
   d. 30-34
   e. 35-39
   f. 40-44
   g. 45-49
   h. 50-54
   i. 55-59
   j. 60-64
   k. 65-69
   l. 70-74
   m. 75-79
   n. 80-84
   o. 85 and over
   p. Prefer not to say
6. Your gender
   a. Woman
   b. Man
   c. Non-binary
   d. Prefer not to say
   e. Prefer to self-describe
7. Your suburb
   a. Ashwood
   b. Burwood
   c. Chadstone
   d. Clayton
   e. Glen Waverley
   f. Hughesdale
   g. Huntingdale
   h. Mount Waverley
   i. Mulgrave
   j. Notting Hill
   k. Oakleigh
   l. Oakleigh East
   m. Oakleigh South
   n. Wheelers Hill
   o. Other
8. What language do you speak at home?
   a. English
   b. Mandarin
   c. Greek
   d. Cantonese
   e. Sinhalese
   f. Hindi
   g. Vietnamese
   h. Tamil
   i. Italian
   j. Korean
   k. Punjabi
   l. Other
9. Do you require an interpreter at the focus group session?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Unsure
10. Do you identify as...
    a. A person with a disability, long-term health condition, or impairment that affects your daily activities
    b. Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander
    c. LGBTIQA+ (ie. lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or gender diverse, intersex, queer or question, asexual)
    d. Living in insecure housing or experiencing homelessness
    e. An unpaid carer for family members or others because of their disability or long term health condition
    f. None of the above

11. Do you require any additional support for the focus group session?

    a. Yes b. No c. Unsure

12. Have you participated in community engagement activities delivered by Council over the last 2 years?

    a. Yes b. No c. Unsure

These questions will help us understand how we are doing.

They will not affect your selection in a focus group

13. Thinking about community consultation delivered by Council, what are we doing well?

14. Thinking about community consultation delivered by Council, what do we need to get better at?

Appendix C: Participant targets, selected participants and participants

DEMOGRAPHIC CATEGORY	CRITERIA	MONASH POPULATION REPRESENTATION %[4]	MONASH POPULATION ADJUSTED %[5]	PARTICIPANT TARGET (N=100)	SELECTED PARTICIPANTS (N=100)	PARTICIPANTS (N=66)[6]
Age	Younger than 19 years	21.3%			0	0 (0%)
	20 - 24 years	8.5%	10%	10	2	2 (3%)
	25 - 29 years	8.2%	10%	10	6	3 (5%)
	30 - 34 years	7.2%	9%	9	9	7 (11%)
	35 - 39 years	7.1%	9%	9	9	3 (5%)
	40 - 44 years	6.5%	8%	8	8	5 (8%)
	45 - 49 years	6.3%	8%	8	10	6 (9%)
	50 - 54 years	6.2%	8%	8	8	5 (8%)
	55 - 59 years	5.5%	7%	7	11	6 (9%)
	60 - 64 years	4.9%	6%	6	7	5 (8%)
	65 - 69 years	4.4%	6%	6	7	6 (9%)
	70 - 74 years	4.1%	6%	6	8	7 (11%)
	75 - 79 years	3.5%	5%	5	6	2 (3%)
	80 - 84 years	3.0%	4%	4	5	5 (8%)
	85 years +	3.3%	4%	4	4	3 (5%)

[4] The 'Monash population representation' column outlines the percentage of the Monash population per demographic category and criteria, as of the 2021 Australian census. Sources: https://www.abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/LGA24970 and https://profile.id.com.au/monash/population

[5] The 'Monash population adjusted' column adjusts the percentage of the demographic category and criteria in the 'Monash population representation' column. This is to round the numbers to the closest whole number, remove all those younger than 19 years of age, adjust for non-binary people and those who prefer to self-describe, and increase the target percentage for Traditionally under-represented groups.

[6] One participant attended a focus group with their mother. Some of their details are unknown; thus, an additional 'prefer not to say/unknown' in the 'participants' column.

DEMOGRAPHIC CATEGORY	CRITERIA	MONASH POPULATION REPRESENTATION %[4]	MONASH POPULATION ADJUSTED %[5]	PARTICIPANT TARGET (N=100)	SELECTED PARTICIPANTS (N=100)	PARTICIPANTS (N=66)[6]
	Prefer not to say/unknown	N/A	N/A	0	0	1 (2%)
Gender	Woman	49.8%	47%	47	51	37 (56%)
	Man	50.2%	47%	47	45	25 (38%)
	Non-binary	N/A	3%	3	2	2 (3%)
	Prefer not to say/unknown	N/A	N/A		2	2 (3%)
	Prefer to self describe	N/A	3%	3	0	0 (0%)
Suburb	Ashwood/Burwood	5.3%	5%	5	6	6 (9%)
	Chadstone	5.1%	5%	5	8	4 (6%)
	Clayton	10.2%	10%	10	10	5 (8%)
	Glen Waverley	23.7%	23%	23	23	17 (26%)
	Hughesdale	4.0%	4%	4	4	3 (5%)
	Mount Waverley	18.8%	18%	18	17	9 (14%)
	Mulgrave	10.5%	10%	10	8	8 (12%)
	Notting Hill	1.6%	2%	2	2	1 (2%)
	Oakleigh	4.5%	4%	4	4	1 (2%)
	Oakleigh East/Huntingdale	4.7%	5%	5	5	3 (5%)
	Oakleigh South	3.1%	3%	3	3	2 (3%)
	Wheelers Hill	11.0%	11%	11	10	6 (9%)
	Other	N/A	N/A		0	0 (2%)
	Unknown	N/A	N/A			1 (2%)
	English		47%	47	58	39 (59%)
	Mandarin	15.2%	15%	15	13	10 (15%)
	Greek	5.4%	5%	5	4	0 (0%)
	Cantonese	4.6%	5%	5	2	2 (3%)

DEMOGRAPHIC CATEGORY	CRITERIA	MONASH POPULATION REPRESENTATION %[4]	MONASH POPULATION ADJUSTED %[5]	PARTICIPANT TARGET (N=100)	SELECTED PARTICIPANTS (N=100)	PARTICIPANTS (N=66)[6]
Language spoken at home	Sinhalese	2.9%	3%	3	2	1 (2%)
	Hindi	2.2%	2%	2	2	1 (2%)
	Vietnamese	1.8%	2%	2	1	1 (2%)
	Tamil	1.7%	2%	2	2	0 (0%)
	Italian	1.6%	2%	2	1	1 (2%)
	Korean	1.2%	1%	1	0	0 (0%)
	Punjabi	1.0%	1%	1	0	0 (0%)
	Other	14.4%	15%	15	15	11 (17%)
Diversity and inclusion Traditionally under-represented groups	A person with a disability, long-term health condition, or impairment that affects daily activities	5.8%	6%	6	11	3 (5%)
	Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander	0.3%	3%	3	2	1 (2%)
	LGBTIQA+	N/A	7%	7	7	5 (8%)
	Living in insecure housing or experiencing homelessness	N/A	3%	3	2	2 (3%)
	An unpaid carer for family members or others because of their disability or long term health condition	12%	12%	12	12	8 (12%)
Participated in community engagement activities delivered by Council over the last 2 years	Yes	N/A	60%	60	48	33 (50%)
	No	N/A	30%	30	44	27 (41%)
	Unsure	N/A	10%	10	8	6 (9%)

Appendix D: Focus group agenda

AGENDA ITEM	DESCRIPTION
Welcome, Acknowledgement of Country and housekeeping	• Welcome • Acknowledgement of Country • Who is in the room: roles and responsibilities • Housekeeping
Icebreaker	Monash pop quiz
Exploring the agenda	• Agenda • Why we are here
Community engagement principles and expectations	Activity • Individually and at table groups: What should Council keep in mind when engaging with the community? • What do you expect from Council?
Engagement scenarios	Activity • Three engagement scenarios, each hosted by a Council or Capire staff. – Market stall (pop-up) – Focus group or workshop – Online survey • Questions at each station: Discuss – What would help or invite you to engage with Council? – For those who have engaged, think about why you engaged. For those who haven't engaged, think about what would help you to. – What would prevent or hinder you from engaging? – What would you like that experience to be like? (feel, see, hear) 8-minute rotations
Final group discussion	Group discussion • This is a guiding document. What is important for Monash's Engagement Policy? • Thinking about everything that has been discussed, what's important to you about Council's community engagement?
Next steps and close	Next steps • Gift cards • Evaluation survey • Updated Policy by July 2026
Close	

Appendix E: Out of scope feedback

Thinking about community consultation delivered by Council, what are we doing well?

When considering what Council is doing well, community members shared the following un-related to community engagement.

- Advocacy against State Government projects that impact residents.
- Helpful, dedicated and patient Council staff, such as the community service department and library staff.
- Excellent facilities and services, including the libraries being upgraded, public toilets, recreation and community centres, Monash Aquatic Centre, golf courses, voluntary services, Monash Link Health Services, sporting facilities, exercise groups and programs for seniors and people with disabilities.
- The public parks and nature trails, including recent upgrades to playgrounds, sports grounds, Jells Park and common spaces.
- Maintenance such as responding to concerns, gutter cleaning, clearing broken trees, immediately rectifying rubbish bin issues, Snap Send Solve, and playground management.
- Waste collection and the recycling depot.
- Great free events, festivals and cultural activities.
- Sustainability projects such as vegetation conservation, tree management, improving recycling programs and the Monash Gardens for Wildlife.
- Making it a safe and secure environment including the street lighting and reviewing local laws.
- Lawn mowing and road and footpath resurfacing.
- Suburb development.

Thinking about community consultation delivered by Council, what do we need to get better at?

When considering what Council can do better at, community members shared the following un-related to community engagement:

- Improve meaningful information and education about Council, staff, who to talk to about topics, policy changes, including the rationale, Councillors, including their roles and views, planned interruptions, use of rubbish bins and services and events.
  - It was shared that the website is confusing and overwhelming with information disappearing when it is date sensitive, information should be in multiple languages in addition to English and more summarised communication including from Council meetings would be useful.
- Coordinate with the State Government on key decisions and roads whilst protecting ratepayers' rights, and communicate about it.
- Continuously review and manage the green canopy with residents, increase sustainable living education with young people, plant native trees along Kelly Street to improve the habitat corridors for birds, increase solar panels, pocket parks, street seating, and shade sails at playgrounds to make them usable in summer.
- Improve urban planning, such as protecting the environment, building regulations, limiting and mitigating overdevelopment that lacks site parking and increases traffic pollution and developing a long term master plans for all parts of the Council.
- Represent all of Monash and seek to distribute improvements and upgrades more equally.
- Improve maintenance such as rubbish collection, air monitoring, and cleaning up footpaths, creeks, weeds, graffiti, shopping centres, the cemetery and roads.
- Improve the balance between community funds expenditure and responsible funds investment.
- Improve fire prevention and natural disaster prevention.

- Improvements to safety and security, such as more neighbourhood watch sessions, footpaths, bike tracks and lanes, secure street parking and lighting, and safety around shopping centres.
- Better services to help Monash's aging population, the homeless, new migrants integrate, those with disabilities, gambling, family violence, and depression.
- Deliver and action Council promises.
- Managing the increase of pet registration costs without increasing service delivery.
- Consider issues from systematic perspectives rather than in isolation.
- Improve funding and autonomy for neighbourhood houses.
- Increase tree pruning.
- More and improved community events, including for teenagers and using schools for larger community organisations.

Engagement expectations

When participants were asked to reflect and discuss what Council should keep in mind when engaging the community, and what the community expects from Council before, during and after they conduct engagement, including what they do not want to see or experience, the following out-of-scope feedback was shared.

WHAT TO KEEP IN MIND AND EXPECTATIONS

- Understand how future development impacts amenity and the environment, including pre-warning residents and considering compensation for change.
- Have a technology plan to bring Monash into the future and beyond, including in relation to education and science.

Additional questions and comments

One participant asked where the community engagement was regarding the Oakleigh South aged care, as it impacts community members, including traffic, and it received objections.

The following feedback was also shared throughout the focus groups:

- Multiple participants raised budget and funding concerns, including for Council to manage funds responsibly, appropriately, and for longevity, such as across suburbs, to be aware of revenue raising that is not necessarily justified, and to consider the cost of services.
- Planning-related comments included the desire for Council to plan holistically, respect its heritage and maintain basic infrastructure such as parks and roads. There was also concern that Council ignores the impacts on existing infrastructure from new development or park upgrades,
- There was a request for more seating at events, including music festivals, for example, in a sensory tent.