

Community Reference Groups Guidelines

Inform

Consult

Involve

Collaborate

Empower

Level of participation adapted from the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation

1. Description

Community Reference Groups provide advice to Council concerning a specific issue, enhance communication between Council and the community and complement other elements of community engagement.

2. Benefits

- Can be an effective way to involve stakeholders in specific projects or activities.
- Opportunity to maximise the skills and expertise that exist in the community to complement the role of Council in service delivery.
- Potential to test community engagement techniques and audiences to improve consultation outcomes for an issue.

3. When to use a Community Reference Group

- ✓ When a collaborative approach to community engagement is desirable or required.
- ✓ When a specific issue would benefit from greater community input.
- ✓ If an issue is substantial and the resourcing required for a Community Reference Group justifies the benefits and outcomes achieved.
- ✓ If specific or expert input is required and this can be sourced from key stakeholders in the City of Greater Dandenong.
- ✓ Where collaboration with stakeholders is desirable to enhance outcomes for a particular issue.
- ✓ When increased community awareness of an issue is required.

4. When not to use a Community Reference Group

- ✗ When statutory processes exclude input from such a group.
- ✗ When similar groups already exist for the same (or similar) service or issue and there is a risk of the same community members belonging to a Community Reference Group.
- ✗ When alternate collaborative forms of consultation are identified as being more effective.

- ✘ When informing, consulting and involving are more effective methods of engagement for the specific issue.

5. Membership of Community Reference Groups

The membership of each Community Reference Group will be proposed as part of the establishment of the group and may comprise any of the following:

- Council staff members to resource the Community Reference Group with administrative support and technical expertise relating to the issue;
- A specific number of members to be defined in the Terms of Reference with a clearly defined term of membership;
- Representatives who are over 18 years of age;
- Representatives from appropriate community organisations; and
- Community representatives who reflect a diversity of community views and interests and the various geographical areas of the City.

It is noted that:

- Membership on a Community Reference Group is voluntary; and
- Involvement of Councillors on a Community Reference Group will depend on needs and interests in relation to the issue. Councillors' involvement in Community Reference Groups will not form part of the Councillor appointments each year as determined by Council.

6. Basis upon which Community Reference Groups are formed

A Community Reference Group:

- ✓ Operates as a mechanism to assist and support community engagement on a particular issue;
- ✓ Has a start and finish date (sunset clause) and specific roles and responsibilities;
- ✓ Is an equitable forum that is representative of the City of Greater Dandenong community and relevant stakeholders;
- ✓ Complements other elements of Council's community engagement processes;
- ✓ Enhances communication between Council and the community;
- ✓ Is not a decision making body but is able to advise Council on relevant matters related to the issue; and
- ✓ Operates as a transparent, representative and accessible forum.

7. Process for Membership of Community Reference Groups

- Public Notice calling for Expressions of Interest.
- Nomination Form to be completed by interested people who wish to register an Expression of Interest.

7.1 Selection Criteria for Membership of Community Reference Groups

- Involvement in the community in the interest area that relates to the purpose of the Community Reference Group.
- Endorsed by local organisation if representing one on the Community Reference Group.
- Strong community networks and linkages.
- Demonstrated ability to constructively participate in an advisory capacity.

- ☑ Ability to represent a broad range of views that reflect the diversity of the community.
- ☑ Strong understanding of the local community and its social, environmental and economic influences.
- ☑ Good knowledge and understanding of the local issues that are relevant to the issue.
- ☑ Possess a willingness to contribute positively to meetings in a fair and unbiased manner.
- ☑ Have an ability to look beyond personal interests for the benefit of the community and residents of the City of Greater Dandenong.
- ☑ Ability and willingness to encourage participation from and provide feedback to the community regarding the issue.
- ☑ Able to commit to the Community Reference Group for the required duration.
- ☑ Willingness to celebrate the success and achievements of the issue.

7.2 Selection Panel to make recommendation of members on Community Reference Groups

- Senior member of Council (CEO or Director – or delegated Manager).
- Nominated Council staff member from the specific service area related to the issue.

A recommendation about the membership of the Community Reference Group is made for the endorsement of Council.

It is noted that once the Community Reference Group has been appointed, this selection panel is disbanded.

8. Responsibilities of the Community Reference Group

The responsibilities of each Community Reference Group will be outlined in a Terms of Reference (attached).

9. Protocols

A code of conduct (attached) will be signed by all members of each Community Reference Group.

10. Reference Materials

- Community Engagement Policy; and
- Community Engagement Planning Framework.