



*Join the
Conversation*

Community Engagement Framework



Working together to
make well-informed
decisions for our Hills
communities

Acknowledgement of Country

Council acknowledges that we conduct our business on the traditional Country of the Peramangk and Kaurna people. We pay our respects to Ancestors and Elders past and present as the Custodians of this ancient and beautiful land.

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Mayor's Message

Getting involved in Council planning and decision-making is one of the most powerful ways you can help shape the future of our community.

When we hear directly from our residents, community groups and business owners, Council is able to make informed decisions that truly reflect what our community needs and wants.

I'm pleased to introduce this Community Engagement Framework. It sets out how we'll connect with you and involve you in decisions that matter. The framework is built on what you've told us is most important and will guide us to engage in ways that align with your expectations and preferences.

Your ideas and opinions matter, so I encourage you to get involved in conversations that will shape the future of life in the Adelaide Hills.

Nathan Daniell
Mayor



Introduction

The Adelaide Hills Council area is made up of 57 townships and suburbs, each with unique identities and characteristics. These localities are spread across 795km² and are home to over 40,000 residents.

We are committed to giving people across the Hills opportunities to join in conversations that matter to them, and ensuring Council decisions reflect the voices of our Adelaide Hills communities.

Community engagement undertaken by Adelaide Hills Council is informed by legislative and regulatory requirements, including the *Local Government Act 1999* and the *Minister for Local Government's Community Engagement Charter*. These requirements are given effect through Council's Community Engagement Policy.

Under the *Local Government Act 1999* Council is required to maintain a Community Engagement Policy. The Policy sets out Council's formal commitments, statutory requirements and minimum standards for community engagement.

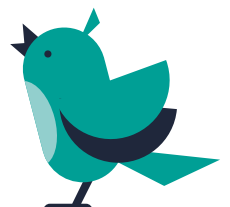
The Community Engagement Framework sits above the Community Engagement Policy. It provides the overarching principles, approach and culture for how Council engages with our community, while the Policy will provide the formal governance and legislative foundation for engagement activities.

The Framework is a guiding document that describes a consistent and coordinated engagement approach to community engagement. It explains our engagement principles (our commitments to our community) and outlines how our community can contribute to Council decision-making processes.

The Community Engagement Framework is not a policy and does not create statutory obligations. It is intended to guide best-practice engagement across Council activities and to support the implementation of Council's Community Engagement Policy.

Through implementation of the framework, we aim to:

- Deliver clear, timely and accessible communication about engagement opportunities so people understand what Council is doing, why it matters, and how they can be involved.
- Provide early and ongoing opportunities to participate, recognising that meaningful engagement starts well before decisions are finalised.
- Manage community expectations by being transparent about project purpose, influence and constraints, including what is open for feedback and what is not.
- Tell the stories about how community input has influenced decisions by closing the loop with our community, explaining how feedback has shaped decisions, and why certain suggestions may not have been adopted.
- Build trusting and ongoing relationships between Council staff, Representative Elected Body and the community based on openness, respect and shared understanding.
- Empower our community by valuing local knowledge, supporting collaboration and enabling shared decision-making where appropriate.
- Strengthen capability and consistency across council, increase staff confidence and align engagement best practice with Council's strategic objectives.



What is community engagement?

Community engagement can be described as any process that involves the community in decision-making and uses that community input to make better, more informed decisions.

It is about providing genuine opportunities for diverse communities to meaningfully contribute to problem solving, opportunities and outcomes that affect or interest them.



Our approach

The way Council engages with our community will vary depending on the topic, complexity of the issue or idea and the level of influence stakeholders (e.g. community members, business owners, relevant organisations and agencies) may have over an outcome.

Community engagement can include informing, consultation and active community participation. Our engagement work is guided by the *Engagement Institute's International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) Spectrum of Public Participation*.

Some aspects of community engagement are directed by statutory requirements such as the *Local Government Act 1999* (the Act) and *Minister for Local Government's Community Engagement Charter 2025* (the Charter).

We may choose to undertake community engagement activities not prescribed by the Act, the Charter or any other legislation, when we believe engagement will lead to better outcomes for our community and for Council and will enhance decision-making and our ability to deliver on the outcomes stated in our Strategic Plan. Council will endeavour to achieve best practice community engagement whenever possible.

Community engagement versus customer requests

There are a variety of ways residents and stakeholders can share ideas and concerns with council including by submitting a Customer Request. Customer Requests are typically individual transactions, focusing on reporting an issue or seeking a service (e.g. reporting a pothole, requesting tree pruning) to ensure a prompt, direct response.

These requests may involve conversations with the affected resident/s however they are not considered to be a community engagement process.

The most effective way to influence Council planning and rate spending, is to participate in Council strategic planning and budgeting processes as either an individual or community group and to work with council staff and Representative Elected Body to plan for future needs and priorities within your local area.

We are committed to giving people across the Hills the opportunity to take part in conversations that matter to them

How did we engage with you?

During September and October 2025, we engaged with community members and stakeholders across the Adelaide Hills to share information about the development of the Community Engagement Framework and have a range of discussions about what is important and valuable to them to feature in this document.

We asked our community about what good community engagement looks like and what level of involvement they would like to have in Council decision-making processes.

Engagement activities undertaken:

3

staff workshops

5

resident / community association meetings

2

meetings with key stakeholders

4

engagement pop-ups (libraries, markets)

3

community forums

Engagement feedback / participation (number of people):

13

online and hardcopy feedback forms

7

online visional / idea tool

4

written responses (email and letter)

25

engagement pop-up activities

39

stakeholder meetings

61

community forums

20

staff workshops

"Transparency is very important. Offering multiple ways to engage."





What we heard

What does good community engagement look like?

- Timely and ongoing communication
- Inclusive and accessible engagement
- Transparency and trust
- Collaborative approach
- People focused
- Strategic and purposeful
- Effective use of feedback
- Empower and recognise community knowledge and experience

How can we improve the way we engage with our community?

- Promotion and communication
- Accessibility and inclusion
- Responsiveness and transparency
- Relationship building
- Empower and support
- Systems and processes
- Training and culture
- Strategic use of data

Do you have any feedback you'd like to share about your experiences engaging with council?

Positive Experiences

- Authentic engagement
- Valued community spaces / assets
- Effective communication
- Staff and team support
- Tools and platforms

Challenges and Frustrations

- Communication gaps
- Decision-making issues
- Process and planning weaknesses
- Support and culture
- Inclusivity and reach
- Tools and resources
- Project challenges

“Good engagement has an excellent feedback ‘loop’ so that people who contribute feel really connected, rather than just being part of a policy (i.e. something that Council ‘has to do’ rather than wants to do)”

Our Guiding Principles

Our community shared what is most important for us to consider when it comes to good community engagement and Council decision-making processes.

Through these discussions with community members, key stakeholders and council staff, we developed three guiding principles, which underpin our community engagement practices.

Guiding Principles

- 1 Communication and Connection** - We will communicate in ways that are clear, timely and accessible, recognising that our community engages through many different channels. We will grow genuine and respectful relationships and ensure people can meaningfully participate in conversations that affect or interest them.
- 2 Purpose, Influence and Transparency** - We will be clear about why we are engaging and inform our community of the ways in which community engagement can shape and influence local decisions. We will build community trust and confidence by creating opportunities for open and honest conversations and clearly communicating outcomes of Council decisions and project next steps.
- 3 Active Participation** - We will grow engagement participation and community capacity through embracing local knowledge and lived experience and involving our community throughout decision-making processes.

How we will deliver on our principles

Communication and Connection

We will communicate in ways that are clear, timely and accessible, recognising that our community engages through many different channels. We will grow genuine and respectful relationships and ensure everybody can meaningfully participate in conversations that affect or interest them.

We will deliver on our principle by:

- Providing clear and timely information in accessible language, about engagement opportunities through a variety of formats and promotional channels.
- Making engagement participation flexible by creating a variety of ways, times and locations for community members to participate including informal opportunities and community forums.
- Creating a continuous loop of engagement information from early project planning through to decision-making and outcome delivery. This may include meetings with community members, updates on council websites and social channels, emails to subscribers and promotion through our libraries and community centres.
- Seeking representations from a wide variety of members across our diverse community and designing engagements so people can participate meaningfully, regardless of their background, ability or circumstances.
- Creating two-way conversations and engagement channels where each party has the opportunity to learn and take something away from the experience.

Purpose, Influence and Transparency

We will be clear about why we are engaging and inform our community of the ways in which community engagement can shape and influence local decisions. We will build community trust and confidence by creating opportunities for open and honest conversations and clearly communicating outcomes of Council decisions and project next steps.

We will deliver on our principle by:

- Clearly defining the engagement purpose and scope of influence at the beginning of a project so we can share with our community what information we are seeking and speak to the people who are most affected.
- Avoiding predetermined plans where community has limited opportunity to shape outcomes, whenever possible.
- Creating consistent engagement processes and approaches and embedding engagement practices across all departments of council to increase community confidence and trust.
- Explaining and promoting how community feedback has been utilised and has influenced project next steps or outcomes. Using community data and feedback across a variety of council projects and planning initiatives to avoid asking the same question twice.
- Being honest and transparent about project limitations, explaining when and why a project or idea can't proceed and making the hard decisions when they need to be made.
- Clearly explaining Council's role and our decision-making processes and inviting our community to participate in these processes.

Active Participation

We will grow engagement participation and community capacity through embracing local knowledge and lived experience and involving our community throughout decision-making processes.

We will deliver on our principle by:

- Respecting cultural knowledge, and experience and collaborating with Kurna and Peramangk Aboriginal communities and authorities to seek their input and advice.
- Speaking to local experts, people who use the spaces and those who have lived experience, during the engagement or project initiation and throughout the project delivery.
- Putting people at the centre of our planning by respecting that they like to participate in different ways and bring different backgrounds, abilities and experiences that add value to our planning and decision-making processes.
- Empowering community groups and stakeholders to become engagement champions and active citizens, advocating for local priorities, furthering engagement opportunities within their communities and working with council to achieve shared outcomes.
- Investigating opportunities for co-design and co-funded initiatives, including participatory and deliberative engagement methods, when aspirations, project scopes and objectives align.

Democracy & Decision-Making

The graphic below shows a visual description of how Council's Representative Elected Body (Mayor and Elected Members) considers collective ideas and issues identified to reach an outcome or decision.

The model takes you through the various steps that may be involved in the decision-making process and shows the possible opportunities for community members and other stakeholders to share ideas, knowledge, lived experiences and feedback throughout this process.

Every idea or issue identified will not automatically lead to a decision-making and community engagement process. An idea or issue must first be assessed and be determined to align with Council or other government strategic priorities and to require a council decision-making and engagement process to reach a resolution.

Some matters are determined to require a community engagement process under the *Local Government Act 1999* and/or the *Minister for Local Government's Community Engagement Charter*.



See page 13 of the Framework for further information and clarification about each of these steps of the decision-making process.

Decision making steps

Step 1

An idea or issue is identified which requires a community engagement process. This idea or issue may be identified as part of Council strategic planning and budgeting processes or may be raised by a resident or community group. Not every idea or issue identified will lead to a decision-making and/or community engagement process.

Step 2

The project is scoped and the issue or idea is defined through conversations with council staff, community members and any other relevant stakeholders. Negotiables and non-negotiables for the project are determined.

Step 3

A community engagement plan and approach is developed by the council project team and approved by the relevant council delegate (Manager, Director, CEO or Elected Body depending on the scale and complexity of the project). This may involve discussions with community members and relevant stakeholders. Information is shared about the engagement opportunity including how community members can get involved and how their ideas and feedback will inform the decision-making process.

Step 4

Stakeholders are identified including level of participation and engagement tools/techniques for each. The level of engagement and methods of engagement selected will be dependent on the complexity of the issue or idea, the scope of the project, and the level of community influence possible.

Step 5

The engagement plan is implemented. Information is shared about the engagement opportunity including how community members can get involved and how their ideas and feedback can influence the decision or outcome. Community members and other key stakeholders are brought together to discuss the issue or idea. This could involve surveys, community forums, one-on-one meetings, co-design workshops and online engagement tools.

Step 6

Feedback is collated and assessed by relevant staff. Key themes of feedback are identified, and any further clarification of engagement findings is sought from contributors. A community engagement outcomes report is prepared.

Step 7

The issue or idea is presented by staff to the Representative Elected Body for review. Information may be delivered via a Council Workshop presentation or Council Meeting Report and could include presentation of the issue or idea, analysis of the engagement findings, consideration of other influences and recommended next steps.

Step 8

The Representative Elected Body makes a decision after considering community feedback alongside other decision-making influences. Interested community members and other stakeholders may choose to present at or attend the relevant Council Meeting where this decision is discussed.

Influences on decision-making that may be considered by the Representative Elected Body:

- Representative Elected Body and staff local knowledge and expertise.
- Legislation and policies.
- Previous Council decisions.
- Council strategic priorities.
- Legal or expert advice.
- Community knowledge and feedback including community engagement outcomes and any presentations to Council.
- Council capacity and resources – available budgets and staffing and any competing projects.
- Environmental, social and economic context.
- Research and analysis.

Step 9

Community members and stakeholders are advised of the decision and next steps. Information is shared with engagement contributors about the decision including how it was reached, the community engagement outcomes, and any planned next steps staff will take.

Step 10

Implementation of the decision or outcome and evaluation and review of engagement process. This review will be used to inform future community engagement and decision-making processes. Feedback collected across the community engagement process will be shared with relevant staff across council to inform future and ongoing projects.

Roles of people in engagement

Community members and stakeholders

Become informed and involved in community engagement opportunities that interest and impact them.

Review engagement materials and provide informed feedback.

Be open to all ideas and respect other people's opinions and perspectives.

Adhere to the engagement process and timeframe provided.

Understand that many factors/influences contribute to a decision, and that the outcome may not always be the one they desire.

Follow designated avenues to bring ideas and concerns to council staff and Representative Elected Body for consideration.

Treat Council staff and Representative Elected Body with respect.

Representative Elected Body

Endorse and support Council's Community Engagement Policy and Community Engagement Framework.

Uphold Council's Community Engagement Principles.

Be open to all ideas and respect other people's opinions and perspectives.

Help identify issues and opportunities that benefit from community engagement.

Promote participation in community engagement activities and opportunities.

Promote one shared message and goal in line with project scope and guidelines.

Be objective when engaging in conversations out in the community.

Review and consider the results of community engagement findings when forming opinions and making decisions.

Council staff

Uphold Council's Community Engagement Principles.

Consult community engagement staff about the need for community engagement before initiating work or making decisions.

Partner with communication and engagement staff to design genuine and meaningful engagement processes and opportunities.

Incorporate community engagement timing and budgets into project planning, ensuring adequate time is allocated for community members to learn about and participate in engagement opportunities.

Ensure community members have the information required to be informed and participate meaningfully.

Encourage discussion and understanding of all viewpoints and try to be as objective as possible.

Evaluate, document and report engagement findings to Council and the community.

Continuously build skills / look for opportunities for improvement and share knowledge to build staff capacity.

How we will measure and review

This framework will guide community engagement activities undertaken by Adelaide Hills Council through to 2030. The framework may be updated in line with the development and endorsement of Council's next Strategic Plan.

We will monitor the implementation of the framework through the development of an internal Community Engagement Action Plan. The Action Plan will allow us to track our progress and monitor and report against our objectives and principles.



Appendix 1: Engagement Levels

The table below shows the different levels of community engagement council may undertake based on the goals of the engagement, ability for community to influence the decision or outcome and the scale and complexity of the project or decision.

Community engagement can include informing, consulting, and active community participation. Our engagement work is guided by the Engagement Institute’s International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) Spectrum of Public Participation.

<i>Inform</i>	<i>Consult</i>	<i>Active Participation</i>
We will inform our community when there is limited or no opportunity for community members to influence a decision or outcome. This may be due to legislative, technical or safety requirements.	We will consult with our community when we have a project or idea that needs further community input before a decision can be made.	We will actively involve our community when we have the opportunity to work together around an idea or issue and have the supporting resources to enable this process.
We will explain to our community: • What we are doing and why. • The impact of the decision or outcome. • Where further information can be found. • How any concerns or questions can be shared.	We will ask our community: • For their preferences. • For any ideas for improvement. • What the impact would/ could be of the proposed decision or outcome.	We will work with our community to understand: • What people would like to see happen. • How they would like to be involved. • What we should consider or be aware of. • How we should proceed.

Inform***Consult******Active
Participation*****Example engagement methods and tools:**

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information on Adelaide Hills Website and Engagement Hub • Factsheets • E-newsletter articles • Social media posts • Information in libraries / customer service centres | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Surveys or feedback forms • Meetings with key stakeholders • Idea submissions • Drop-in/ pop-up engagement sessions • workshops | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus groups • Deliberative panels • Co-design workshops • Community forums • Advisory groups • Community asset mapping |
|--|---|--|

Example engagement projects:

- | | | |
|--|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council election information • Minor changes to office opening hours • Roadworks / temporary road closures | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New or reviewed policies • Local reserve upgrades • Lease agreement over 5 years • Revisions to existing By-laws | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Main street or precinct master plans • Regional reserve upgrades • Development of Council strategic plans |
|--|---|---|





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