

Whitehorse Community Engagement Guide



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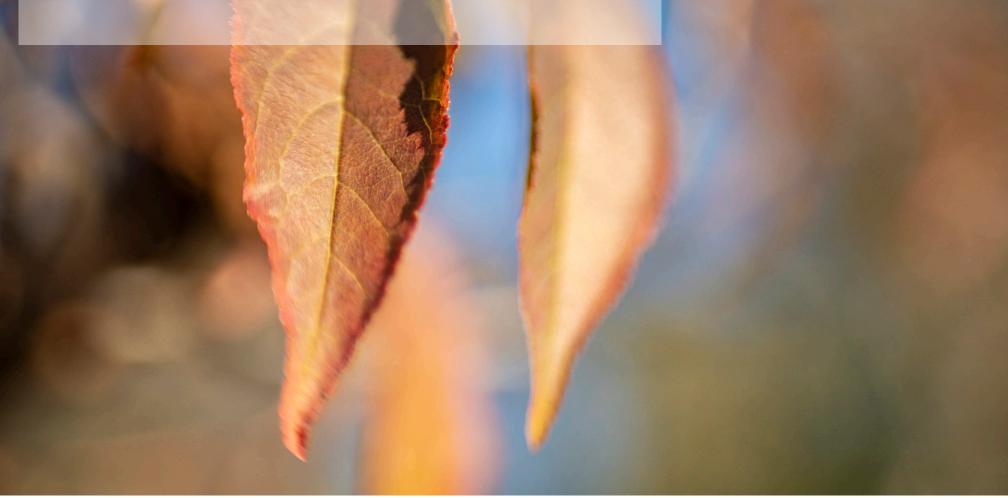
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Acknowledgement of Country

Whitehorse City Council acknowledges the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people of the Kulin Nation as the traditional owners of the land. We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging.



Background

The purpose of the Whitehorse Community Engagement Guide is to help community organisations that want to undertake planning and targeted engagement for a specific purpose. This guide will cover how to plan your engagments.

What is 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.

Community engagement can range from providing information about decisions that have been made, through to empowering your community to make decisions. How much influence participants have on the final decision or outcome varies from project to project.

Some community engagement is undertaken to inform decision-making; some is undertaken to build relationships; and other is focused on the objective of strengthening communities. Often, all three of these objectives are supported by community engagement.

Why is community engagement important?

Effective community engagement has benefits for both your organisation and the community.

Better identifying the priorities, needs and aspirations of your community will assist your organisation to improve its strategic planning, initiative development and service delivery .

Successful community engagement:

- allows the community to have a say a basic democratic right
- helps to build long-term relationships and trust
- enables consumers, members or supporters to express their expectations for products, services and policies that are important for them
- demonstrates the organisation's commitment to listening to, and serving, its customers, members or supporters
- can assist in building the capacity and the strengthening of communities
- harnesses the collective power of volunteers to support community-led endeavours.



Understanding the IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum

The International Association of Public Participation's (IAP2) engagement model is designed to assist with the selection of the level of participation that defines the public's role in any community engagement process. It can help with planning effective community engagement.

Council uses the IAP2 model to inform our community engagement practice.

This model includes a Public Participation Spectrum. The spectrum includes and recognises the need for a range of engagement practices from informing the community through to empowering the community to make decisions.

As we move along the spectrum the community's impact on the decision increases

	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Participation goal	One-way communication to provide balanced and objective information to assist understanding about something that is going to happen or has already happened.	Two-way communication process aimed at obtaining feedback on ideas, alternatives and proposals to inform decision- making.	Participatory process designed to help identify issues and views to ensure that concerns and aspirations are understood and considered.	Working together to develop an understanding of all issues and interests to work out alternatives and identify preferred solutions.	To give the community the knowledge, means, responsibility and accountability so the final decision can be placed in their hands.
Our commitment to the community	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will look for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.
Role of community	Listen	Contribute	Participate	Partner	Lead

Step 1 — Be clear about the exact decision or issue that you are engaging on

Consider the decisions you are making, and why contributions from people, groups and communities will provide you with rich information to assist decision-making.

When undertaking community engagement, you should be able to answer the following questions:

- What exactly is the issue that your community engagement activity is seeking to address?
- Why are we engaging?
- What will be different because we are engaging with all key stakeholders?

Negotiables and non-negotiables

Identify (on the next page) what can be influenced (negotiables) and cannot be influenced (non-negotiables) using the table below.

For good community engagement to occur, it's critical for you to be clear about this as a key strategy in both communicating key messages and in managing expectations of those involved.

Once you have determined exactly what is negotiable, this information can be used to help plan what kind of community contributions you want to collect through the engagement process. For example, a sporting organisation applying for funding for new multipurpose courts might ask what additional sports their members or nearby residents would play on the courts.



Negotiables: What are the elements that can change and will be influenced by engagement?	Non-Negotiables: What are the elements that cannot change and therefore are not able to be influenced by engagement?
E.g., what sports would you play on the courts?	E.g., Working with Council to ensure compliance with all requirements

Step 2 — Identify who needs to be involved

For this guide, we define the Whitehorse community as including everyone who lives, works, studies, visits, plays, or invests in the City of Whitehorse.



Broader definitions of community

It's important to note that our community is made up of many smaller communities. This can be useful to consider when planning who we want to involve in our decision-making processes. These communities can include:

- Communities of place people connected by geographic boundaries, such as particular streets, suburbs or wards.
- Communities of interest people sharing the same interest or passion, such as people with interests in the arts, heritage, environment, etc.
- Communities of action people trying to bring about change, such as people actively participating in environmental causes, advocacy campaigns, or to develop new services or offerings within the community.
- Communities of practice people in the same profession or who undertake the same activities, such as people who study architecture, or people who practice Tai Chi.
- Communities of circumstance people who are brought together by external events or common situations, usually not of their making, such as survivors of breast cancer, or households affected by a fire or flood.
- Communities of culture and language people who have a shared set of cultural values and expectations and shared language.
- Communities of business and commerce people who own and manage businesses within the municipality as well as employees and those actively seeking employment in the municipality.

Identifying who needs to be engaged

It's vital to identify which people, groups or communities are likely to be affected by the decision that needs to be made, or people who have an interest in it.

1. Begin by brainstorming everyone who might be affected by or interested in this project. Include individuals, groups, communities and even your own volunteers or staff. Think as broadly as possible. Write your ideas in the box below.



2. Some of the questions to consider about the people or groups you have identified could include:

Stakeholder group	What is their interest level in the project? (High/ Medium/Low)	What level of influence will they have on the project? (High/ Medium/Low)	Special interests, risks or needs	IAP2 spectrum point	What methods of engagement might work well for this person or group?	Timing/ frequency/ sequencing	Actions and responsible person
Group 1 For example, local businesses							
Group 2 For example, surrounding residents							
Group 3 For example, people with disability							

3. Next you can begin to sort the people who will be affected by or interested in the project into groups from the information collected above, which will help you to later plan your methods of engagement. There are traditional stakeholder engagement matrix templates as seen below that you can use to do this, or you can create your own.

Keep Manage Closely **Satisfied** Influence / Power **Monitor** Keep Informed

Stakeholder Interest / Influence

Interest / Commitment



Step 3 — Budgeting for community engagement

It's critical to ensure that a community engagement process for any project is appropriately funded from the outset of the project.

Depending on internal capabilities, there may be components of your community engagement that you can deliver yourself. However, there may also be a need to outsource. Things that you need to think about budgeting for during a community engagement process include, but are not limited to:

- Printing of flyers, posters, resources, FAQs, letters
- Translations of your written material and interpreters to receive and report on responses
- Postage to deliver printed material to households or businesses
- Hire of venues to hold meetings or events in
- Catering for participants
- Incentives to participate, such as reimbursements, supermarket vouchers, taxi vouchers, childcare support or printing certificates of participation (only to be used carefully to ensure use does not influence results)
- Resources required to facilitate workshops (stationery, printing, handouts, etc)
- Expert support, such as an independent facilitator or a community engagement specialist

Step 4 — Understand your timeline and key milestones

Some high level strategic documents or capital works projects may be planned and implemented over a long period, and may contain different stages for community and stakeholder consultation. It's important to identify each stage of community engagement, when it needs to occur and other key milestones that need to be incorporated.

Project stages	What engagement is required?	Responsibility	What outcomes do you want to achieve?	Completed by
<i>Example: Project planning 31 January – 30 February 2023</i>	High level stakeholder – internal	Project manager: Sarah Smith	Project control group sign off on engagement plan	30 January 2023
<i>Example: Concept design development</i>	Broad community and stakeholder	Project manager: Sarah Smith	Clear understanding of community and stakeholder priorities	30 March 2023

Step 5 — Develop key messages

It's important to prepare a set of key messages about your intended community engagement process.

Preparing these key messages can help you explain what the project is about with ease, and specifically why the community are being invited to be a part of it.

Some things to include in your key messages might be:

- What is the overall purpose of the project? Why is it needed? What is the dilemma, or what is negotiable?
- How will this benefit the community?
- Who is being asked to get involved? Who makes the final decision?
- How will the community be able to get involved? Through what methods?
- What are the key milestones for the project? What is the timeframe?
- When will the community be able to get involved? When will the final decision be made?
- What sustainability measures will be put in place?
- Where can people find out more about the project?

Remember to use plain English when writing your key messages!

Key messages:

1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		

Step 6 — Write your engagement activity plan

Use the below table to map out the methods, who you will be engaging with, what you are engaging about, how, where and when you will engage, who is responsible and how much it will cost.

Engagement method and description	Which stakeholder group will be engaged this way?	What's the key focus/ questions you'll ask using this method?	When and where will the engagement take place?	What resources/ materials do we need for this method?	Whose responsibility is this piece of engagement?	How will you promote this opportunity?	How will you keep this cohort informed on project outcomes?	What will be the cost of delivering this engagement?

See appendix 1 for examples of engagement methods.

Step 7 — Undertake risk identification and mitigation planning

The next section helps you to identify any specific risks of undertaking this community engagement activity, as opposed to your overarching project risks. Identifying these risks early allows you to develop ways you can mitigate these risks to achieve a better outcome for everyone involved.

Typical risks in undertaking community engagement include:

- Willingness of people to get involved nobody turns up! (Have you communicated to the right people? Identified the right issue?)
- Inability to implement community feedback (Have you asked the right question?)
- Insufficient resources to complete planned engagement (Have you budgeted appropriately right from the start?)
- Community reaction is there a possibility of outrage about this project? (Do you understand how the issue impacts the community?)
- Timeline constraints is there enough time to engage people, groups and communities adequately? (Have you commenced engagement early enough? Have you allowed adequate time for all stages?)
- Political considerations- both internally and in the community
- Insufficient reach did you do enough to reach people who speak languages other than English? (Have you provided translated materials and reached out to community leaders?)
- Special interest group intervention or take over (Have you taken key stakeholders along for the journey?)

Complete the risk matrix on the next page to create a risk mitigation plan for your community engagement activity.

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What could go wrong? (Identify your potential engagement concerns/risks)	Who would be impacted?	What will be put in place to ensure this does not happen? (Mitigation control)	Whose responsibility is it to help mitigate this risk?
<i>E.g., Poor engagement outcomes in past projects or other related projects</i>	Residents in vicinity of project	Understand the engagement activity and what went wrong. Clear messaging to minimise conflict.	Project Sponsor Project Control Group

Step 8 — Closing the loop

Closing the loop is all about demonstrating to the community that their views have been heard and shows progress towards a decision.

Closing the loop is a simple practice which is essential for building trust with your stakeholders. It shows transparency in your decision-making and ensures that the community feel validated for taking the time to provide input in your consultation.

As a best-practice method, closing the loop makes your engagement activities more robust and genuine and can help to drive interaction and engagement with your projects¹.

Some ideas to close the loop include, but aren't limited to:

- Send an email or letter to people who participated letting them know what happened as a result of their involvement.
- Update your **website project page** with final reports and recommendations. Include an update about how the community influenced the final decisions that were made.
- Create an **infographic** that shows the key things you heard during the engagement process, and circulate this to the people, groups and communities you worked with. This could look good on a poster... or bus shelter!
- **Record a video** of the senior leaders or the project manager explaining how the community engagement process helped inform the final decision. Share this via your email to participants, on social media, on your website and so on.
- Write an article for your **website** about the process and outcomes.
- Post the outcomes of community engagement process on your **social media channels**.
- Hold a **celebratory event** to thank the community for their involvement and use this opportunity to explain how their involvement helped the process run smoothly.
- Send out a media release announcing the final decision and how community contributions helped shape it.

A number of these ideas could also be implemented for projects at the 'inform' end of the spectrum where communication has been oneway.

^{1.} Closing the Loop, blog post, Nathan Connors, Bang the Table: <u>https://www.bangthetable.com/blog/closing-the-loop</u> Cited 24 February 2022

Step 9 — Evaluate your community engagement

Why evaluate our community engagement?

To continuously improve it's important to reflect on both the process of community engagement we undertook, as well as the outcomes achieved because of the process.

You must evaluate your community engagement² :

- For accountability, through making sure the best use of resources has been undertaken, including public money, the time and efforts of participants, etc.
- To establish whether or not a fair process was implemented, including whether participants views and needs were accurately and fairly represented in a decision-making process.
- To learn from past experiences, for the purpose of making future improvements.

Evaluating community engagement can be challenging because sometimes an end point is difficult to define; it can be difficult to determine the best measurement criteria; participation satisfaction can be challenging to measure particularly relating to perceived versus actual impacts made; as well as lack of time, resources and expertise to undertake robust evaluation.

You can use the template on the next page to reflect on your community engagement process at a point during the project that your consider the community engagement is complete.

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² A Guide to Evaluating Stakeholder Engagement and Public Consultation, Allison Hendricks

Process evaluation

Project title	
Project lead	
Date	
What was the project?	
What were the	
engagement objectives?	
What were the	
engagement tools and	
methods used?	
Who participated in the	
engagement?	
Who did not participate	
in the engagement?	
How could this gap be	
addressed next time?	
Were the participants	
notified of the outcome?	
How?	
What were the key	
engagement findings?	
(Include a link/ reference	
report can be found)	
engagement findings?	

How will the feedback be	
used?	
What are the next steps	
for the engagement?	
for the engagement:	
What surprised you?	
What frustrated or	
concerned you?	
What worked well?	
What would you do	
differently? What will you	
try next time?	
Are there any other	
observations/learnings	
you can think of?	

Outcome evaluation

Thorough evaluation of any community engagement process should include opportunity for people who participated in the process to reflect on it.

The following rating scale could be used with participants to share the level to which they felt our community engagement principles were adhered to.

	VERY LOW	SOMEWHAT LOW	ADEQUATE	SOMEWHAT HIGH	VERY HIGH
Inclusion, access and constructive participation					
I heard a variety of opinions, values and needs					
I felt the conversations were constructive					
There was opportunity for me to take part in conversation about the topic	1				
The right people were involved in the process	1				
Clarity of purpose and scope		•			
I always had a clear sense of the scope of the process and my role in it					
It was clear to me how the community's contribution influenced the outcomes					
Transparency, informative and clear		•	1		
The way the information was provided to be me met my needs					
I felt supported to be able to meaningfully participate					
I was given enough information on the topic to be able to meaningfully participate					
The community engagement process increased my understanding of the issue					
Integrity, caring and responsiveness					
It felt like the organisation cared about its engagement approach					



When you have identified who needs to be involved, and the level of engagement required, you can start to think about what methods you will use to undertake the required engagement. Think carefully about choosing methods that are appropriate for the people you want to reach.

Hybrid community engagement is the concept of offering a mix of written, face-to-face, and online engagement opportunities on any given project, depending on who you are trying to engage with. It's important to note that many people prefer to engage in person, while others by writing, and others using digital tools. Best practice community engagement includes considering offering a choice of how someone who is interested in your project might want to participate in it.

Below are some suggested methods. Which will you use?

Method	Description	Best for	Consider	Level of the spectrum
Newsletter/ fact sheet/ brochures	Newsletters, fact sheets, brochures and other digital printings are direct, succinct and easily accessible communication material that encourage awareness of the main issues and priorities of the project. They can be standalone or a series e.g., monthly newsletters or themed fact sheets depending on the complexity of project. Ensure you include images and photos that complement the words and the subject matter.	Providing detailed project information to the community and encouraging people to find out more by visiting the webpage. Keeping people up-to-date with the progress of the project.	Translating the fact sheet or newsletter into key community languages. Mailing or delivering hard copy information about your project to all of or some of the community.	Inform

Written engagement method

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Method	Description	Best for	Consider	Level of the spectrum
Poster/ Postcard	Postcards and posters are used to publicise the project among the community. They can be distributed to places frequented by the community and in a variety of formats such as multiple languages to promote the engagement opportunities and provide information about the project.	Getting quick information about the project out to the community and encouraging people to find out more by visiting the webpage.	Postcards and posters should use plain language to account for varying levels of literacy within the community. The poster or postcard could be used to advertise the project through local channels. Consider including a QR code to link to further information – this could be a survey, video, or FAQs.	Inform
Letter/email	A direct and personalised letter or email can include information about the project, links the webpage and encourage people to provide their feedback. It's best to include an option to receive information via post as some people may not have an email address and/or prefer to receive hard-copy information.	Letters and emails can announce the beginning of a project, stages of a project, such as the release of an engagement findings report and thank participants for their time at an engagement event.	As part of a project, ask people to register to receive updates on the project and whether they would like to receive information on similar projects. Translating the letter into key community languages.	Inform
Media release	Media releases are official and will reflect your position or outcome of a project. They can also be used to raise awareness and generate publicity. Media releases aim to get the widest possible coverage and may elicit further enquiries about the topic covered.	Media releases can disseminate information quickly to many people and can help your organisation to make contact with the media.	Media releases can be difficult to retract, should any changes to the messaging occur. Use the key messages for your project to prepare the media release.	Inform

Method	Description	Best for	Consider	Level of the spectrum
Paper survey	Surveys allow you to collect both quantitative and qualitative feedback. It's a useful tool if you are seeking formal submissions for your project.	Collecting one-way, structured responses to specific questions and personal information, such as demographics.	The best way to ask the question for example open field (long or short response options), checkboxes (one or more answers from a list). Consider including a paper survey on the back of a pamphlet or as an attachment to a letter. Think about offering a pre-paid return option or somewhere people can drop off their responses.	Consult Involve

Face-to-face engagement methods

For all face-to-face engagement methods consider booking an interpreter to facilitate responses in other community languages.

Method	Description	Best for	Consider	Level of the spectrum
Interviews/ in person surveys	Interviews allow flexibility to meet the needs and answer questions of the interviewee and provides a private setting which is great for deeper engagement and discussion of sensitive topics and can be used to validate information. They aim to elicit detailed information and opinions on an issue through wide-ranging discussion rather than specific questioning.	Interviews are great for key stakeholders and to target specific members of the community. A survey format could be used at face-to-face engagement activities to ensure all responses are collected in the same way.	Who the best stakeholders are to interview and how you will be keeping a record of the interview (written or through an audio or video recording).	Consult Involve Collaborate

Method	Description	Best for	Consider	Level of the spectrum
Street interviews (vox pops)	Street Interviews (street-based intercept surveys) informally capture people's views on the street in areas of high foot traffic or event. They aim to reach the not-typically engaged community members and can help to engage those who are time poor or may not know about the project.	Communicating the project and capturing the high- level views of the wider community.	Limit question to three or four targeted questions as you will often only have people for a short conversation. Think about your 'hook' – how you will engage people to chat with you.	Consult Involve Collaborate
Briefing	Briefings use regular meetings to provide a short presentation to inform stakeholders about the project and the opportunities to participate, in an informal and comfortable environment.	Presenting information to established groups such as trader associations or community leaders.	Having project information to hand out following the briefing to direct people to places (website or email address) where they can provide feedback.	Consult Involve Collaborate
Focus group	 Focus groups are a facilitated session of 1.5 to 2-hours in length, with 8-12 people. They allow the sharing of information and building of trust with participants in a structured setting. Focus groups can be designed for a specific community group or be open to mixed stakeholders, to encourage them to hear other perspectives and experiences. 	The design of focus groups can be flexible with activities and content tailored to suit the participants.	Whether the focus group will have group discussions as well as use creative methods such as mapping and visioning. Language can be a barrier to participation. Interpreters may be necessary to ensure that complex issues are fully understood, and participants feel welcome.	Consult Involve Collaborate
Walking tour/ site visit	Walking tours (or field trips) are a great way for people to see firsthand a space they are discussing. Walking tours follow a predetermined route and could be facilitated or self-guided, with participants answering questions along the way. They usually take place over one-hour and can be followed with a short focus group.	These group activities build community capacity by creating a space for like-minded people to share experiences.	Ask participants to register for the session, so that you are aware of their physical needs and can adapt the route if necessary.	Consult Involve Collaborate

Method	Description	Best for	Consider	Level of the spectrum
Drop in Sessions	An drop in session (also known as an open house or a listening post) is usually held in a public setting and is great to engage the community's awareness and interest. They can run from 2-hours to a whole day and present information about the project as well as the opportunity to speak with the member of the project team and provide feedback. They are an opportunity to engage the whole community including people who might not normally be involved in engagement activities in a less formal way. They allow for greater flexibility as participants can choose to be involved for as much or little time as they like.	Include activities where people can see or hear what others have said – this will encourage people to respond to other people's comments.	Hold your session during an existing community event as you will already have a captive audience. Setting-up the venue according to themes to take people on a journey.	Consult Involve Collaborate
Рор-ир	A pop-up involves temporarily transforming a space into something else such as a closing a street and turning it into a park or public space. Creating pop-ups allows the community to re-imagine local spaces and tangibly experience an idea firsthand. By transforming an under-used space into a more attractive setting you will entice unlikely participants to be engaged in the design of your project. Pop-ups are also a great way to identify opportunities with participants that may not otherwise be explored.	Pop-ups can generate meaningful engagement opportunities and build local support for the project.	Use a pop-up as part of the wider engagement program providing project information with details about engagement opportunities.	Consult Involve Collaborate

Method	Description	Best for	Consider	Level of the spectrum
Deliberative forums	Deliberative forums are longer and more in-depth sessions providing an opportunity for participants to talk with one another about their different points of view. Taking place over a few days, these forums provide a more structured space for deliberation and discussion than a workshop. The goal of deliberation is to find where there is common ground for action and provide recommendations to the decision-maker.	Bringing people together as a group to make choices about difficult and complex public issues where there is a lot of uncertainty about solutions.	The number and make-up of the participants e.g., are they a representative sample of the community.	Consult Involve Collaborate Empower
Representative Community Panel	Community panels or representative panels bring a group of community members together to learn about an issue over several sessions and make a recommendation. A core component is creating a sample that represents the diversity of experiences, values and voices within that community. The sample is usually randomly chosen according to demographic and other factors such as religion and employment status.	A great opportunity to develop a deep understanding of an issue with participants able to share information within their community.	The format of the sessions must encourage participation and dialogue.	Consult Involve Collaborate Empower

Online engagement methods

Method	Description	Best for	Consider	Level of the spectrum
Website	Your organisation's website is a centralised place for all information. You could add a new web page with information dedicated to your project.	Capable of reaching a large audience at low cost Popular information resource	Needs to be visible and easy to navigate Keep information updated People without access may be disadvantaged Technical difficulties	Inform
Social media	Social media such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and LinkedIn is now part of most people's lives, and can be a powerful engagement tool. Its ease, cost effectiveness and wide adoption make it a compelling and accessible link to diverse communities. Develop a social media plan to strategically think and plan for your social media campaign.	Complementing existing engagement approach to overcome some of the barriers of participation. Providing posts to community groups and asking them to share the information on their social media page.	Whether you have budget to pay for targeted posts to reach specific stakeholder groups. Using images to accompany your posts. Many social media platforms also offer interactive elements.	Inform
Online survey	Some online survey providers allow you to collect both quantitative and qualitative feedback. Surveys are the most flexible online tool as questions can be asked in multiple formats in the one survey. It's also a useful tool if you are seeking formal submissions for your project.	Collecting one-way, structured responses to specific questions and personal information, such as demographics. The form could be used at face-to-face engagement activities to ensure all responses are collected in the same way.	The best way to ask the question, for example, open field (long or short response options), dropdown menus and radio buttons (one answer from a multiple-choice list), checkboxes (one or more answers from a list) and file uploads (participants can upload an image or document such as a submission). If translating surveys, ensure you only use bilingual multiple choice questions so that results can be collated without the need for ongoing translation service fees.	Consult Involve

Other engagement methods

Method	Description	Best for	Consider	Level of the spectrum
FAQs	An FAQs page is a useful way to organise information that your customers often ask.	Helps the community address their needs.	Consider keeping the information updated and in a logical sequence.	Inform
		Address common questions.	Consider investing in translated versions in other community languages.	





ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Whitehorse City Council acknowledges the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people of the Kulin Nation as the traditional owners of the land. We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging.

CONTACTING COUNCIL

Postal address	Whitehorse City Council Locked Bag 2 Nunawading Delivery Centre 3131
ABN	39 549 568 822
Telephone	9262 6333 (including language support)
NRS	133 677 then quote 9262 6333 (Service for deaf or hearing impaired people)
Service centre	Whitehorse Civic Centre 379-399 Whitehorse Road, Nunawading 3131
Website	www.whitehorse.vic.gov.au
Email	customer.service@whitehorse.vic.gov.au
Social Media	Connect with Whitehorse City Council
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