



Engagement Framework

2023





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1. Introduction

Community engagement refers to the many ways in which we connect with communities in day-to-day interactions and in developing and implementing policies, programs and services.

We define community engagement as:

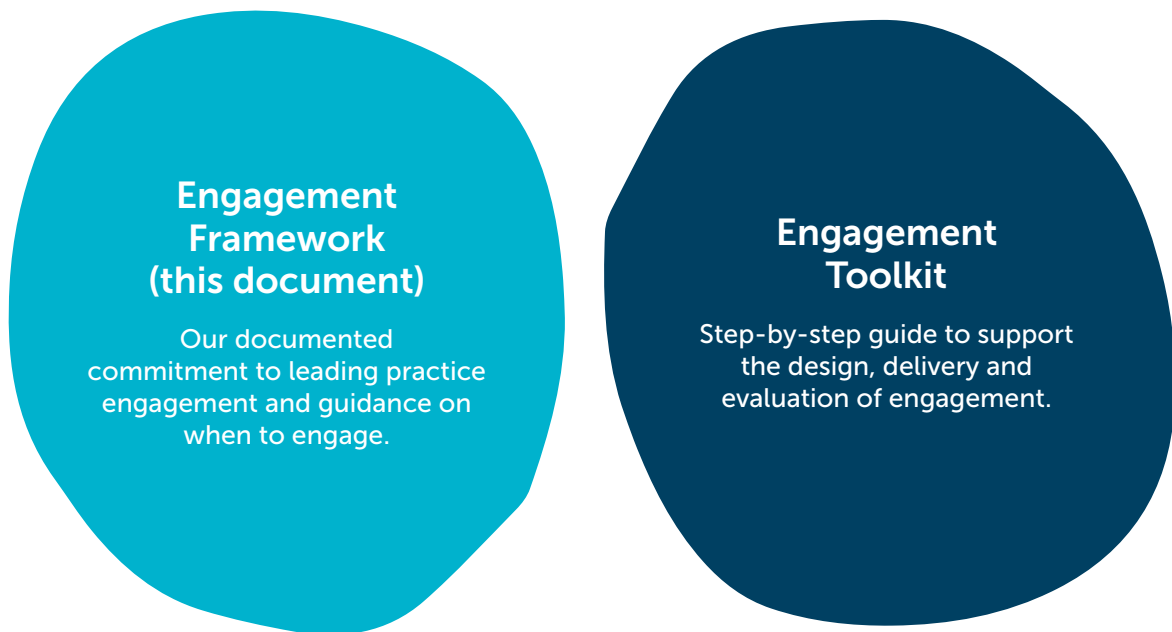
A genuine process of working with people to build capacity, strengthen relationships and inform decisions.

We are committed to developing processes to encourage greater community participation and opportunities for engagement. High-quality community engagement enables us to make well-informed decisions at an operational and strategic level, achieve effective and transparent governance and is fundamental to healthy, connected and inclusive communities.

2. Role of the engagement framework

This framework guides our employees when engaging with key stakeholders and the community. Importantly, it promotes consistency and transparency in how we plan and deliver stakeholder and community engagement.

This **Engagement Framework** is supported by the **Engagement Toolkit** which provides a step-by-step approach to designing, delivering, reporting and evaluating stakeholder and community engagement.



Engagement in practice.

Community and stakeholder engagement comes in many forms at Wannon Water. It could include entering private land to maintain an asset, managing temporary disruptions to stakeholders, negotiating water charges with major water customers, running a public education campaign or asking for feedback on a major project like the price submission.

Each example operates at a different scale or scope but applies similar engagement principles to achieve a consistent engagement outcome. Here are two case studies that highlight our engagement approach.



Case study one: Great Tasting Water (Involve¹)

Wannon Water engaged with residents and businesses to build a case to improve the quality and taste of tap water in Portland, Port Fairy and Heywood.

Activities we delivered for this project:

- Online engagement webpage
- Surveys (online and print)
- Pop-ups in each town (in-person)
- Phone interviews
- Supporting communications

Learnings from this project:

- Adapt the engagement approach to meet COVID-19 restrictions e.g. online engagement and social distancing.
- Adapt the approach to reduce barriers to engaging e.g. remote communities within our service area and busy local businesses.



Case study two: Relocation of a sewer pump station (Inform² and Consult³)

This is a planned asset management project which will relocate a sewer pump station from a nature strip on the side of a road to another more suitable location. The Asset Creation team has the plans ready. However, before work can commence, they need to let nearby neighbours know about the upcoming work and understand any site sensitivities.

In this example, the stakeholders are a local school community (where the existing sewer pump is located), local residents, commuters and local businesses.

Activities planned for this engagement project are:

- Direct phone calls and emails to the school principal and local council.
 - Seek opportunities to minimise disruption to the school community e.g. time/day of works to be completed, detours and noise restrictions.
- Mail-out notifications to the school community (parents, teachers and staff), local residents and businesses.
- Targeted social media campaign with notification updates and a short, 30-second video.

Recommendations for this project:

- Adapt the engagement approach to meet COVID-19 restrictions e.g. online engagement and social distancing.
- Provide ample lead time to the school community and nearby neighbours of upcoming works.
- Seek opportunities to minimise disruptions and disturbances to daily activities for stakeholders.

1 INVOLVE: To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.

2 INFORM: To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.

3 CONSULT: To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.

3. Definitions

When planning and delivering our community engagement, it is important that a common language is understood. For Wannon Water's Engagement Framework, the following definitions apply.

Engagement: Engagement is a planned process with the specific purpose of working with individuals and groups to encourage active involvement in the business of the organisation. The term "engagement" is very broad, so the purpose of the engagement should be defined for each specific project and project stage.

Engagement refers to the range of opportunities for the community to participate in the organisation's business. This ranges from educating individuals or groups about a project; obtaining community feedback at a key project stage or milestone; or working collaboratively with stakeholders to address local issues.

Community: A group of people who have a relationship or a shared interest.

A *community of place* is a group of people who are connected by the area they live, work and/or visit. This could include a community living in the same street, neighbourhood or suburb; a community working in the same building; or businesses in a particular activity centre. A *community of interest* is a group of people who have a shared interest, for example, the natural environment, local history or contemporary art. A *community of affiliation* is a group of people who are members of the same group or club, for example, members of a sporting club, Rotary or a church group.

Stakeholder: Individuals or organisations, who affect, or can be affected by project decisions. Stakeholders can include interest groups, government departments, media, businesses and industry.

Customer: An individual or business who receives a service from Wannon Water (refer to stakeholder list for a range of customer types).

Communication: The range of channels and formats used to share information with different audiences. The purpose of communication is to build awareness and support, but it can also be used to make announcements, keep people informed, and respond to media or public enquiries.

Public: Members of the general public who may not belong to a specific community relevant to a project but still have an interest in it.

Customers experiencing vulnerabilities: The Essential Services Commission defines customers experiencing vulnerabilities as 'people (who) may become vulnerable due to an event (e.g. unexpected job loss, family violence, family tragedy), system factors (e.g. employment insecurity, lack of access in regional areas, lack of digital literacy or racism) or changes in the market (e.g. complex changes to products or services that aren't designed with everyone in mind).'⁴

⁴ Essential Services Commission. (2021). Getting to fair: Breaking down barriers to essential services. Available from: www.esc.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/getting-to-fair-strategy-20210812_1.pdf

4. When to engage

Community engagement at Wannon Water is *'a genuine process of working with people to build capacity, strengthen relationships and inform decisions'*.

It's important to understand early in your project if you need to engage. This provides customers and stakeholders with the maximum opportunity to participate meaningfully, which builds trust in our services.

Knowing when to engage also reduces 'over-engagement' with key stakeholders and the community, both internally and externally. This strategic approach encourages them to participate when it is most needed.

When projects are late in determining if engagement is required, key decisions may have already been made, reducing the opportunity for genuine participation.

These prompts will help you to determine if you need to engage. If you respond 'yes' to any of these, you need to develop an engagement plan:

- Are you designing infrastructure where multiple options are being assessed?
- Are you developing strategic plans or policies that will impact customers?
- Are you required by legislation to engage?
- Are you impacting a major client/water user?
- Are you delivering a project where local community knowledge might help make its delivery more efficient?

The Engagement Team can support you to prepare your plan. Please refer to the decision tool (refer page 13) about when the team is involved in delivering engagement activities with projects.

Important notes

Entry to land: Our employees and contractors often need to enter private properties to access services or conduct works. In these circumstances, the *Water Act 1989* sets out our powers to enter land and the notice period we must provide to the occupier prior to entry. Refer to our Entry Powers Procedure for full details. Letter templates can be found on the so:control document centre for common notifications such as planned interruptions to water supply, mist testing and sewer relining.

Service interruptions: Customers must be notified a minimum of 48 hours (two business days) prior to any planned water or sewerage interruptions. Letter templates can be found on the so:control document centre for common interruptions such as water mains cleaning and replacement. Emergency work does not require notice.

Our community

We are Victoria's second-largest regional urban water corporation by service area, spanning 23,500 square kilometres of South West Victoria. Our region extends from the Otway Ranges to the South Australian border and includes the major centres of Warrnambool, Portland and Hamilton.

We recognise the intrinsic connection of Traditional Owners to Country and acknowledge their contribution to land, water, and resources management. We are committed to seeking out and building relationships and working in partnership to deliver the actions and outcomes in our Reconciliation Action Plan.

Our Wannon Water community



Our services

We provide water services to approximately 44,500 water customers in 34 towns, including 38,000 residential customers, 4,700 business customers and 1,800 rural customers. We provide sewerage services to around 38,000 residential, commercial and industrial customers across 16 sewerage systems.

Six local government areas of:

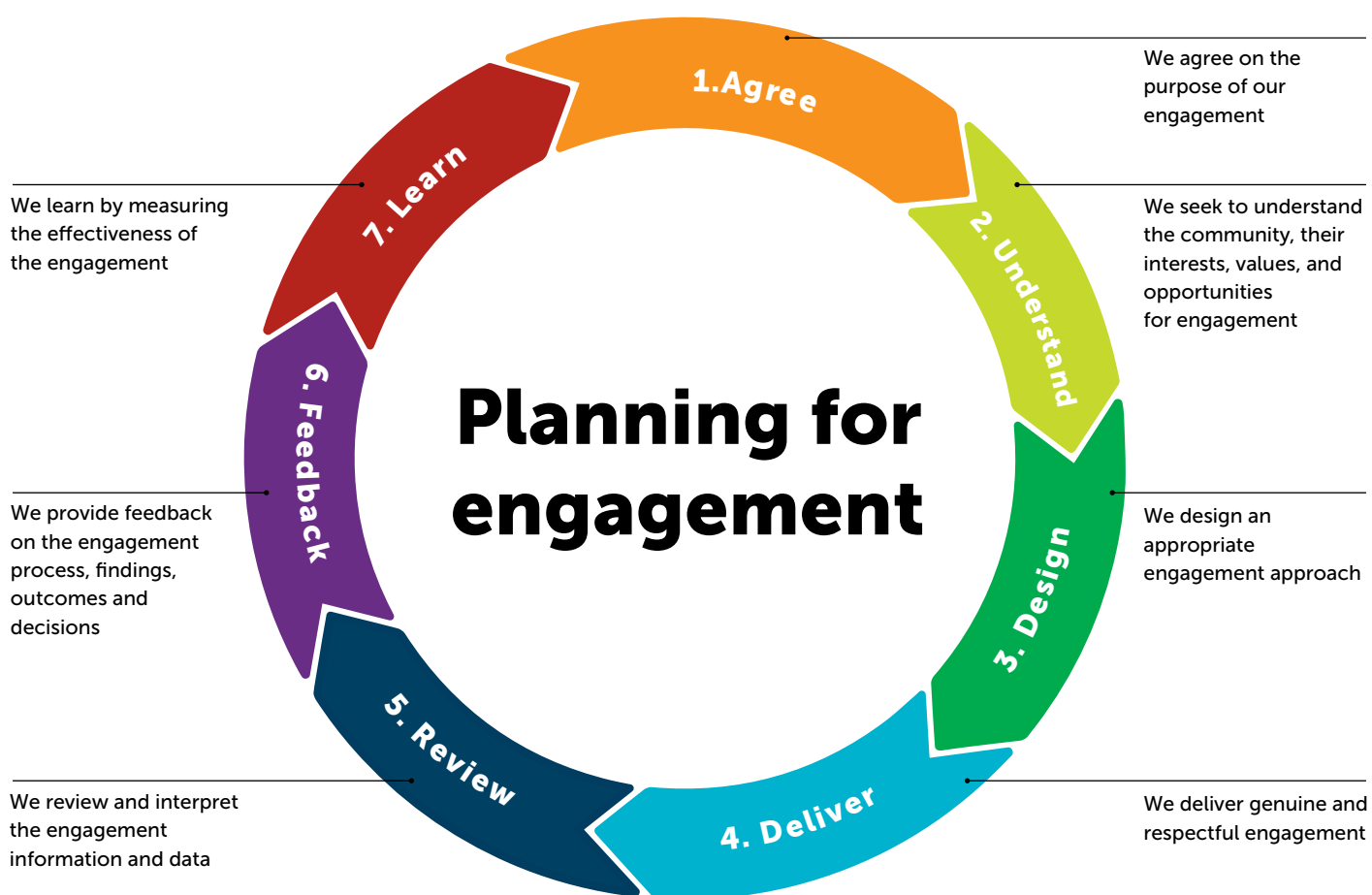
- Corangamite
- Colac Otway
- Glenelg
- Moyne
- Southern Grampians
- Warrnambool.

Regional population of 100,400.

5. Our engagement purpose and principles

Our engagement approach is guided by a planned process that involves the community in the decisions that impact them using the principles below.

At the end of the engagement cycle, a review of the learnings should be undertaken before starting a new process.



Engagement principles in practice

Each principle has a series of guidelines to support the design and delivery of community engagement. Appendix A provides a checklist to consider for each principle. Further guidance on these principles is available in the accompanying Engagement Toolkit.

Table 1 Engagement principles in practice

Principle	How this is delivered	Shared benefit
Agree	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Clearly articulating the engagement scope, objectives and level of community and stakeholder influence ➤ Integrating the engagement design with internal risk management procedures ➤ Agreeing on the evaluation criteria to measure the effectiveness of the engagement ➤ Gaining buy-in, feedback and sign-off regarding the engagement objectives and negotiables ➤ Agreeing on roles and responsibilities of key employees for a) project strategic direction, b) coordinator of content, c) coordinator of engagement, d) logistics, and e) members of the project team 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ We agree on the purpose of engagement, leading to consistent expectations and scope of change being set with the community and stakeholders. We can confidently and genuinely respond to questions and feedback
Understand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Identifying stakeholders and their possible values and likely level of interest in the project ➤ Considering the possible 'hard to reach' groups ➤ Understanding who has, or has not, been involved in previous related projects ➤ Being aware of other projects, opportunities or community issues that may influence community participation in the engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ We understand the community, their interests, values, barriers and opportunities for engagement ➤ Our engagement approach is empathetic to stakeholder interests, values and opportunities ➤ We build authentic long-term relationships with community members and stakeholders to proactively resolve potential project issues ➤ We understand how our decisions will impact people with differing needs or barriers

Principle	How this is delivered	Shared benefit
Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Asking the community how they want to be involved ➤ Using a range of different engagement methods that provide people with accessible options to participate ➤ Selecting tools that collect relevant project information and data ➤ Coordinating with other Wannon Water engagement activities ➤ Promoting opportunities to strengthen community education and connection ➤ Agreeing on an approach to information management and data analysis ➤ Supporting face-to-face activities with online engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Participants can provide feedback in a format that is sensitive to their needs or barriers ➤ We can build community awareness and knowledge on common questions or myths about our operations ➤ We can proactively manage relationships to minimise potential conflict or misunderstandings
Deliver	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Providing the appropriate lead times when promoting the project to stakeholders ➤ Providing targeted project information in advance of engagement activities to support informed participation ➤ Describing to the community how their involvement will influence decision-making at the outset of the engagement ➤ Undertaking the engagement with integrity, respect and being open to a range of different views and interests ➤ Delivering engagement activities at days, times and locations that meet the needs of the community and stakeholders ➤ Providing a timeframe of when participants can expect feedback 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ We deliver genuine and respectful engagement ➤ Project outcomes are improved by receiving timely feedback from the right stakeholders and/or community members
Review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Consolidating the data and information collected during each engagement activity ➤ Analysing the data and information to identify themes, priorities and preferences ➤ Identifying gaps in participation and information to be addressed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Trends in feedback can inform decision-making and identification of project risks or successes

Principle	How this is delivered	Shared benefit
Feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Providing feedback on the engagement process and findings to the project team, including decision makers, for their consideration ➤ Communicating with participants and stakeholders about the engagement process, findings, outcomes and how any decisions were made ➤ Publishing updates and outcomes of community engagement on key communication forums and channels ➤ Sharing engagement findings and outcomes with colleagues and key stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Participants understand the engagement process, findings, outcomes and decisions ➤ Participants feel listened to and are more willing to participate in future engagement ➤ Colleagues have shared knowledge about community and stakeholder feedback on the topic
Learn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Measuring the success of the engagement process from the beginning ➤ Understanding and evaluating the depth and breadth of participation to inform future engagement ➤ Capturing and sharing the learnings from the engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ We learn by measuring the effectiveness of the engagement ➤ Aspects that worked well in the engagement program can be taken forward, and less successful aspects can be improved in future projects



6. Roles and responsibilities

Community engagement is a core focus of how we operate within the region and is a part of nearly every employee's role.

Specialist community engagement skills sit within our Communications and Engagement Branch. Engagement activities are also delivered by other service areas within the organisation as part of their projects. The branch supports the design and delivery of engagement projects occurring across the organisation and builds the capacity of other employees to deliver effective engagement. The branch is also responsible for delivering specific strategic engagement projects and involving external engagement contractors as required.

The branch has overall accountability for implementing and monitoring the Engagement Framework. All employees have a responsibility in ensuring its implementation.

The level of involvement of the branch in engagement projects is determined by the project and engagement risks.

Project owner

Overall project and engagement delivery.

Communications and Engagement Branch

Provide professional development/build capacity of the project owner to plan the engagement at the relevant level

Assist the project owner in delivering the engagement at the appropriate level depending on complexities, size and risk.

When do you need support?

Follow the steps below to understand when you need support from the **Communications and Engagement Branch**.

1 When asking for feedback on your project, are you:



2
Contact the **Media and Communications Coordinator** when you have your draft letters or key messages prepared or if you need advice.

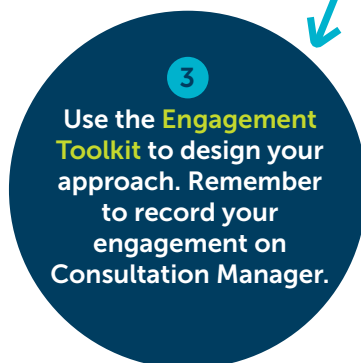
They can help determine appropriate materials for your project. Generally, letters to customers and stakeholders can be reviewed in a day or two, but more detailed materials such as information sheets, website updates and reports require **at least two weeks' notice**.



2
Is this project related to corporate strategy, high-risk or complex?

No

Yes



3
Use the **Engagement Toolkit** to design your approach. Remember to record your engagement on Consultation Manager.

Please contact the Engagement and Education Coordinator as soon as possible if seeking feedback on your engagement plan.



3
Seek support from the **Engagement and Education Coordinator** to design and deliver engagement program.

The Engagement and Education Coordinator is working on multiple engagements. It's important to identify that you need their support as early in the planning stage of your project as possible. Generally **at least four weeks' notice** is required to review draft engagement materials and engagement plan.

What makes a project high-risk or complex?

To determine whether a project is high-risk or complex, consider if your project triggers any of the items below:

- We are involved in an activity that leads to someone being severely injured or loss of life.
- We provide unsafe drinking water or cannot provide sustainable sewerage services.
- We are unable to meet the demand for water.
- We experience a change that threatens our viability.
- We have a significant negative impact on the natural environment or cultural heritage.
- We are unable to anticipate or respond to changing community expectations.
- We are involved in an activity that causes an operational risk.

Overview of roles and responsibilities

Outlined below is a description of the roles and responsibilities of all employees regarding engagement

Name	Role	Responsibilities	Resources
Senior Management Team – Executive Team and Branch Managers	Responsible for implementation.	Champion the implementation of the Engagement Framework.	Engagement Framework. Communications and Engagement Branch.
General Manager, Community & Corporate Services	Accountable for oversight and implementation.	Lead the community engagement and partnership culture.	Engagement Framework. Communications and Engagement Branch.
Communications & Engagement Branch	Accountable for implementation.	<p>Deliver Wannon Water Engage Cycle (WVEC) program and other strategic engagement projects.</p> <p>Provide internal education, training and capacity building for employees to undertake their own engagement.</p> <p>Support teams undertaking engagement.</p> <p>Undertake ongoing monitoring and evaluation, and identify continuous improvement opportunities.</p>	<p>Engagement Framework, Toolkit and templates.</p> <p>Dedicated training resource within team to deliver training. Training materials including modules and Toolkit.</p> <p>Dedicated specialist engagement employees to support the design and delivery of engagement programs.</p> <p>Evaluation and monitoring framework and learning log.</p> <p>Stakeholder database (Consultation Manager).</p> <p>External consultants (as needed).</p>

Name	Role	Responsibilities	Resources
Customer engagers – all employees	Responsible for connecting customers with community engagement.	Understand the purpose and practice of our community engagement. Connect customers with our community engagement programs.	Engagement Framework, Toolkit and templates. Branch managers and the Communications and Engagement Branch for advice and referral.
Supporting engagers – project team members	Responsible for aspects of implementation.	Deliver community engagement activities according to Community Engagement Plans with the oversight of the project owners.	Engagement Framework, Toolkit and templates. Specialist support from the Communications and Engagement Branch as appropriate to the project. Stakeholder database (Consultation Manager).
Leading engagers – project managers Engagement & Education Coordinator Engagement Projects Officer	Responsible for planning and implementation.	To identify when community engagement is needed. To design and deliver engagement programs using the Engagement Framework. To seek support from the Communications and Engagement Branch. To capture engagement data and lessons learnt.	Engagement Framework, Toolkit and templates. Specialist support from the Communications and Engagement Branch as appropriate to the project. Stakeholder database (Consultation Manager). Evaluation and monitoring framework and learning log.

Appendix A: Engagement steps in practice

Agree Checklist

- Review the Agree Session agenda in Engagement Toolkit Appendix 1.
- Agree on project scope.
- Agree on level of stakeholder and/or community influence – refer to the IAP2 Spectrum (Inform, Consult, Involve, Collaborate, Empower).
- Agree on the engagement negotiables and non-negotiables.
- Identify project and engagement risks and mitigation measures.
- Review the lessons learnt register for similar projects.
- Agree on the success metrics for the project.
- Engagement purpose is approved by key decision makers.
- Define key milestones for project.

Understand Checklist

- Identify key project stakeholders and/or community members.
- Identify barriers of participation or additional support requirements for potential participants.
- Check which stakeholders/community members have previously participated and review previous feedback (check with Consultation Manager and the Engagement and Education Coordinator).
- Check publicly available information for other projects, opportunities or community issues that may influence the project.
- Assess whether it is the right time to engage.

Design Checklist

- Review previous feedback for preferences on the format of delivery.
- Review other engagement events at Wannon Water to avoid clashes or leverage engagement opportunities.
- Review opportunities during the project to build stakeholder and/or community awareness and capacity in the topic area.
- Design the engagement questions to reflect the engagement purpose and scope. Review Engagement Toolkit Appendix 4 for support.
- Select the appropriate communication and/or engagement tools to provide the level of feedback required.
- Identify whether face-to-face activities should be supported with online engagement.
- Seek ways to minimise potential barriers to participation.
- Agree on the approach to information management and data analysis.

Deliver Checklist

- Consider internal engagement processes e.g. notifying Customer Relations or updating so:control.
- Provide stakeholders and/or the community with the appropriate lead time to participate.
- Provide required information ahead of engagement to support informed participation.
- Check that communication and engagement materials address accessibility requirements.
- Check the level of influence that participants will have is clear in communication and engagement materials.
- Check that engagement design and promotion encourages diversity of participation in lived experiences, perspectives and interests.
- Provide a timeframe of when participants will expect feedback.
- Ask for participant feedback on the engagement process to improve future activities.

Review Checklist

- Consolidate data and information after each engagement activity.
- Analyse data to identify themes, priorities and preferences.
- Identify gaps in participation and information to be addressed.
- Share early findings with relevant colleagues.

Feedback Checklist

- Evaluate the engagement process against the objectives and purpose outlined in 'Agree' phase.
- Highlight major themes, priorities and preferences gathered through feedback.
- Identify the level of detail the project team requires.
- Agree on the level of detail and the channel that engagement findings will be shared with participants.
- Share findings with colleagues, participants and key stakeholders in agreed formats.

Learn Checklist

- Conduct a learn session (Engagement Toolkit Appendix 8):
 - Assess the effectiveness of the engagement questions
 - Assess the effectiveness of the engagement tools
 - Assess the effectiveness of participation
 - Assess how participant barriers were identified and managed.
- Share learnings in the shared database and with relevant stakeholders.
- Complete the case study template in Engagement Toolkit Appendix 9.
- Record stakeholder and community members' preferences or key actions in the stakeholder management database Consultation Manager (CM4).

Appendix B: Supporting policy frameworks

The Engagement Framework supports our strategic intent that *'our communities trust us, our performance and services meet their changing needs and expectations, and we are insightful and effective community leaders enabled through our connectedness to the community.'*⁵

This framework reflects best practice community engagement, using the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) Core Values for the Practice of Public Participation⁶ as a foundation for the approach.

These IAP2 core values guide the design and delivery of public participation:

- Public participation is based on the belief that those who are affected by a decision have a right to be involved in the decision-making process
- Public participation includes the promise that the public's contribution will influence the decision
- Public participation promotes sustainable decisions by recognising and communicating the needs and interests of all participants, including decision makers
- Public participation seeks out and facilitates the involvement of those potentially affected by or interested in a decision

- Public participation seeks input from participants in designing how they participate
- Public participation provides participants with the information they need to participate in a meaningful way
- Public participation communicates to participants how their input affected the decision

The framework also responds to the Victorian Auditor General's Office (VAGO) Better Practice Guide: Public Participation in Government Decision-Making.⁷

The framework aligns with principles from the Essential Services Commission '2023 Water Price Review Guidance Paper'⁸ and 'Getting to Fair Strategy'⁹ in relation to customer engagement.

5 <https://www.wannonwater.com.au/about-us/publications/corporate-plan.aspx>

6 IAP2 Core Values: iap2.org.au/About-Us/About-IAP2-Australasia-/Core-Values

7 VAGO Better Practice Guide: audit.vic.gov.au/publications/20150130-Public-Participation-BPG/20150130-Public-Participation-BPG.pdf

8 Essential Services Commission 2021 Water Price Review Guidance Paper: esc.vic.gov.au/water/water-prices-tariffs-and-specialdrainage/water-price-reviews/water-price-review-2023/

9 Essential Services Commission: Getting to Fair Strategy (2021) esc.vic.gov.au/other-work/regulating-consumer-vulnerability-mind

Corporate Policy Context

The relevant policies that support the Engagement Framework include:

Board Policy Framework

Our Board is appointed by the Victorian Government. It comprises eight independent non-executive Directors and a Managing Director who lead Wannon Water and govern with the assistance of a formal committee structure.

The Board Policy Framework includes guiding principles that not only place great importance on engaging with customers and communities, but also identify areas in which we wish to engage; an intent to understand and act on our communities' needs; a commitment to report back to customers on our activities; and methods of implementation.

Our Strategic Direction

Our purpose: *To deliver water and sewerage services and improve the lives of people in South West Victoria.*

Our vision: *Beyond water for strong communities.*

Our focus is on:

- **Putting people first** - We genuinely care about our employees, our customers and our communities, and we're making a real and positive difference.
- **Our customers** - We meet customer needs and exceed their expectations.
- **The environment** - We are bold in our work to care for and protect the environment.

Customer outcomes:

- **We're reliable** - Ongoing reliability of water and sewerage services.
- **We're supportive** - Fair and reasonable bills for all.
- **We're valued** - Improved customer experience of our products and services.
- **We're sustainable** - Ongoing protection of the environment through action and education, prioritising Country and our communities.
- **We're responsive** - Improved water quality in identified communities.
- **We're influential** - Active partnerships for healthy and resilient communities.

Annual Corporate Plan

The Corporate Plan sets out our direction to deliver the corporate objectives for a five-year period. It commits us to ensuring that engagement with customers and communities is integrated into our day-to-day activities and planning. This ensures we remain a relevant service provider and we understand how we can best meet the needs of our customers.

Partnering for Stronger Communities

Our community strategy, *Partnering for Stronger Communities*, seeks to deliver our strategic direction. The strategy was informed by broad community consultation and aims to:

- Improve our understanding of the priorities for our communities
- Build the capacity of our workforce to engage and partner with these communities
- Take action in partnering with communities on areas that will deliver shared value for all.

Wannon Water Engagement Cycle

The Wannon Water Engagement Cycle (WVEC) is an annual process that ensures our customers, stakeholders and community members provide valuable input and advice to help inform our decision-making, quality improvement and annual Corporate Plan.

The WVEC helps us capture diverse and informed customer and community perspectives on policy and planning and service issues. The WVEC is a cyclical five-year process. Each year, we publish an annual report that outlines our performance over the previous financial year. This includes an overview of our community engagement achievements.

International Association for Public Participation (IAP2)

IAP2 is a member association which seeks to promote and improve the practice of public participation or community engagement, incorporating individuals, governments, institutions and other entities that affect the public interest throughout the world.

Wannon Water is a corporate member of IAP2.

Victorian Auditor General's Office (VAGO)

In 2015, VAGO released its Better Practice Guide: Public Participation in Government Decision-making. This document describes the Victorian Government's expectation of how community engagement should be designed and delivered to ensure greater public participation in government decision-making. It follows a principled approach that is grounded in the IAP2 Core Values and Spectrum of Public Participation.

Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA)

The Victorian Minister for Water and DELWP manage Victoria's groundwater, catchments and waterways, infrastructure, water saving and re-use projects, flood management, governance and water legislation in partnership with a network of government agencies and water authorities¹⁰.

DEECA prepares reports and operates programs that guide our business. The main reports are outlined below.

- **Water for Victoria** is a plan for a future with less water as Victoria responds to the impact of climate change and a growing population.
- **Annual Water Outlook for Victoria** provides information about the state's water supplies, expected climatic conditions and contingency plans to cope with any supply shortages should they arise¹¹.
- **Aboriginal Water Program** aims to better include Aboriginal people in the way water is managed in Victoria and to reconnect communities to water for cultural, economic, customary and spiritual purposes¹².

Essential Services Commission (ESC)

The ESC promotes the long-term interest of Victorian consumers with respect to the price, quality and reliability of essential services.

The relevant ESC documents that support the Engagement Framework are outlined on the next page.

¹⁰ www.water.vic.gov.au

¹¹ www.water.vic.gov.au/water-corporations

¹² www.water.vic.gov.au/aboriginal-values

2018 Water Price Review Guidance Paper

The ESC price review process reviews the maximum prices that all 17 of Victoria's water businesses can charge for their water and sewerage services during the regulated time period. This approach places greater emphasis on community engagement to influence our price submission. One component of the price submission is to clearly and succinctly identify value for money for customers

Getting to Fair Strategy

The ESC's strategic goal is to create fairness by breaking down barriers and facilitating equitable access to essential services. The strategy highlights the role of utility providers in empowering consumers to make choices and seek help when needed. Objectives of the strategy ensure that the services that ESC regulates, such as Wannon Water, are more responsive, inclusive and accessible.

Actions to achieve these objectives include:

- **Support better practice in delivering services to consumers experiencing vulnerability in regulated services** e.g. reviewing water customer service codes, reviewing family violence provisions and providing better communications to those experiencing barriers to access.
- **Consider consumer vulnerability as an enduring priority and provide data to the ESC for compliance monitoring.**
- **Provide the ESC with qualitative and quantitative data to better understand how consumers experiencing vulnerability interact with the sector.**
- **Demonstrate best practice as an organisation to be more responsive, inclusive and accessible** e.g. promoting greater use of social procurement, during recruitment processes, having an inclusive and universal stakeholder engagement framework, meeting gender equality obligations, and fairly remunerate participants in engagement processes.
- **Develop a better understanding of First Nations Victorians (acknowledging self-determination as the guiding principle)**

Sensitive and appropriate engagement with consumers experiencing vulnerability

The ESC guidance paper published in January 2021 reviews existing resources and proposes 10 principles for effective, sensitive and appropriate engagement with consumers experiencing vulnerability by essential services regulators through a 'universal' and 'inclusive' approach.

The principals for universal consumer engagement are¹³:

1. Be inclusive
2. Collaborate and co-design with consumers
3. Treat engagement as an ongoing process based on relationships
4. Have a clear purpose
5. Reflect community diversity
6. Invest in engagement
7. Be transparent and offer genuine involvement
8. Show respect for individuals, their knowledge and expertise
9. Use methods that are universal and flexible
10. Reflect, adapt and improve.

¹³ esc.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/C%202021%202937%20%20MSEI%20Engagement%20report%20-%20FINAL%20January-2021%282%29.pdf



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