



# Community Engagement Framework 2009

## Table of Contents

<b>1. Executive Summary</b>	1
<b>2. Background:</b>	
2.1 What is community engagement?	2
2.2 Benefits of community engagement	2
<b>3. Purpose and Principles</b>	3
3.1 Council's purpose	3
3.2 Mission	3
3.3 Principles	4
<b>4. Communication</b>	5
<b>5. Issues</b>	
5.1 When and how will we engage – what are the triggers?	6
5.2 What are the stages of engagement?	7
5.3 Effect of community engagement on projects	12
5.3.1 Budgets	12
5.3.2 Planning and Timelines	12
<b>6. Tools and Procedures</b>	13
<b>7. Engagement process and opportunities for review and feedback</b>	14

## 1. Executive Summary

Council is committed to improving quality of life in Bayside through the involvement of the Bayside community in development of its policies, programs and services. Council is also committed to ensuring that all views are considered through inclusive deliberation and active involvement of the community.

This helps Council to fulfil its mandated roles of providing governance and leadership for the local community through advocacy, decision making and action, and fostering community cohesion and encouraging active participation in civic life.

Council is committed to utilising current and emerging technology to provide greater transparency of its processes and to enable more people to have their input.

The use of sound evidence, community input and good processes, including proper follow-up and reporting, will ensure that Bayside continues to offer targeted services that meet community needs, and guide Council's priorities into the future.

Council will target its engagement activities through:

- information sharing
- consultation, and/or
- active participation.

and by adopting the engagement principles of:

- inclusiveness
- proactive engagement
- mutual respect
- integrity and transparency, and
- affirming diversity.

In doing so, Council will:

- undertake purposeful and inclusive engagement with stakeholders
- ensure information and communication is timely and accurate
- develop processes and systems that are user friendly and convenient
- develop best-practice processes that seek to involve stakeholders at levels conducive to their comfort
- strengthen community engagement activities with sectors of the community that may not have actively participated in the past, and collaborate with other agencies to coordinate community engagement
- build engagement skills and knowledge into internal processes and performance management systems, including training staff and Councillors, and
- review its community engagement activities progressively, and the ways in which they have delivered better outcomes for the community in alignment with Council's commitments.

With the Council Plan 2009 – 2013, Bayside City Council has elevated community engagement to a key Commitment.

This includes tailoring community engagement strategies for specific purposes and incorporating them into service delivery plans. Strategies to improve our community engagement will be developed, incorporated and reviewed in line with Council's commitment to continuous improvement. A staged implementation program is proposed.



## 2. Background

### 2.1.1 What is community engagement?

Community engagement refers to the many ways in which Council will connect with citizens in the development and implementation of policies, programs and services.

Engagement covers a wide variety of Council-community connections, ranging from information sharing through community consultation to active participation in government policy development and its decision-making processes.

Engagement acknowledges the right of citizens to have a say and to get involved in the business of Council. It is not about public relations or marketing a particular viewpoint or issue, rather it involves assisting Council to fulfil its obligations to the community having regard to the long term and cumulative effects of decisions. Effective community engagement allows Council to tap into diverse perspectives and potential solutions to improve the quality of its decision-making.

### 2.1.2 Bayside's community

Council acknowledges that the local community includes people who live in Bayside, ratepayers, and people and bodies who conduct business and activities in Bayside.

## 2.2 Benefits of community engagement

Community engagement is important for a number of reasons:

- **It complements representative democracy**  
The choices that people make at election time do not necessarily guarantee that they will agree with everything their representatives may do in the future. Systematic and regular consultation is necessary to complement the electoral process by informing governments of the ongoing issues within the community.
- **It leads to better decision-making**  
*The Good Governance Guide* says 'good decision-making is likely to occur when decisions are based on good information, when Councillors have the opportunity to put forward their point of view, and when there has been community input.' Community engagement means keeping the community informed and involved in ongoing consultation, so that Council can make better decisions that more closely match the needs and aspirations of the community.
- **It fosters networks and new relationships**  
Close relationships between Council and the community foster networks and new relationships that can lead to increased opportunity for cooperation and coordination of projects and services to improve the community.



- **Creates a strong community**

A community that is informed about, and engaged in, local issues creates an involved and therefore strong community. The Good Governance Guide suggests that 'local governments have an important role in building strong communities. Engaging the community should be highly valued and a goal which influences all activities of local government.'

- **Trust and confidence in Local Government**

*The Good Governance Guide* states that 'a community is more likely to feel trust and confidence in its Local Government if the community is engaged in and involved with its governance. That is, the community participates, is consulted, is informed and generally feels part of the governance process.'

- **Community Leadership**

Community engagement is also beneficial to Council's role as a community leader. The Good Governance Guide says that 'Council leadership should be characterised by processes of providing information and explanation, consultation, and checking of its position through appropriate means.'

- **In addition, community engagement can:**

- Increase involvement in the processes contributing to decision-making, strengthening people's feeling of political effectiveness, creating more accessible government
- Through appropriate methods increase the involvement of those who tend to be less involved in decision-making processes
- Help Council to rationally address competing priorities
- Raise awareness and foster positive attitudinal and behaviour change

### **3. Purpose and Principles**

#### **3.1 Council's purpose**

In its Council Plan 2009 - 2013 Council has defined its purpose as being "To work with the community to make Bayside a better place". Community engagement is the means of aligning Council and community direction, utilising the knowledge, skills, passions and interests of all stakeholders meet Council's identified purpose.

#### **3.2 Mission**

Council will use community engagement to achieve the best outcomes for the local community having regard to the long term and cumulative effects of decisions. Good community engagement will help ensure that resources are used efficiently and effectively and services are provided in accordance with the *Local Government Act's* Best Value principles to meet the needs and improve the community's overall quality of life.



### 3.3 Principles

Council will engage with an open mind, not an empty mind.

The following principles represent Bayside City Council's approach to community engagement:

Principle	What does it mean?
Leadership	Council will provide responsible and accountable community leadership, making accountable decisions based on the best available information including that gained through community engagement.
Sharing information	Council will listen and respond and will support the community by providing information to those who need it in clear and accessible ways. It will bring its own expertise and views to the table in an open and transparent manner.
Clear and reasonable timeframes	Council will conduct sound planning to ensure, subject to external constraints, that there are reasonable timeframes to collect community feedback and disseminate the information in time to inform projects and programs.
Shared learning and obligations	Council accepts that Council and the community can learn from each other during the process and that it is important for all parties to make an effort to exchange views and to learn through such exchanges. Bayside will endeavour to use engagement opportunities as a means of informing, educating and building capacity within the community and Council.
Council wants the community to help provide solutions	In complex matters, we recognise that solutions may lie outside of Council and seek to promote and encourage engagement within and across the community – Council is not at the centre of all matters and is not itself able to resolve all problems.
Respect known stakeholders	Council will seek to build and strengthen relationships with key stakeholders including community reference groups and other established community bodies.
Tell stakeholders if they will be affected	Anyone affected by a Council proposition has a right to know what the impacts will be.
Clear process of impacting on decisions	Council will identify negotiables and non-negotiables. When we engage, we will make it clear how stakeholders' views will impact on the decision-making process.
Simplicity, accessibility and openness	Council's engagement processes will be transparent and it will ensure that complex and technical concepts are relayed in accessible, clear language.
Collaborative and cooperative process	Council accepts that agreement cannot always be reached and will work with disagreements to achieve a consensus wherever possible, using respectful listening, understanding and negotiation processes. Where two or more stakeholders have conflicting views, Council will endeavour to provide the reasonable conditions and support required to facilitate resolution. Council will seek to align stakeholder priorities and to bring parties into solutions.
Avoid duplication	Council will coordinate its communications and engagement activities to avoid community consultation fatigue.
Accountability and responsibility for decisions	While Council will value and utilise the knowledge, skills and expertise of the community, where Council is responsible and accountable for a given matter, it will accept its responsibility to make the final decision and to provide accountable leadership. Council recognises that its commitment to community engagement has in effect a contract with the community and will abide by the processes as agreed and established.
Value contributions of all	Effective engagement processes enhance democratic processes and value diversity in the community as an asset that provides a balance of different perspectives and respect for all human differences. Council will ensure that throughout its engagement processes knowledge is captured and used to inform and guide subsequent work.
No surprises	The community will know what to expect in the engagement processes Council undertakes. The principles that underpin Council's community engagement will be applied consistently. It will provide clear documentation to show who will do what by when.



Principle	What does it mean?
Strive for balance	Council will strive to get the balance right between engagement and the need to act. This will ensure appropriate representation and responsible use of resources. It will collect evidence on its performance and together with the community regularly review its community engagement program
Weigh viewpoints	Council governs for the community in its diversity – community engagement must be conducted so that the balanced views of the community are presented, without undue or unbalanced emphasis being given to specific or vested interests. Council will promote and operate by evidence-based decision making.
Continuous improvement	Council's community engagement is based on internationally accepted best-practice principles. Council will review research and developments in community engagement and related fields and incorporate improvements to refine its community engagement. Council's approach to community engagement, its deployment, the results obtained and improvements implemented will be continually reviewed in accordance with Business Excellence principles.
Advocacy	Council will advocate on behalf of the community to other levels of government, agencies and public bodies.

## 4. Communication

**Objective: Council is committed to using the best available means of communicating and engaging with its community, bearing in mind the diversity of options, priorities and resource constraints.**

Council recognises that our community and stakeholder needs and wants are diverse and that methods to communicate and engage must reflect this. Council recognises the value of new technologies in communications and community engagement, but does not discount the value of traditional approaches.

Engagement procedures will typically involve a variety of tools and approaches and while the general principles of engagement will be adhered to, each situation will be considered on its merits. Council will identify a range of strategies, recognising different strategies have different strengths and application for different purposes.

'Real conversations' are the subject of a Council Commitment in the Council Plan 2009 -13. Real conversations with the community will form be central component of engagement on key issues and will always be valued and supported for their contribution to real understandings.

Council's communications guidelines will stress the need to feed back the results of engagement to participants, ensuring that the reasons for decisions are clearly articulated and shared with those who have an interest in the focus of the engagement.

Council will consistently review and improve techniques and approaches for sharing information across a range of media. We will continue to use traditional avenues such as print media, direct mailing, flyers and face to face meetings and will make the best possible use of new technologies including the internet, recognising the unique opportunities that the internet provides for information sharing, feedback and transparency, while not wasting time and resources in unproductive areas.



Council will place community engagement procedures on its website, including the methodologies and timelines to be applied in major engagement processes.

Council is committed to capturing all feedback in its engagement processes, whether by letter, email, in-person etc. and describing how that information is dealt with and wherever possible providing a summary of outcomes on the website.

Council will identify and provide wherever possible, online access to policies, legislation, supporting documentation and summaries of key information to help inform the community and enable better deliberation of key issues.

Where meetings on key issues are proposed, Council will promote the purpose and the intended format of the meetings and will provide a summary of the outcomes. Where minutes are produced, copies will be available on request, with due consideration of privacy and other legislative requirements.

## **5. Issues**

### **5.1 When and how we will engage – what are the triggers?**

Various factors influence the need to engage with the community on a specific issue.

There are many information sources about community needs. Council will consider these as part of planning for the level and type of engagement. They include:

- Benchmarking
- Internal research/consultation
- External research (e.g. government or university research)
- Staff knowledge and expertise (e.g. Youth Services Department on young people)

Council has an obligation to bring as much relevant information as it can to any consultation.

Where there is a lack of clarity about the scope and purpose of a project, Council may consult on that.



## 5.2 What are the stages of engagement?

Council will consider the **impact** on the community as the main trigger to determine what to consult on, with the engagement tools to be used dependent on the specific issue and the scope of the project. Relevant stakeholders will be identified and appropriate **weighting** will be given to input from parties depending on the level of impact.

Once the impact has been determined, Council will consider whether it is a **localised** or **broader community** issue.

Council will then consider the **complexity** of the issue, which will then lead to the **level of engagement** indicated. The table below outlines some typical levels and tools.

*Community Engagement is a body of techniques and approaches that develop and sustain working relationships between Bayside City Council and the wider community. This chart provides a snapshot of the levels, tools and steps in in the process.*



The examples provided below are indicative, not prescriptive: each issue will be considered on its merits.

Level of Impact	Criteria (one or more of the following)	Examples
<p>Level A High impact– Bayside</p> <p><i>High level of impact or risk, perceived or real, on the whole or a large part of Bayside.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Potential high impact on State or regional strategies or directions.</li> <li>• High level of real or perceived impact or risk across Bayside.</li> <li>• Any significant impact on attributes that are considered to be of high value to the whole of Bayside, such as the natural environment or heritage.</li> <li>• Any impact on the health, safety or well being of the Bayside community.</li> <li>• Potential high degree of controversy or conflict.</li> <li>• Likely high level of interest across Bayside.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Municipality-wide or regional plans</li> <li>• A change to land categorisation, i.e. community to operational land or selling land</li> <li>• Disability Action Plan</li> <li>• Strategies, plans or policies, e.g. Culture, Youth, Aged</li> <li>• Removal of a facility or service catering across Bayside, eg library services</li> <li>• Provision of a district or regional facility, e.g. skate park, indoor sports centre</li> <li>• Key changes to a Bayside wide service, e.g. beach services, waste management</li> <li>• Changes to or impact on natural bushland or waterway (where the natural values could be affected)</li> </ul>
<p>Level B High impact – Local</p> <p><i>High level of impact or risk, perceived or real, of a local nature, eg a local area, specific community or user group.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High level of real or perceived impact or risk on a local area, small community or user group/s of a specific facility or service.</li> <li>• The loss of or significant change to any facility or service to a local community.</li> <li>• Potential high degree of controversy or conflict at the local level.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Removal or relocation of a local playground</li> <li>• Change to or loss of valued activity or program, eg local youth activity</li> <li>• Re-development of a sportsground</li> <li>• Major development or redevelopment of non-regional parks</li> <li>• Local street road closure</li> <li>• Increase or removal of car parking in local shopping centre</li> </ul>
<p>Level C Lower Impact – Bayside</p> <p><i>Lower level of impact on the whole or a large part of Bayside.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lower, although still some real or perceived impact or risk across Bayside.</li> <li>• Potential for some controversy or conflict.</li> <li>• Potential for some although not significant impact on State or regional strategies or directions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improvements to a Bayside wide service, e.g. Emergency Services, Library Services</li> <li>• Upgrade of a district or regional facility</li> <li>• Changes to Customer Service processes, e.g. payment of rates</li> <li>• Most changes to fees and charges (unless contentious)</li> <li>• Provision of a community wide event</li> <li>• Review of community needs, e.g. Biennial Survey, recreation needs assessment</li> </ul>
<p>Level D Lower Impact – Local</p> <p><i>Lower level of impact of a local nature, eg a local area, specific community or user group.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lower level of real or perceived impact or risk on a local area, small community or user group/s of a specific facility or service.</li> <li>• Only a small change or improvement to a facility or service at the local level.</li> <li>• Low or no risk of controversy or conflict at the local level.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Upgrade of a local playground</li> <li>• Local street or streetscape upgrade</li> <li>• Changes to a local activity program, eg timing or venue/location</li> </ul>

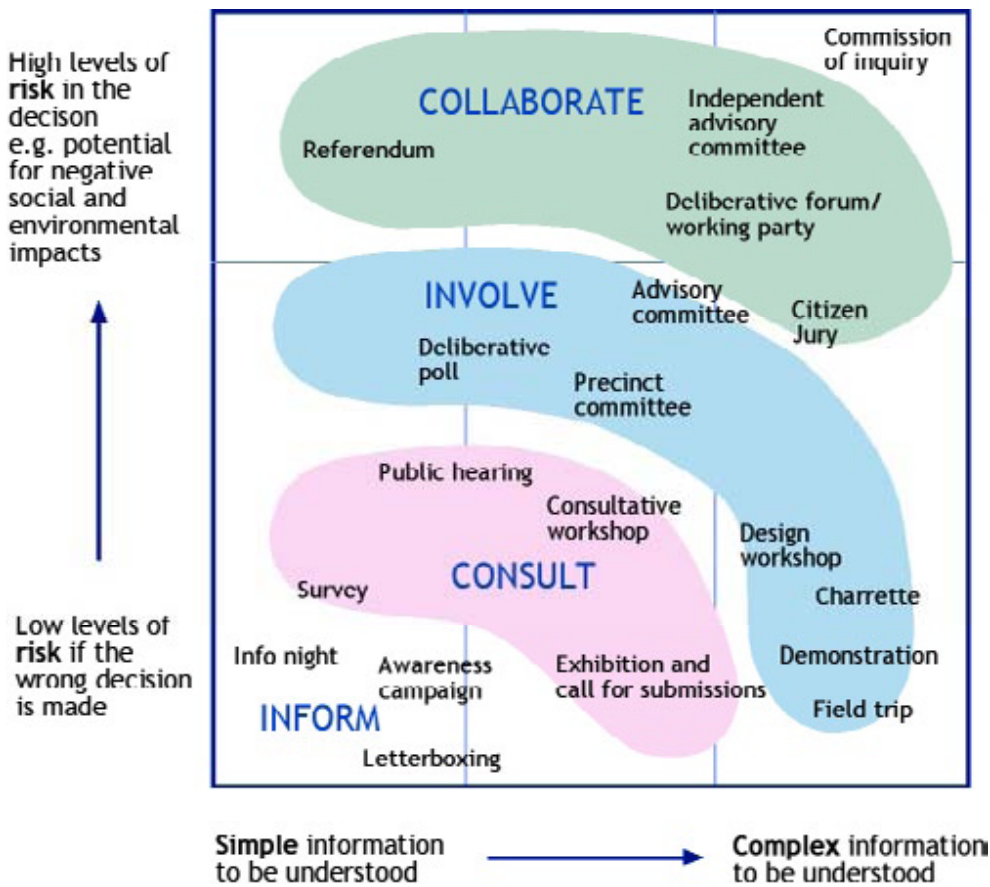
A four-tier level of community engagement is used to guide Council's approach to conducting consultation.

Typical level of engagement	Definition	Typical highest level of impact
<b>1. Informing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advising the community of a situation or proposal</li> <li>• Informing on a decision or direction</li> <li>• Providing advice on an issue</li> <li>• No response is required, although people are free to seek a further level of participation.</li> </ul>	Level A  Level B  Level C  Level D
<b>2. Consulting</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Undertaking market research to identify needs or issues</li> <li>• Seeking comment on a proposal, action or issue.</li> <li>• Seeking feedback on a service or facility</li> <li>• Requiring a response, but limited opportunity for dialogue</li> <li>• Option for people to seek a further level of participation.</li> </ul>	Level A  Level B  Level C  Level D
<b>3. Involving</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Involving the community in discussion and debate</li> <li>• Ensuring informed input through briefings and information</li> <li>• Adopting a more personal and innovative approach through personal contact and meetings/ sessions that encourage participation</li> <li>• Involving at different times in the planning process, i.e. keeping informed and enabling further comment.</li> </ul>	Level A  Level B
<b>4. Collaborating</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establishing a structure for involvement in decision-making, e.g. committee</li> <li>• Enabling ongoing involvement and keeping informed</li> <li>• Allocating responsibility in achieving initiatives.</li> </ul>	Level A  Level B

The engagement approach applied in each instance will be influenced by the assessed impact level. The impact and complexity level for a given matter will tend to reflect the engagement. The higher the impact the greater the level of engagement.



The level of engagement that may be required is illustrated on the following diagram, which indicates the relationship between the degree of impact and the complexity of the information.



© Les Robinson 2002

This decision diagram is based on:

- likely risk and
- complexity of the information which needs to be understood for a sound decision

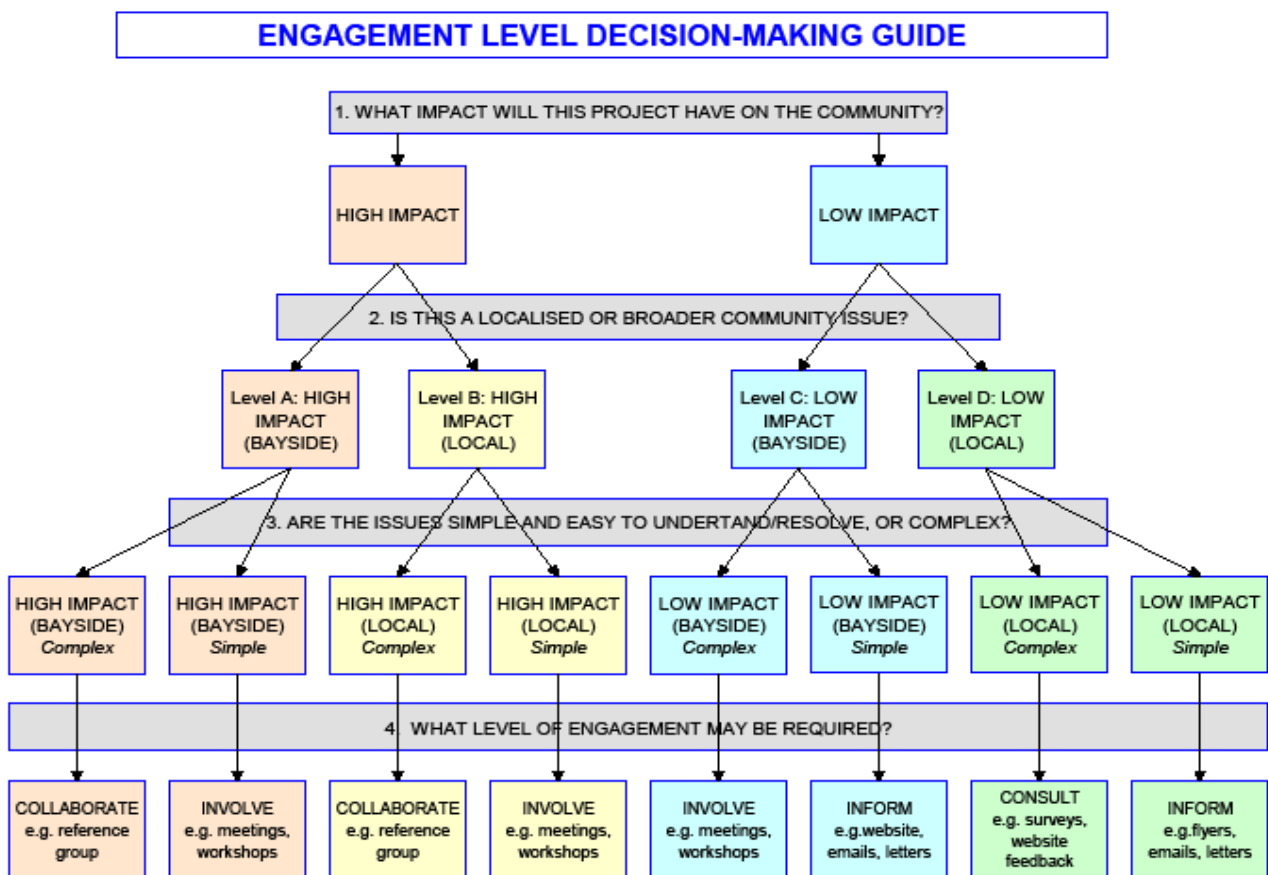
The example methodologies are indicative only of some of the numerous types of community engagement tools that Council may utilise.

Selection of methodologies will depend on the outcomes of research that will include demographic, technical, legal and financial data. Recommendations and information provided by Council will, in all cases, be evidence based.

Further information on techniques and methodologies can be found in the community toolkit at (web location)

How the assessment of impact, locality or scope, and complexity works in practice is illustrated in the Engagement Level Decision-Making Guide below.

Council first evaluates the likely impact of the issue or project on the community and Council, and then asks whether it is a local issue or one with ramifications across the municipality. Council then considers whether the issue is easily understood or more complex before deciding on the methodologies of engagement. For many issues, it's typical that multiple types of engagement will occur, for example, letter-box drops, surveys, focus groups, information sessions and one-on-one conversations.



## **5.2 Effect of community engagement on projects**

Council has committed to increasing its community engagement, which is expected to bring considerable long-term benefits, but will have some short and medium-term challenges and impacts on projects and service delivery, particularly some planning and budgetary implications.

### **5.2.1 Budgets**

Community engagement will provide value to the community, but it does come at a cost. Staff time allocated to surveys, focus groups, workshops and the myriad of other tools used all cost time **and** money to prepare, run and interpret. It is therefore necessary to anticipate and provide budget capacity for all significant engagement exercises. These costs will be met from Department or project budget allocations.

A staged approach to implementation of this Framework will be put in place, allowing time to build capacity within both Council and the community.

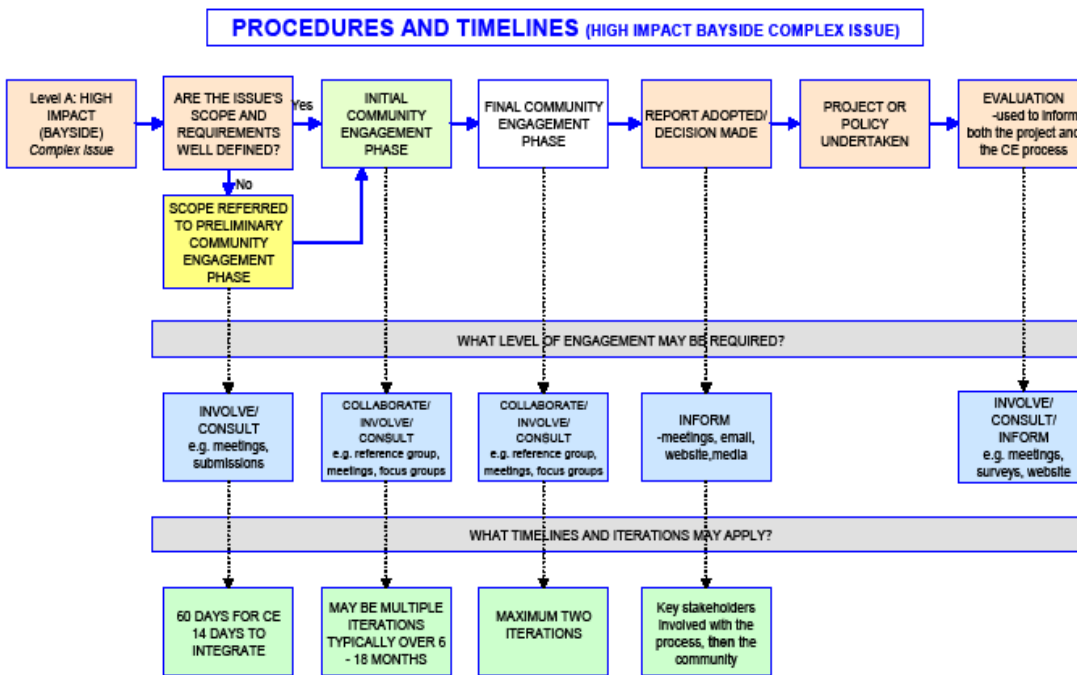
### **5.2.2 Timelines and Planning**

Effective community engagement requires careful planning and consideration of the time required to engage the community. The time required for engagement, including its evaluation, varies depending on numerous factors including impact, complexity, community cohesion on the issue, and the methodologies chosen.

Community engagement in any project potentially commences when a proposal enters the public sphere. Triggers for commencing engagement exercises such as those outlined on page 10, will vary according to the complexity of the issue or project, however the steps for each project will be clearly stated once identified.



The Community Engagement Procedures and Timelines diagram below illustrates a typical engagement plan for a high impact complex issue that would affect all of Bayside.



## 6. Tools and Procedures

The tools and procedures will be documented in the internal Staff Community Engagement Training Manual (under development) and will be modified periodically according to technologies available to Council, systems and procedures adopted, and the ongoing review of Council’s engagement initiatives.

Council will provide publicly accessible resources including flowcharts, Frequently Asked Questions, policy papers and guidance on tools and techniques together with other material, as required, to help everyone to derive optimal benefit from each engagement.

Council projects will be listed for public scrutiny and individualised notification systems shall be implemented to alert interested stakeholders to significant changes or progress.

## 7. Engagement process and opportunities for review and feedback

While each community engagement opportunity will follow the principles outlined in this framework, they will differ based on the complexities of the issue and the needs of the stakeholders.

The diagram below illustrates a typical engagement process for a complex, high impact issue affecting the entire municipality. It indicated the role of Council's staff in preparing and collating information, where the Council provides feedback into the process and makes decisions and where the community has its say in influencing those decisions.

