VISITOR ECONOMY

Community Engagement Framework

VICTORIA State Government

Acknowledgement

The diverse landscapes of Victoria have been the home of, and of significance to, diverse Nations for more than 60,000 years. The First Peoples in Victoria have cared for and nurtured Country throughout this time. The lands and waters on which Victorians and visitors draw enjoyment and inspiration continue to be a living cultural landscape.

We proudly acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the lands and waters throughout Victoria, and we pay our respects to their Elders past and present.

We recognise the rights and aspirations of Victorian First Peoples and acknowledge that First Peoples' Self Determination is a human right as enshrined in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Artist – Dixon Patten, Yorta Yorta and Gunnai

This artwork depicts the department, its people and its commitment to developing the economy by helping to create Aboriginal employment opportunities, supporting inclusion and economic prosperity and thriving Aboriginal communities.

The bigger circle in the middle represents the broad work of the department and its eight different Groups working together to achieve this.

The pathways represent the opportunities for the Aboriginal community to achieve personal and economic prosperity and improved employment outcomes.

The various smaller circles represent the different mobs within the Aboriginal community and the footprints represent the diversity of knowledge, skills and resources the community have.

The artefacts represent our traditional economy and are a reminder of our trade/barter system(s) and the connection to our cultural practices and ceremonies.

The emu and kangaroo tracks represent the department's commitment to moving forward, as these animals can't walk backwards.

Contents

Introduction

With its spectacular attractions and experiences, Victoria is a world-class destination for tourists from across Australia and the world. The state's visitor economy has long been a driver of economic growth, delivering positive impact far beyond the tourism sector.

A productive visitor economy is vital for a prosperous Victorian economy. The sector encompasses a variety of interconnected industries and occupations making it the second largest service export sector, creating around 257,500 jobs in the 2022/23 financial year. Tourism is particularly important to Victoria's regions, with 48% of all tourism workers employed in regional Victoria.

In the year ending March 2024, total tourism expenditure in Victoria reached a record-breaking high of $39.3 billion – up 12% year-on-year. That equates to almost $108 million a day in visitor spend, which clearly highlights its importance to the state's economy.

Visitor numbers to and within Victoria reached 88.8 million in the year ending March 2024, while visitor nights spent in Victoria reached 143.6 million, representing an increase of 18% year-on-year.

The Victorian Government is prioritising the sustainable growth of the state's visitor economy – and a key component of this involves strengthening relationships between councils, Regional Tourism Boards (RTBs), Visitor Economy Partnerships (VEPs), industry and the community.

Better stakeholder and community engagement has the potential to foster, preserve and strengthen goodwill towards the visitor economy, and towards visitors themselves. Done well, it can help build mutual understanding by creating opportunities for stakeholders and the community to have input into relevant planning and decision making.

This is vital because local communities are critical to the visitor economy. Communities that are positive about and welcoming of visitors create different experiences from those that are less enthusiastic. However, community members can also hold legitimate concerns about the impacts of the visitor economy on the amenity, safety or liveability of their communities. Good engagement can help identify and potentially resolve these concerns.

About this Framework

The Regional Tourism Review 2019 found that community support for tourism was weakened when there was no community engagement, and when engagement occurred too late. In response, the Victorian Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions (DJSIR) has developed this robust, scalable and cost-effective framework to support local councils, RTBs, VEPs and industry to work with their communities to conserve and enhance the visitor economy.

Designed to complement established local government and RTB engagement processes, the Visitor Economy Community Engagement Framework (the Framework) has been created to help guide councils, RTBs, VEPs and industry as they engage on a suite of tourism related matters, from strategy and planning to specific tourism-related issues or developments.

The framework is intended to complement the Tourism Investment Toolkit. It has been designed to support the Experience Victoria 2033 Strategic Plan for a Thriving Visitor Economy, where the goal is to use tourism to empower local communities.

Together we will:

- support local government and industry to engage with communities to deliver tourism initiatives.
- support communities to understand the value of the visitor economy and influence local projects to make sure the visitor economy benefits them and reflects their aspirations.

Tourism expenditure in Victoria
$39.3 billion

Visitor spend is almost
$108 million
a day

Visitor numbers reached
88.8 million

Visitor nights spent in Victoria are back to
95%
of year ending March 2019

It reflects the governance principles outlined in the *Local Government Act 2020*, which require councils to:

[give] priority ... to achieving the best outcomes for the municipal community, including future generations

[promote] the economic, social and environmental sustainability of the municipal district, including mitigation and planning for climate change risks

[engage] the municipal community in strategic planning and strategic decision making.

The Framework is intended as a blueprint to better enable the capture and consideration of community perspectives on visitor economy matters at the local level. It aims to measurably improve understanding of and support for the visitor economy by assisting councils, RTBs, VEPs and industry to initiate and maintain an ongoing process of community engagement.

Acknowledgement of contributors

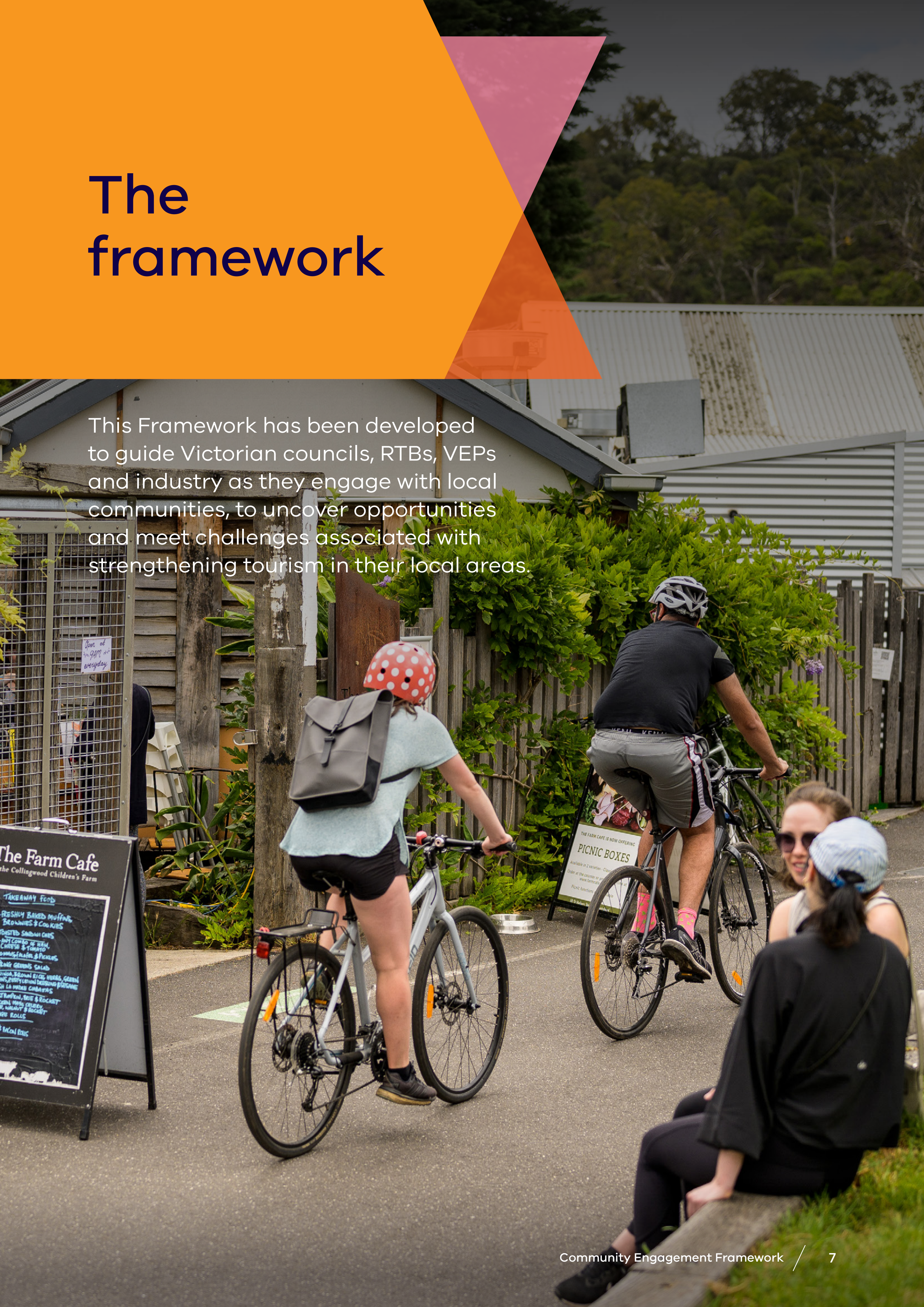
The Framework has been developed to accommodate commonalities and differences across all of Victoria's diverse geography and demography. Guided by the Visitor Economy Recovery and Reform Plan, the Framework has been developed to be highly flexible, so that it can be used to guide engagement on matters relating to the visitor economy across Victoria.

The Framework was delivered and tested through a series of workshops throughout the regions in Victoria, where members of RTBs, VEPs and local councils were invited to take part and share their feedback.

DJSIR is grateful to and thanks the councils, RTBs and VEPs that took part for their contribution to the Visitor Economy Community Engagement Program. Their knowledge and dedication helped deliver a Framework that will strengthen community relationships across Victoria, smoothing the path towards a thriving visitor economy.

The framework

This Framework has been developed to guide Victorian councils, RTBs, VEPs and industry as they engage with local communities, to uncover opportunities and meet challenges associated with strengthening tourism in their local areas.



It is underpinned by best practice stakeholder engagement and co-design principles, including the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) spectrum for public participation, to enable community conversations at two levels: **listening** and **educating**. This will be covered in more detail in section 1.1.8.

A more detailed explanation of IAP2 can be found at **Appendix A**.

IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation

The IAP2 spectrum of public participation supports good planning and working with project stakeholders. From left to right, it outlines a progressive increase in the level of public participation and involvement. Every stakeholder's IAP2 level will be informed by their decision-making responsibility or influence, and where their input will be needed to inform the project. A stakeholder's IAP2 level may change through the life of the project.

How to use this framework

The framework follows a five-step engagement process, and includes one section for each step. To help you navigate the document, each step section is colour coded.

Defining the engagement

Why are you engaging? What is the challenge or opportunity you're trying to solve?

Preparing for the engagement

Outlining the strategy – setting objectives, defining scope and identifying your stakeholders

Planning the engagement

Developing the implementation plan and selecting tools

Delivering the engagement

Hosting events and engaging the community

Evaluating and reporting on the engagement

Tracking progress, collating feedback and analysing data

This framework has been developed alongside a set of tools that will help deliver your community engagement projects. There are tools and templates relevant and referenced throughout each of the sections.

Look out for references to tools and templates throughout the document, like the one shown on the right.

See **Appendix B** for more information about the Communication and Engagement Process.

Great engagement on the visitor economy – a Victorian example

A new visitor centre was one of the key projects identified in the 2017 Puffing Billy Railway Master Plan, which was developed by Puffing Billy Railway in partnership with the State Government to guide the attraction's ability to meet growing visitor expectations and challenges into the future.

Developed over 18 months, the Master Plan underwent extensive community and stakeholder consultation involving feedback and idea generation at both the early visioning stage and the concept development stage to inform initiatives and the strategic direction of the Plan. It aimed to create an enhanced visitor experience, including proposing a new visitor centre at the central point along the railway.

As part of the delivery of the visitor centre initiative, the Puffing Billy Railway team involved the local community and key stakeholders at all phases of designing and delivering the visitor centre. The Railway took a community-centric approach to engagement, making sure to be very clear on scope and negotiables throughout.

Key to the success of the project's delivery was the early engagement as part of the Master Plan. Further involvement of the community was undertaken as part of the project design phase and also the planning approval through a special purpose planning scheme amendment.

Strong, existing relationships with key stakeholders were leveraged by the team. They engaged with the community and stakeholders focussed on existing contacts and networks including attending working groups, committee meetings, drop-in sessions, community forums and other planned events to keep the community up to date, seek input and report back on how feedback had been addressed. Regular Puffing Billy Railway website updates, distribution of stakeholder e-newsletters, and the provision of a dedicated feedback email address further managed expectations and facilitated feedback from stakeholders.

Through their careful engagement, the team identified that tree removal was going to be a challenge – potentially posing the biggest reputation risk for the project. To mitigate the risk, the team engaged early and transparently with local environmental groups, to strengthen relationships, listen to concerns, and educate members on the project more broadly. As a result, these groups became advocates for the project.

By committing to great engagement and putting in place clear negotiable and non-negotiables and involving the community and relevant stakeholders at each phase of the project, the Puffing Billy Railway team were able to deliver a project that genuinely improved visitor experiences and strengthened local relationships.

The engagement activities undertaken as part of this project have enabled ongoing systemic engagement to be undertaken by the Railway as part of its day to day activities, building stronger relationships and trust with the local community.

1. Defining the engagement

Used well, engagement can be a powerful tool for building better relationships between local government, RTBs, VEPs, your local tourism industry and your local community. Making sure that engagement is necessary and being very clear about why you're engaging (and how you'll use what you hear) is vital.

1.1. Is engagement the right approach?

Engagement can only lead to productive outcomes if you are genuinely seeking community input and involvement.

It isn't the solution to every issue – so before you invest time and effort in planning or delivering engagement, it is worth spending some time reflecting on whether engagement is the right approach to help with what you are trying to achieve.

At a high level, engagement is more likely to be successful if there is scope for community to influence – or even determine – at least some of the decisions that are being made, and you are very clear about how you'll use what you hear to shape your planning or decision making.

The checklist at **Appendix C** is a great tool for deciding whether engagement is the right approach.

1.2. What's your purpose?

Knowing exactly **why** you are engaging – that is, defining your purpose in engaging – is essential to the success of your engagement. Being clear on the purpose of your engagement at the start will ensure you can develop a plan that is targeted, deliverable and measurable.

When you're defining the purpose, it's important to consider the challenge or opportunity you are trying to solve? This could be as broad as improving understanding of the value of tourism and events to the local community, or as narrow as solving a specific local issue, such as how a local asset could be developed or used in the future. Answering this question clearly will inform the rest of the process.

Once you've determined whether community engagement will be viable and valuable, you'll need to define your purpose. The purpose will underpin your engagement objectives and ensure you can develop a plan that is targeted, deliverable and measurable. When defining your purpose, you'll need to consider:

- What do you want to know from the community (and why)
- Which parts of the project the community can influence
- How you'll use the information you gather through engagement.

Check out **Appendix D** for a template to use when defining your purpose.

Some common engagement purposes include:

- Identifying a problem or opportunity
- Understanding community sentiment or perceptions
- Complying with legislative or regulatory requirements.
- Sharing information
- Creating behaviour change
- Informing decision making

Two examples of valid, clear purposes include:

- To seek input on local community priorities and aspirations, to inform development of the 2025-2030 Tourism Strategy.
- To understand community concerns about possible impacts of the [project] development and identify preferred mitigations (such as in the Puffing Billy example on the previous page).

2. Preparing for the engagement

Setting a clear strategy is critical to successful engagement. By following the steps outlined in this section and the next, you will create the foundation for an engagement program that meets your requirements. Your strategy will lay out what is and what is not part of the engagement and will help to keep your project on task.

The below sections will help you answer questions to shape your engagement strategy, and a range of tools have also been developed to support your work in this stage.

2.1. Who are your stakeholders?

Understanding the relationship your key stakeholders will have with the issue you're engaging on will help you deliver an effective engagement program, and help you to tailor your engagement to suit their interest, attitudes, beliefs and level of understanding of the visitor economy. There are several steps you can take to understand who your stakeholders are, and what makes them tick.

> The stakeholder identification template at **Appendix E** will be useful at this point.

First, you'll need to identify who your key stakeholders are – the broad groups who can help or hinder you reaching your objectives. When working out which groups to include, consider:

- Does the engagement topic impact people in a particular geographic area, or of a particular age, occupation or other attribute?
- Who else might be affected or interested?

Once you have identified your key stakeholder groups, it is important to map their interest in and influence on the issue you're engaging about. You'll need to consider:

- Who will be most impacted **by** decisions?
- Who will have the most impact **on** decisions?
- Whether you need to be engaging CALD or other vulnerable groups?
- Who will be most in support of the project, and who will oppose it?
- Who has significant influence in the community – or on the decision makers – and who is less influential?
- Keep in mind, stakeholders may also be involved in the local council, employed by relevant state agencies, or part of the tourism industry themselves.

> The template at **Appendix F** will help you map your stakeholders' interest and influence.

2.1.1. LEVEL OF PARTICIPATION

The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) Public Participation Spectrum represents and illustrates the level of influence the public can have on an outcome or decision.

Using the stakeholder mapping tool provided at Appendix E will help you understand where your key stakeholders fit on the spectrum. This, in turn, will help you to determine the appropriate engagement tools and methods to fulfil the purpose and objectives you defined earlier.

INCREASING IMPACT ON THE DECISION

	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Engagement goal	To provide stakeholders with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the issues, alternatives and opportunities.	To obtain stakeholder feedback on options and/or decisions.	To work directly with stakeholders throughout the process to ensure that their concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with stakeholders in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place decision making in the hands of the public.
Promise to stakeholders	We will keep you informed and provide you with tailored information for you to better understand key concepts.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and provide feedback on how stakeholder 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 stakeholder input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for direct advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.

2.1.2. DESKTOP RESEARCH

It's good practice to get a clear understanding of the history and context of an issue – and of the relationship with relevant community members and stakeholders – before leaping into engagement.

Understanding community sentiment can, in the first instance, be achieved by checking in with people in your organisation about previous conversations. It seems obvious but understanding what's already known on the matter, including what you've already said you'll do, will go a long way to ensuring your engagement approach is respectful of any time that stakeholders and the community have already invested in conversation.

Understanding who you're speaking to can help you determine how best to reach them, and what they'll want to know. In many cases, they may already have expressed views about the issue that you're engaging about, or been engaged on a similar topic.

Here are some common sources you can use to get your desktop research started:

- Media articles (you can often find these by searching 'news' on online search engines)
- Media monitoring and social media listening tools (check Google for some free options, or just use the search function on various social media platforms)
- Previous survey responses or engagement evaluation reports, or minutes of previous meetings
- The websites or newsletters of local community interest groups
- Free social, demographic and economic data sites, such as the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

These sources can help you identify:

- The demographics of your target stakeholders and communities including how old they are, what languages they speak at home, their education or literacy levels, where or whether they work.
- How they like to engage or be engaged.
- Whether they have publicly expressed views about the issue you're engaging about, and what those views might be.
- How previous engagement efforts have worked out, and whether there are any lessons to be learned or improvements that could be made.

2.1.3. ADDITIONAL RESEARCH

Once you have completed your desktop research, you may identify gaps in your knowledge that you need to fill before you start to engage your community.

For example, you may feel that it's important to get a sense of your audience's existing understanding of the issue, so you can decide whether your engagement needs to include an information or education component, or whether it can go straight into consultation.

The purpose of this research is to provide you with insight to deliver a successful engagement program. It is distinct from engagement or consultation as it is about testing and information gathering, rather than involving and collaborating.

Conducting research can be expensive, but you can use existing networks, channels or forums (such as a community advisory group, your Facebook page or a newsletter subscriber database) to get a general sense of what you need to know. Free or inexpensive tools such as SurveyMonkey are a good way keep costs down, too.

While research approaches that use existing channels are not as technically robust or statistically reliable as more expensive methods, they are a good way to get an idea of your community's knowledge, attitudes or perceptions.

> If you need to conduct additional research, our baseline community perceptions survey template at **Appendix G** may help.

2.2. What can your community influence?

Being clear about what you are and are not engaging about will make it simpler to design good engagement materials and activities, and help you keep conversations with the community and stakeholders on track.

Communities and stakeholders can make more meaningful contributions when they understand exactly what they're being asked to offer input on. It's important to define this early, and be transparent and consistent about what is and isn't on the table for consideration.

Try to be as specific as you can – so, for example, if you're just consulting about how best to manage the impacts of a change, rather than whether the change should happen at all, you will need to be clear about that. Defining and communicating these negotiables and non-negotiables is a key element in building trust with your community.

It's also worth considering whether there are other issues or opportunities of importance to your community or stakeholders which could affect the conversation you want to have, and how you'll manage these if they come up.

> **Appendix H** is a factsheet about negotiables and non-negotiables.

Case study

Being clear on what is negotiable will help you identify what the community can and can't influence. For example, in scoping a community engagement program about potential future uses of the Kyneton Mineral Springs, Macedon Ranges Shire identified a clear set of negotiables and non-negotiables:

Negotiable

- Potential for an active transport connection with Kyneton township
- Upgrades and new installations to site amenities
- Opportunities for public events and activities
- Further development of the bottling operations

Non-negotiable

- Review of planning protections and exemptions
- Public access to the springs will remain open
- Bottling operations will continue
- Water quality will continue to be tested by DEECA

2.3. What are your objectives?

When you're preparing for your engagement, it is valuable to set objectives that clearly define the outcomes you're seeking to achieve. The best objectives are SMART objectives – objectives that are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound.

Setting an objective can be as easy as turning a question into a statement. For example, the question:

'Would our community support the establishment of a visitor information centre in our local town hall?'

Can be reframed as an engagement objective and strengthened by adding a timeframe:

'By June 2024, understand the level of community support for establishing a visitor information centre in the town hall.'

In many cases, creating one clear objective will be all you need – but if your issue is complex, or the stakeholder environment is diverse or broad, you may need up to four.

It's important to think about how you'll measure your objectives while you're setting them – because if you can't measure them, you'll never know whether you've achieved them or not. Below are a few examples of measures that can be used for different objectives.

In many cases, it's appropriate to use qualitative measures when measuring engagement outcomes because how strongly a group or individual responds to an issue can be as significant as the number of people who respond in a particular way.

Objective	Measure
Elicit feedback from at least 150 community members by 2 October 2023	Event sign in sheets
Identify three key areas of opportunity to explore in the draft Tourism Strategy by 15 June 2024	Thematic analysis
Produce an engagement report reflecting community aspirations and concerns to inform strategy by 1 May 2024	Completed report

*Please note: measurable doesn't have to mean quantifiable.

2.4. What are your key messages?

Clearly defined key messages provide a strong foundation for effective communication. Using simple, clear messaging helps prioritise information for your audience, and ensure consistency and accuracy. Your key messages should explain to the community what you're engaging about, what you want to know and how you'll use what you hear.

TIPS FOR NAILING YOUR KEY MESSAGES:

- Be clear and concise – keep each one short and to the point.
- You should not need more than five key messages, and each should be no more than a sentence long.
- Don't forget to address the value or community benefit that you believe will be provided from the project or opportunity you're engaging about. Make sure this message is clear, and based on good evidence.
- You'll need to balance what you want to say with what you believe your community will want or need to know to engage meaningfully.
- Remember to tell your community how their feedback will be used, and how and when you'll report back to them on what you've heard and how it's impacted your decision making.
- Avoid using jargon, long and complex sentences. There are great, free online tools to check your messaging for plain English.

MAKE IT INTERESTING

Think about what might motivate your stakeholders to join the conversation, rather than simply what information you need from them.

✗ "Have your say on our tourism strategy."

✓ "The sunshine coast has the big pineapple, Ballina has the big prawn, but what is Ballarat's biggest attraction?"

INCLUDE A CALL TO ACTION

What are you asking your stakeholders to do? Some common engagement call to actions include:

- Have your say
- Share your feedback,
- Take our survey.

USE AN ACTIVE TONE OF VOICE

✗ "A new tourism strategy will be developed."

✓ "We're developing a new tourism strategy."

TAILOR THE MESSAGES

Let your stakeholders know what part they have to play in the project.

✓ "Your ideas will help us …"

✓ "We will use your feedback to inform …"

Case study

Hobsons Bay City Council adopted these key messages to support early engagement on their next tourism strategy as part of the framework pilot:

- We're creating our next tourism strategy to help shape the Hobsons Bay visitor economy over the next 5 years.
- We're proud of what our local area has to offer, and we want to know what you think makes Hobsons Bay a great place to visit.
- We're keen to identify priorities for developing our tourism assets, and understand any impacts on the local community.
- The strategy will guide how we support existing businesses and how we can strengthen our tourist economy for the future.
- Having a thriving tourist economy enriches the community, boosts the local economy, creates jobs, and generates local business income.

2.5. What risks do you need to manage?

Just as well-planned engagement can strengthen community relationships and improve the visitor economy, poorly planned or executed engagement can negatively impact on project outcomes, relationships and on the community.

Developing a project risk register before your community engagement will allow you to identify any potential risks ahead of time, and implement strategies to mitigate or manage them before they negatively impact your project.

We've included an example of a Project Risk Register template at **Appendix I**.

Some common risks you may need to be aware of for visitor economy engagement could include:

- **Engagement fatigue** – community has been over exposed to consultation and is becoming disengaged or overwhelmed
- **Misalignment of scope** – community or stakeholders provide feedback on issues that are not relevant or cannot be influenced
- **Low participation** – insufficient feedback is received because stakeholders are not interested or engaged with the project.

Your organisation may already have a risk register or matrix with common issues in your local area that you could incorporate into your visitor economy engagement project.

3. Planning the engagement

Once the strategic considerations outlined in the previous section have been settled, the next step is to develop a practical implementation plan that outlines **how** you will engage the community.

See **Appendix J** for a detailed Communications and Engagement Plan template.

3.1. When will you engage?

A few key considerations should inform the timing of your engagement program:

- when you need the feedback to shape decision-making or planning
- when your stakeholders are likely to be available to be engaged
- peak visitor periods or other periods of high activity in your area or across Victoria.

When considering how best to schedule engagement to meet internal milestones, you will allow enough time to write up and analyse what you've heard, but not so much time that the plans are likely to change between the engagement and the decision.

From a stakeholder perspective, your timing should reflect who your stakeholders are and what other time pressures they might be under. So, for example, while avoiding school holidays won't make much difference in a primarily retired community, it will have a big impact in a neighbourhood of young families. Similarly, respecting cultural practices during Ramadan will really help communities with a significant Muslim population to take part. Avoiding any overlaps or conflicts with other local engagement activities can help maximise participation, too.

Allowing enough time for meaningful engagement is vitally important, especially when the engagement is focused on complex material. You'll need to provide your community with enough time to come to grips with all the background necessary to inform their participation, and then leave them enough time to think about what they've learned, and respond.

It's also worth thinking about whether all the engagement needs to happen in a single step, or whether it can be staged across multiple project phases, to maximise the community's ability to provide feedback that is as targeted and current as possible.

This is especially true where the engagement is focusing on a project or issue that will take shape over years, rather than months or weeks. In many cases, engagement can become more targeted and focused on the detail as the project progresses – for example, it might be more general or values-based in the early design stages, and much more specific as project development begins.

3.2. Who needs to be involved?

Great engagement requires internal buy-in, support and input from right across an organisation. In planning your engagement program, it's important to think about which other teams or people will need to be involved. Consider who else might have:

- subject matter knowledge about the engagement topic?
- experience in engagement?
- knowledge of or relationships with target communities or stakeholders?

And don't forget to think about who will need to approve what, and allow time for approvals at every stage – including when you've developed your plan, created the engagement materials and drafted your engagement report.

3.3. Which methods will you use?

With so many traditional and digital engagement methods available, knowing which to choose can be difficult. While being realistic about your budget, timeframes, resourcing and expertise, there are three things to think about when weighing up your options:

- your engagement purpose and objectives, because knowing what outcomes you're seeking can make it easier to spot the methods most likely to deliver results.

- what your stakeholders will need, because you need to make sure there's at least one method or activity that will suit each stakeholder group's requirements, which may include type of activity, timing, location, accessibility, etc.
- which levels of participation you have identified across your stakeholder map, because some methods are much better suited to informing your stakeholders rather than collaborating with them, for example.

We've included a list of common engagement methods and their uses at **Appendix K**.

Please note: face to face engagement isn't necessarily better than online engagement – both have benefits and shortcomings. It can be worth doing a mix to maximise opportunities for all sorts of people to take part.

3.3.1. REACHING HARD-TO-REACH GROUPS

The visitor economy affects all Victorians, but many people encounter barriers to taking part in community engagement when they try to participate.

Refer to our factsheet about common barriers to engagement at **Appendix L**.

These barriers can relate to people's cultural and linguistic background, socio-economic factors such as unemployment or poverty, or issues such as illness or disability.

Engaging inclusively is an important responsibility for organisations that make decisions that impact other people's lives. When engaging with these community groups you should consider:

- partnering with trusted allies (for their connections, networks, and credibility)
- allowing more time for the engagement
- creating a relationship-centred approach, rather than a project-centred approach, so that engagement builds on existing trust and a history beyond the immediate need
- working to build a real understanding of your stakeholder's needs (for example, providing translated written materials to a CALD community may not be effective if its members have low literacy even in their familiar languages)
- finding innovative ways to help people to engage
- providing information in formats or ways that make it easier for them to access and understand, such as using simple signage, with clear pictures or animations.

IAP2 identifies the need to ask people how they want to be engaged as a core value. Doing this well is one of the key elements of best practice engagement – especially with hard to engage groups.

3.4. What materials do you need?

Once you've determined your engagement methods, you can start developing engagement materials.

In part, the formats and types of materials required will depend on the engagement methods you've chosen.

You'll find lots of information and tips about how to develop and use different engagement materials at **Appendix M**.

For example, an emphasis on online engagement will require highly visual, digital materials – web text, frequently asked questions, images, short videos and animations. Face-to-face engagement can also make use of these materials, as well as materials such as display boards that provide a mix of images and text.

Whatever you develop, you must keep your audience in mind. Think about their existing knowledge about and interest in the engagement topic, as well as their likely literacy levels and time availability.

Simpler is always better when developing engagement materials. Readers of all abilities absorb information better when it's expressed in common words and short sentences.

Similarly, visual tools – infographics, maps, diagrams, timelines and artists impressions all help build understanding so that stakeholders can provide informed input and feedback.

Your materials should also reflect both the distribution channels you have available to you, and your budget.

Think about the channels you already have, including any opportunities to piggyback off events and networks that your organisation and partner organisations have already planned or implemented. These might include, for example, e-newsletters from other parts of the organisations, notice boards and display screens in libraries and other community hubs, or upcoming community events.

In terms of budget, you need to account for the distribution as well as the production of your materials. So, if you're buying advertising, get quotes ahead of time. If you're targeting a specific geographic community, Australia Post has free tools that will allow you to estimate how many houses you'll need to letterbox drop, which can help with estimating printing costs too. And don't forget event costs, for venues, transport, and catering (if you're planning to offer it).

And finally, always consider the environment – is there a way you could choose more environmentally friendly materials?

3.5. Are you compliant?

When planning any engagement program or activity, it's important to ensure you've checked all the compliance boxes, so you can be certain that you're doing the right thing by both your organisation and the community. Many of these may be met as part of your business-as-usual operations, but it pays to be aware of what's required. You may have people in your organisation that will be able to guide you on specific needs depending on the specifics of your engagement plan, but a few key areas to consider are:

- **Accessibility** – do your engagement activities and materials need to meet accessibility requirements? These could include the use of plain language, access to engagement materials (online, hard copy, translations), or physical access to community activities.
- **Public safety** – will all your engagement activities be delivered in a safe way? To maximise safety, you may need to consider things like wet weather contingencies, emergency management plans, or even security for controversial events.

> There's more information about managing privacy in the fact sheet at **Appendix N**, and a template project consent form at **Appendix O**.

- **Privacy** – how will you protect the personal information of people who engage with you? You'll need to make sure that all engagement data is stored securely – for hard copy files, this means being locked away in a cabinet and for online files, ensuring your servers are secure.
- **Permits and licenses** – you may need to obtain permits or licences for some in-person events, or to display engagement materials.
- **Insurance requirements** – if you're holding in person events, you'll need to make sure your public liability insurance covers the size and scale of the event you're holding.
- **Working with children requirements** – if you're engaging with anyone under the age of 18 you'll need to make sure you have a Working With Children Check. You can check the requirements and apply at vic.gov.au/do-i-need-check
- **Permissions** – if you're taking photos or videos, or plan to share the responses you receive publicly, you'll need to seek written permission from participants.
- **Requirements such as gender equity audits** – ensure your engagement is in line with your local organisation's policies and ensure you're fulfilling any wider state or federal requirements – check out vic.gov.au/public-engagement-hub for more information.

4. Delivering the engagement

Now that your strategy is sound and you have thoroughly planned your process for discussing the visitor economy, you're ready to put your hard work to use.

Depending on the complexity of your engagement project, your delivery phase could run anywhere from a few weeks to a few months. Some organisations have minimum engagement periods set out in a Community Engagement Policy or similar, so it's always worth checking to make sure you're meeting required standards.

4.1. Are you ready to host an event?

If events are in your engagement mix, now is a good time to review your engagement outcomes and remind yourself why you want to meet the community face-to-face.

This will enable you to be clear about the outcomes you are seeking and how you can best manage an event to ensure they're achieved.

Have a look at our event budget tracker at **Appendix P**, template event runsheet at **Appendix Q**, and feedback template at **Appendix R**.

4.2. How will you respond to feedback?

Everyone within your organisation will potentially play a role in responding to enquiries and feedback about the engagement, depending on the nature and subject of the enquiry.

When you are responding to feedback, consider adapting your organisation's existing complaints and enquiries handling process, or developing a new one. The process should outline desired response timeframes, and clearly spell out all escalation and approvals requirements.

Frequently asked questions are a useful tool to support your whole team to answer simple enquiries – but for more complex questions the process may be more complicated.

TIPS FOR HOSTING A SUCCESSFUL ENGAGEMENT EVENT:

- Establish your available budget and staffing early on, and work within these constraints.
- Arrange an accessible venue, prioritising health and safety, and specific stakeholder requirements – do you need AUSLAN or language interpreters? Will you need to run both online and in-person sessions to maximise participation from your key stakeholder groups?
- Choose suitable times and days for engagement, considering what's going to work best for your key stakeholder groups. For example, if you're targeting young working families, a workshop in the middle of the day isn't likely to be suitable.
- Develop supporting materials, including having invitations, fact sheets, banners, run sheets and any other materials you need to run a smooth and successful event ready ahead of time.
- Have a plan for managing conflict at your event, and consider how you'll keep the conversation productive, constructive and on track. This should be part of your risk register (see Section 2.5).
- Know exactly how you're going to capture feedback, both about your engagement topic, and about the engagement event itself. Having a post event feedback form ready to go at the end of the session will help inform your lessons learned review later, and may give you insights that can be applied immediately to refine and improve the experience for your next engagement activity.

5. Evaluating and reporting on the engagement

Tracking progress towards your desired outcomes, and evaluating your whole engagement program is an important part of the process. Continuous monitoring can help to identify what is going well, and what needs to be improved, and thorough evaluation ensures you stay focused on your purpose and objectives.

The steps to take in the evaluation and reporting process are outlined below.

5.1. Is your engagement on track?

Once your engagement program is running – you've held some events and started to receive some input on your engagement topic from your stakeholders – you can start to assess your approach and check you're on track to achieve your milestones, purpose and objectives.
It's worth considering:

- Who you are hearing from: if the feedback you're receiving is predominantly from one specific area or group of stakeholders, and isn't representative of whole community you're trying to reach, you may need to adjust your promotional channels, engagement methods or tools, or the timing or location of your activities, to keep your consultation on track.
- Any unexpected issues that might be emerging: if challenges that you didn't consider in your risk register are starting to crop up, or are more serious or significant than you expected, you may need to revisit your issues management approach, or seek expert support from within or outside your organisation.
- Whether the conversations you're having reflect the purpose of your engagement: if other topics are overtaking your intended focus, think about tweaking the messaging in your promotional material, or the scripts or discussion prompts you are using during engagement.

See **Appendix S** for a template engagement evaluation survey.

Accurate record keeping will assist with the process of analysing the data and information to identity themes, priorities and preferences. It will also enable gaps in participation to be noticed and addressed.

5.2. Have you achieved your objectives?

Evaluation is always easier if you've kept good records of your engagement activities and the feedback you've received about the process and the engagement topic.

If your engagement program is likely run over multiple phases or months, and the issue you're engaging about is of significant interest within your organisation, it's worth considering adopting a monthly 'report card' for internal distribution.

This approach makes it easier to monitor progress towards your objectives, and simplifies reporting at the end of the whole program – and it also gives internal decision makers and stakeholders a sense of the themes and issues that are emerging over time.

Whether you report internally or not, though, being disciplined about recording all information consistently does increase the likelihood that you'll achieve your objectives. (Information about setting and measuring objectives was covered in Section 2.3).

We've included a monthly engagement report card to support internal reporting at **Appendix T**.

5.3. What did you learn about engaging your community?

Internally reflecting on your engagement process is a great way of making sure that your engagement is always building on past experience.

Keep track of any lesson learned as you work your way through the project, and note down any actions: some improvements can be made during your project and others will be relevant for future engagement opportunities.

Conducting an internal lessons learned workshop can be a useful way to wrap up the project and demonstrate the value that the engagement program has delivered. Use this opportunity to discuss your overall engagement approach, what worked well and what areas could be improved.

From here you will be able to map out how you could apply these lessons for future projects, and assign actions to make sure you follow through.

5.4. What did you learn from your community and stakeholders?

Reporting on what you've learned really is the essence of why you engage.

It's not about how many events you held, or how may people came to them. Ultimately, if you've worked through this engagement process, you should have answered the question that led you to engage in the first place. In other words: you'll have fulfilled your purpose.

Creating an engagement report template is difficult, because your report really should be tailored to the specifics of your plan (see **Appendix J**). We'd recommend starting with a table of contents, or a set of headings that reflect your plan. For example:

- **Section 1: Purpose and objectives** – provide an overview of why you conducted the engagement, and what you were hoping to learn.
- **Section 2: Strategy** – summarise the engagement strategy you employed. You may also include other elements of the plan here, including your key messages, and any compliance or approvals requirements that you were required to meet.
- **Section 3: Stakeholders** – this may simply be the table of stakeholders you included in the plan, and along with a summary of their interests, their level of influence and interest in the topic, and their IAP level.
- **Section 4: Activities** – briefly summarise what you did to promote the engagement opportunities, and which specific engagement activities you conducted (e.g. how many drop in sessions or pop ups, where and when; online surveys).
- **Section 5: What we learned** – outline what you heard from your community and stakeholders. It may be useful to organise this section according to the bullet points you included under the purpose section of your plan. When analysing and reporting on what you've learned, it can be useful to think about whether the feedback you received was consistent across all stakeholder groups, all phases or engagement, and all engagement activities. If different groups or activities provided different feedback, it's important to call this out in your report.
- **Section 6: Next steps** – this section should offer an overview of how the feedback received will be incorporated into your organisation's planning or decision making, and when. It should also provide a snapshot of any insights gained through your evaluation of the engagement program, and how these will be used to shape or guide future engagement efforts.

You'll find a template lessons learned agenda at **Appendix U**, and a template register at **Appendix V**.

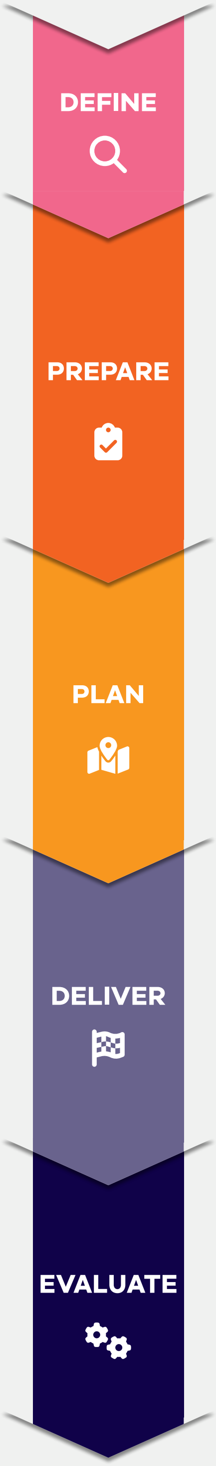
5.5. Reporting back to the community

Letting the community know how their feedback has influenced your decision making is essential to good engagement.

This may be as simple as creating a public-facing version of the engagement report outlined in Section 5.4, or it may involve developing specific communications about the outcomes that can be distributed through all the channels in which the engagement opportunities were originally promoted.

The toolkit

Visit tourism.vic.gov.au to download the toolkit resources listed in this appendix.



Understanding participation and engagement

A. IAP2 – diagram

B. Communication and engagement process – diagram

Defining the purpose of the engagement

C. Should you engage – checklist

D. Defining your purpose – template

Preparing for the engagement

E. Identifying stakeholders – template

F. Stakeholder map – template

G. Baseline perceptions survey – template

H. Negotiables and non-negotiables – factsheet

I. Project risk register – template

Tools for planning the engagement

J. Communications and Engagement Plan – template

K. Engagement methods – list

L. Barriers to engagement – factsheet

M. Engagement materials – list

Tools for delivering the engagement

N. Privacy – factsheet

O. Project consent form – template

P. Community event budget – tracker

Q. Community event runsheet – template

Tools for evaluating and reporting on the engagement

R. Feedback – template

S. Engagement evaluation survey – template

T. Monthly engagement report card – template

U. Lessons learned agenda – template

V. Lessons learned register – template

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