Maribyrnong City Council Community Panel Terms of Reference (updated August 2021)

1. Background

Community engagement is an umbrella phrase that includes information, consultation, engagement and empowering activities. It can be said that it is at the heart of what a council is designed to do.

It supports public involvement in Council decision-making, relationship building and community strengthening and is successfully implemented when the community is and feels part of the process. Done well, it ensures integrity and builds trust in Council processes.

2. Community Panel

Council’s Engagement Policy (which was adopted in February 2021) recognises Community Engagement as the cornerstone of good decision-making and seeks to build engagement practice into project and program planning and delivery. To this end we have resurrected a Community Panel as a means to provide a forum for community minded people from all ages and backgrounds to share their thoughts and views to help inform Council thinking.

The Panel provides an opportunity to input into specific topics by participating in activities like surveys, focus groups, workshops or interviews. It is up to each member how much they participate and what they share. All participation is voluntary.

Critically, there are no limits or restrictions on who can join – the Panel is open to everyone and there is no cap on numbers. Though at times we may need to draw a random group from the panel to provide a representative sample of the community, based on your demographics.

3. Purpose

The Maribyrnong City Council Community Panel is an advisory and advocacy committee whose role is to represent the diverse voice of community members living and working in the City of Maribyrnong.

The initial focus of the Group was to guide the development of the Council Plan 2021-2025, but that was only the start. Panel members are invited to also contribute to a whole range of initiatives and services over a period of time. This could include anything from long term projects to local recreation facility upgrades, or services provided by the local library.

4. Role and function

Panel members will be invited to:

* take part in consultations such as surveys, focus groups and workshops
* attend meetings on occasion
* offer informed comment around projects and issues to help guide Council decision-making
* identify opportunities, and goals Council could pursue that address the needs of the community
* share information with friends and neighbours and encourage them to also become involved

We will:

* provide information to support understanding of key projects and issues
* provide opportunity for you to engage with us and provide feedback
* facilitate opportunity for the panel to talk amongst itself to come to a consensus view on occasion on key matters
* at times draw a random group from the panel to provide a representative sample of the community, based on your demographics
* update you on how your feedback has influenced outcomes
* welcome your ongoing participation and feedback

5. Participation

* your participation in the panel remains completely voluntary
* you can participate as much or as little as you wish
* surveys, polls, feedback forms, virtual walls are all ways you can share your thinking
* there will also be opportunity to make formal submissions on some matters
* at times we might invite those interested to a meeting or workshop (while COVID restrictions are in place these will take place online and will provide support if needed)
* be involved at any time

6. Membership

This is your Community Panel. Anyone and everyone who has an interest in Council’s activities is welcome. The more the merrier as they say. We have deliberately chosen not to make this a selection process because we genuinely want to hear from as many members of our community as want to speak to us. And that is the beauty of digital media – you only need a computer to join. Where that may be a challenge, remember, you can access the internet at any of our libraries.

You do need to:

* be a resident
* be of sound mind

Sorry but you can’t join if you:

* work for Maribyrnong City Council
* are a Councillor for any Victorian municipality
* are a Federal Member of Parliament or a Member of Parliament in any state or territory

The Panel can only be as effective as its members so while we’re not restricting numbers it is important those who join become involved – not in everything but some things. We’ll check in at the end of each financial year to see how you are finding things and whether you wish to stay on the Panel.

When you join we will also ask some demographic questions about your age, gender and language spoken at home. Knowing a little about people on the Panel helps ensure we are talking to the diverse communities who make up our community. We don’t need phone numbers, but an email is important so we can keep in touch.

If at any stage you no longer wish to participate, that’s completely fine, just let us know and we can remove you from the Panel.

7. Membership Term

The Community Panel is intended to be a long-term initiative. Members can stay as long as they like. We’ll check in with you every year to see if any panellists wish to leave the forum (around July).

8. Operations / Administration

The Panel has no budgetary responsibilities, decision making powers or delegated authority.

It shall follow the general consensus principle when determining its preferred position when matters under discussion require a collective viewpoint.

Panellists cannot speak for Council. Council will provide the necessary support for the Panel to function effectively.