



WOMEN'S HEALTH
AND WELLBEING
Barwon South West Inc.

Women's Voices

Community Engagement Strategy

MAY 2021

We proudly acknowledge Aboriginal people as the First Peoples, Traditional Owners and custodians of the lands and waters on which our work occurs. We acknowledge and respect the wisdom, living culture and unique role that Aboriginal people hold, and which has seen them thrive for thousands of years. We also acknowledge the ongoing leadership role of the Aboriginal community. As First Peoples, our Aboriginal communities are best placed to determine their own culturally appropriate path to gender equality.

Executive Summary

Women's Voices was developed to ensure that diverse women are engaged in issues that matter to them across the region. Women's Health and Wellbeing Barwon South West values women's right to, and realisation of, participation as integral to achieving equity for women. The aim is to increase and support opportunities for women in the Barwon South West region to participate in meaningful and authentic engagement. We take a feminist approach to community engagement and apply a gendered lens to issues that affect women's health and wellbeing.

The goal of adopting our community engagement framework is to work together to ensure women voices are heard. The information collected from women's voices will shape and inform planning, policy, advocacy and funding decisions. By listening to local women, we can amplify their voices and translate their experiences and what works into action.

Women's Voices is underpinned by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) Framework as the primary guide to how and when engagement will occur, and the methods used. The framework is an internationally recognised standard for engagement. It informs what type of engagement will be undertaken, its purpose, commitment to the community, and the range of methods that can be used for each level of engagement.

To ensure that Women's Voices engagement framework is best-practice and upholds a high level of rigour, the framework undertook two levels of testing. Firstly, a small focus group of local women was invited to participate in strategy testing and to ensure that the framework reflected the voices of local women and met their needs. The focus group discussed the benefits, expectations and considerations when participating in community engagement activities. All feedback was considered during the development of this framework. Secondly, a peer-review process was undertaken with external partners from other women's health services and those with community engagement backgrounds.

Women's Voices is the guiding document that supports our organisation in building relationships and participating in meaningful engagement with women across the region. Through collective advocacy, we can influence all levels of government to drive meaningful policy change for women. This way of working is a commitment to representing the women of our region with authenticity and accountability.

About WHWBSW

We are a not-for-profit organisation committed to gender equality and preventing women's health issues before they begin. We strive to improve women's lives. As a small organisation with an ambitious vision for change, we support local partners and communities to address the things that shape women's health – often working with local government, health providers and service organisations to progress women's health. We engage women from across the region to understand their experiences and elevate their voices, which informs and guides our advocacy.

Our work is built on a foundation of evidence and a commitment to excellence – leading change by shifting public discussion, translating research into practical actions and pushing for policy changes in government, businesses and organisations.

We were established and incorporated in 2011 and the organisation's core funding comes from the Victorian Government, through the Women's Health Program at the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing.

The Barwon South West region spans three recognised Traditional Owner groups: the Gunditjmara, Eastern Marr and Wadawurrung people. The region includes nine local government areas: City of Greater Geelong, Borough of Queenscliffe, Surf Coast Shire, Colac Otway Shire, Corangamite Shire, Moyne Shire, Glenelg Shire, Southern Grampians Shire and Warrnambool City Council.

Our community consists of approximately 200,000 women across our catchment. At WHWBSW, 'women' refers to anyone who identifies as a woman, regardless of the sex or gender assigned to them at birth. We acknowledge that our focus on reproductive health also touches the lives of many people who do not identify as women.

Our Vision:

Women are healthy, safe and can access all of life's opportunities.

Our impact areas:

- Promote women's independence and decision-making
- Challenge gender stereotypes and roles
- Drive economic equality
- Prevent violence against women before it occurs
- Ensure respect for women's bodies and relationships

Our purpose:

We listen to women. We translate the evidence. We build skills and knowledge. We advocate for gender equality: We listen to and amplify women's voices; translating their experiences and what works into action. We equip our partners with the resources, knowledge and skills to embed and progress gender equality and women's health. Our partnerships, leadership and advocacy influence decision-makers and change our community for the better.

Our focus areas:

- Turning evidence into action and evaluating practice
- Engaging and influencing decision-makers
- Having an exceptional team and partnerships
- Evolving into a strong and growing organisation

Our values:

- We put women at the centre of all of our work
- We respect and welcome all people and value different perspectives
- We hold ourselves accountable through leadership and transparency
- We act with integrity and honesty in everything we do
- We pursue our vision and purpose with courage and passion

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Introduction

Women's Health and Wellbeing Barwon South West has developed a community engagement framework to guide our engagement with women across the Barwon South West region. The aim is to elevate the voices of women across the region. We will identify key regional priority groups to engage with to ensure a diverse community conversation that guides the organisation's work and informs advocacy that influences decision-makers and changes our community for the better. This background document presents best-practice evidence for community engagement that supports development of our community engagement framework. This document has been developed with the inclusion and consideration of local women's voices. Additionally, peer review was undertaken with community engagement professionals, consultants and the women's health sector to ensure the methodology reflects best-practice engagement.

Key definitions

Community Engagement: 'A genuine process of working with stakeholders and groups of people to develop relationships, build understanding and inform decision-making processes.'¹

The community engagement strategy will include multiple actors and it is important to clarify 'who they are':

Community: The women of the Barwon South West region

Stakeholders: Funding bodies, decision makers, existing and new partners

Why is our approach to community engagement different?

We take a feminist approach to community engagement and apply a gendered lens to issues that affect women's health and wellbeing. We advocate on behalf of women in the community about a range of issues at many levels, which may involve partnerships with local, regional and state stakeholders. Our community engagement strategy is

underpinned by the Socio-Ecological Model of Health and the Social Determinants of Health, meaning that we consider the complex interplay between individual women, relationships, community and societal factors.

Who is this framework for?

This document informs our partners and stakeholders on the guiding principles and evidence that underpin our engagement practices with women in our region.

What is informing this framework?

We apply best practice health promotion in all our work, including the social model of health framework, capacity building framework and addressing the social determinants of health.

Guiding documents and frameworks

- Vic Health. Participation for health: Framework for action 2009-2013
- WHO Strategy on women's health and well-being in the WHO European Region
- Socio-Ecological Model of health framework
- NSW Government Capacity Building Framework
- Engage Victoria
- International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) Framework

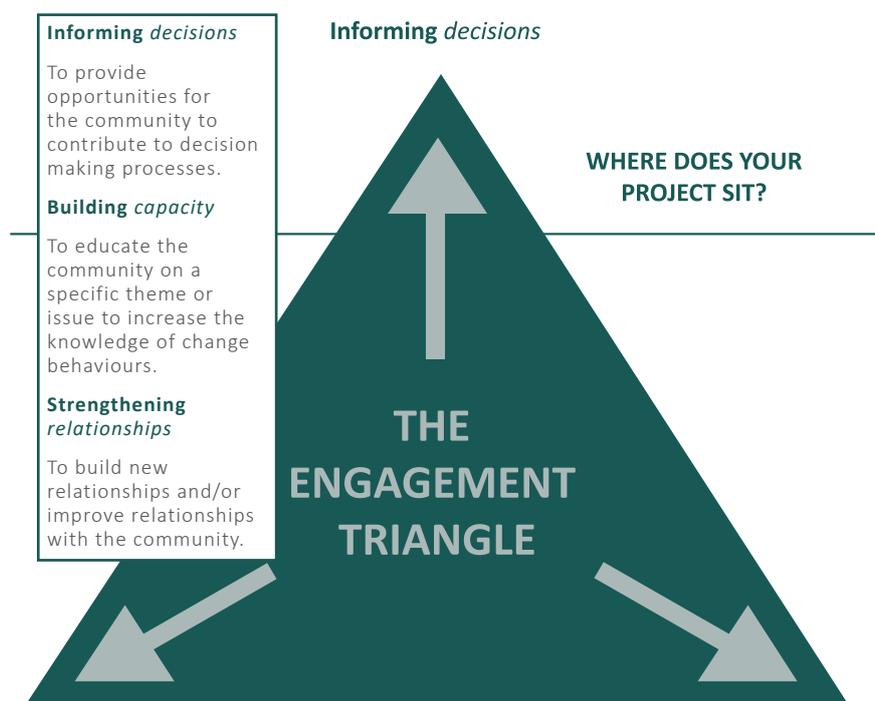
Policy setting

- Victorian State Government "Women's sexual and reproductive health: key priorities 2017-2020"
- Safe and Strong: A Victorian Gender Equality Strategy
- Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008
- Victoria public health and wellbeing plan 2019-2023
- Gender Equality Act 2020

What is community engagement?

The term 'community engagement' is often used as an umbrella term to cover the whole range of public involvement and participation to influence decision-making.

Community engagement refers to actions and processes that take place to inform decisions, build capacity or strengthen relationships with individuals or groups so that more specific interactions can then take place.



Building capacity

Strengthening relationships

Image Source: Capire (2015) Engagment Triangle

The Engagement Triangle is a spatial tool that identifies desired outcomes of engagement based on the overarching objectives of informing decisions, building capacity and strengthening relationships.² We will use the triangle in the planning stages of engagement to clarify objectives, map stakeholders, and identify appropriate tools and engagement techniques.

We will use the IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum³ as the primary guide to inform how and when engagement will occur, and the methods used. The Spectrum is an internationally recognised standard for engagement. It informs the type of engagement that will be undertaken, its purpose, commitment to the community, and the range of methods that can be used for each level of engagement.

IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum

	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GOAL	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problems, alternatives and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decision.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public issues and concerns are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision-making in the hands of the public.
PROMISE TO THE PUBLIC	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, list to and acknowledge concerns and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and issues are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for direct advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.
EXAMPLE TOOLS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fact sheets • Websites • Open houses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public comment • Focus groups • Surveys • Public meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshops • Deliberate polling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Citizen Advisory committees • Consensus building • Participatory decision-making 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Citizen juries • Ballots • Delegated decisions

The engagement methods adopted will vary, depending on the complexity of the issue, the ability to influence or inform an outcome, and the availability of resources. We will endeavour to deliver engagement that is fit for purpose.

The community engagement framework will inform the implementation of engagement activities by considering the following:

- Being clear about the purpose, objectives and scope of engagement – including being honest about what can and cannot be influenced by the engagement. The level of engagement will be refined through testing and review with stakeholders and the community;
- Identifying the women we need to engage, and developing a strategy to seek their participation that best meets their needs;
- Conducting specific engagement with under-represented women whose voices are not often heard;
- Establishing how we will manage, use, and report the engagement learnings;
- Continually improving our engagement process through monitoring and evaluation;
- Ensuring feedback is provided to community women about how we have considered and used their input.

The goal of adopting our community engagement framework is to work together to ensure women's voices are heard. The information collected from Women's Voices will shape and inform planning, policy, advocacy and funding decisions.

The framework will ensure that diverse women are engaged in issues that matter to them across the region. We value women's right to and realisation of participation as integral to achieving equity for women. We aim to increase and support opportunities for women in the Barwon South West region to participate in meaningful and authentic engagement with our organisation. Our key objective is to building equity into our practices to ensure that all women, but particularly under-represented women, have the opportunity and accessibility to participate and contribute.

What are the principles that guide this framework?

The following principles⁴ align with our organisational values and underpin engagement and consultation with community women:

Respect

- **Women's voices, knowledge and experiences are valued:** We recognise that women are the experts in their lives; we value and acknowledge women's knowledge and experiences and their contribution to the organisation and the wider community.
- **Respect for women's community participation as a right:** We believe that women's participation in decisions that affect their lives is a right, not a privilege; we work to support women's participation and capacity to influence outcomes and decisions.
- **Meaningful participation is timely:** We act to respect and support participation that occurs at a time that is viable for the women who participate. We also recognise that meaningful participation requires sufficient time to explore and share stories, ideas and concepts.

Accountability

- **Participation requires transparency and accountability:** We commit to transparency and accountability in engaging with women from the region. This includes transparency around the objectives and the level of commitment sought, and honesty about any limitations and accountability for the feedback we receive.
- **Meaningful participation requires organisational commitment:** We work to undertake a strategic and coordinated approach to participation; embracing a whole-of-organisation commitment to meaningful community consultation.
- **Lifting the voices of the local women in the region:** As an organisation in the Barwon South West region, we will advocate on behalf of regional women to promote their voices and views.

Integrity

- **Women's capacity to engage in participation is supported:** We adopt a feminist approach to participation which recognises that women's community participation is shaped by social, cultural, political and economic factors. We work to redress barriers to women's participation and to support women to engage in participation opportunities.
- **Participation that is equitable:** We act to support community participation that is equitable and that involves the mutual sharing of ideas, benefits, and opportunities.
- **Diversity is valued and acknowledged:** We recognise and value women's diversity and their experiences. We also recognise that an inclusive approach to meaningful participation requires various participation methods and opportunities.
- **Community participation is purposeful yet responsive:** We recognise that participation is an evolving process and that it requires time and commitment from stakeholders, communities and staff. We will act to ensure that participation opportunities are thoughtfully designed, purposeful, yet responsive and continue to develop.

Courage

- **Advocacy for women that are not heard:** We will advocate for women and girls in the region by strengthening and amplifying their voices.
- **Women's voices are reflected throughout the work:** Engagement is ongoing and embedded in all aspects of our work.

Our community engagement framework

	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
PARTICIPATION GOAL	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problems, alternatives and/or solutions	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decision.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public issues and concerns are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision-making in the hands of the public.
CONTRACT WITH THE PUBLIC	We will keep women in the community and/or partners informed	We will keep women in the community and/or partners informed, listen to, and acknowledge concerns and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision	We will work with women in the community and/or partners to ensure that concerns and issues are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will look to women in the community and/or partners for direct advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate their advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	WWE will implement what women in the community and/or partners decide.
EXAMPLE APPROACHES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Email • Media release • Newsletter • Social media • WHWBSW website • Fact sheet and FAQs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Written submissions • Surveys • Advisory committee • Forum • Workshops • Consultation platform 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Municipal PHWB plans • Parliamentary enquiries • Royal commissions • Legislative review • State gov strategic planning • Gender Equality Act 2020 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus group • Facilitated workshop • Advisory committee • Working group • Steering group 	For projects or opportunities where final decision-making is in the hands of the community
EXAMPLE TASKS	Informing the public about our current work	Contributing to our current work	Informing our future work	Co-creation of strategies	

Implementing the framework

What are the levels of community engagement?

The overall aim of the engagement is important; it will define the choice of appropriate context and processes.⁵ The levels include: inform, consult, involve, collaborate and empower.

Inform: When the main purpose is to provide information, or inform about a problem, topic, concern, service, outcome, event, or result (may be appropriate to use media communication). No opportunity to influence decision-making or outcomes; therefore, it is important not to raise expectations that involvement will be greater than this.

Consult: When the main purpose is to gather information, feedback, opinions, and ideas on a predefined topic/issue. Feedback will be considered by the organisation in making decisions. The use of a low-to-medium resource method of consultation may be adequate.

Involve: When the main purpose requires an exchange of information, and are actively involved in helping to define topics, shape ideas and develop alternatives. Active participants are involved in developing ideas and suggestions; decision-making is shared by the organisation and the women consulted with. This is most likely to occur in face-to-face meetings within a supportive environment.

Collaborate: To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision, including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.

Empower: To place final decision-making in the hands of the public.

Communication

The WHWBSW Consultation and Engagement Strategy is aligned with the WHWBSW Communications Strategy. The Communications Strategy works within the level of 'Inform'.

Why WHWBSW would engage?

WHWBSW will engage women (and stakeholders) about their experiences at various times, depending on the nature of the issue being addressed and the decisions to be informed.

Examples of the consultation WHWBSW may undertake with women include:

- Contributing to WHWBSW current work (priority areas)
- Informing WHWBSW future work (Integrated Health Promotion Plan or Strategic Plan)
- Advocacy projects

Engage women about their experience to inform WHWBSW response and actions in relation to:

- Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plans
- Parliamentary enquiries
- Royal commissions
- Legislative review
- State government strategic planning
- Gender Equality Act 2020

The WHWBSW consultation process may be required for a once-only issue, for a short-period of time, an extended period, or an ongoing consultative process. WHWBSW will clearly communicate expectations and objectives prior to the consultation process, as any form of consultation may raise expectations that cannot be met in short time periods.

When WHWBSW would not consult

There are times WHWBSW would not consult due to time constraints or it being unlikely that women's participation would create change. Other times where WHWBSW would not consult, include:

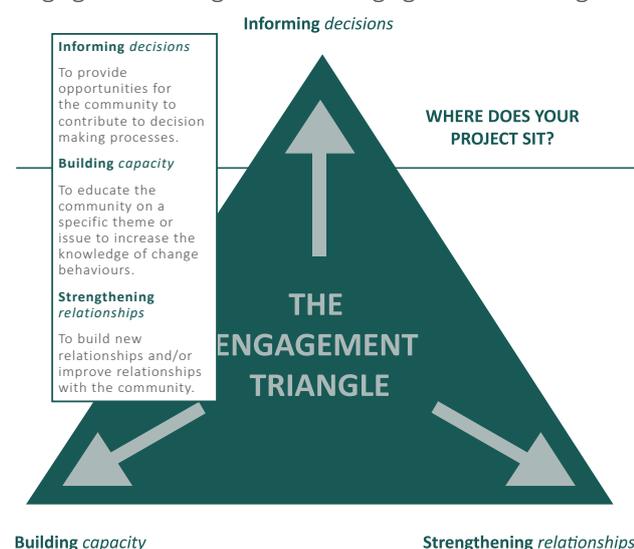
- The decision has already been made
- There is no opportunity for the community to influence the decision
- There is not clarity about the purpose of the consultation
- The capacity is not there in the community
- There is a lack of an existing relationship (trust) and consultation may compound this rather than strengthen the relationship
- There is a risk of over consultation or consultation burn out.

What are the benefits of community engagement?

The benefits of community engagement are different for the individual, the community and the organisation, as outlined:

What are the benefits for WHWBSW?

The benefits of WHWBSW community engagement align to the Engagement Triangle.



Informing decisions:

As a small organisation with an ambitious vision for change, we must identify the issues that impact the women we represent. Through our engagement we can identify and analyse the issues faced by women across our region; informing and guiding our advocacy and decision-making processes. We advise and influence all levels of government to drive meaningful policy change for women. This way of working is a commitment to representing the women of our region with authenticity and accountability.

Building capacity:

We support our partners and the community to address the factors that shape a women's experience and impact their health. We often work with local government, health providers and service organisations to advocate and progress women's health. Our engagement with women across our region builds individual and organisational capacities by listening, amplifying and translating a women's lived experience into action.

Strengthening relationships:

It is fundamental that we build and sustain relationships with the community women we represent, our stakeholders and partners to progress gender quality and drive positive change with and for women. Our organisation benefits from building strong relationship with women across the region – engaging with women and understanding their 'lived' experience, and ensuring that local diverse voices are heard and accurately represented, will assist with improving relationships within the community.

What are the benefits to the individual (human capital)?

Research shows that women participating in community engagement may experience a positive impact on self-perceived personal empowerment, joint learning and sensemaking of community impacts and issues, and an increased understanding of health issues and local priorities.^{6,7}

The empowerment and participation theory links an individual's wellbeing with meaningful participation in all aspects of one's life.⁸ Community engagement, then, provides an opportunity where women can contribute meaningfully to issues that affect their lives, and develop functional capabilities that enable them to participate fully.

We consulted with women across the Barwon South West region to listen to their experiences of community consultation and what benefits they gain from participation. The individual benefits women expressed were feelings of validation from being heard and having a voice at the table to freely express a 'lived' experience. Some of the women expressed that participating in community consultation was a meaningful way to contribute to social change without having to do all the work:

"And for me, I was thinking, participating in community consultation is useful because it's a meaningful way of contributing to change without having to do all the work." (Participant 2)

"It acknowledges 'lived' experience and I think that's what community consultation is most valuable in securing is the expertise of someone that has the 'lived' experience, because, as we've heard today, sometimes the supports and the experts aren't able to, you know, offer the actual support that is needed because they're not the expert of that situation." (Participant 1)

What are the benefits to the community (social capital)?

The voices of women consulted will be used, at times, to inform policy or royal commissions – their experiences will contribute to the greater body of evidence that can lead to wider societal change. It promotes advocacy that not only works to raise awareness but passionate, locally-informed voices can be heard, providing opportunities to drive social change. By encouraging community participation, it enables and influences stakeholders with government, political or funding power to implement policies that consider the needs, voices and visions of local women on issues that matter to them. Community consultation is important because it is, primarily, part of a dialogue where organisations and communities can make decisions that positively affect human capital.⁹

Through our consultation process, local women identified that a benefit of participating in consultation was being able to speak on behalf of their community and/or advocating for others in similar situations that do not have a voice at the table.

Community consultation acknowledges the expertise of a women's lived experience that can be used to support others and influence change:

"Maybe there are many people are not only asked like we are on the Roundtable, suffering from situations like similar to us and they still need a support so we are like we're in this session we can just transfer our voice to you and that might be a hope for them, like to find out something or to set up something in the future." (Participant 3)

"for me, I think, sharing my lived experience and knowing that it will be used in a way that influence change is incredibly meaningful." (Participant 2)

"...to be involved in something that is as big as what I'm going to be living in and what the future generations are going to be living in so it's very important to me" (Participant 4)

⁶ Bowen et al. (2010). *When Suits Meet Roots: The Antecedents and Consequences of Community Engagement Strategy*. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 95(2), 297-318.

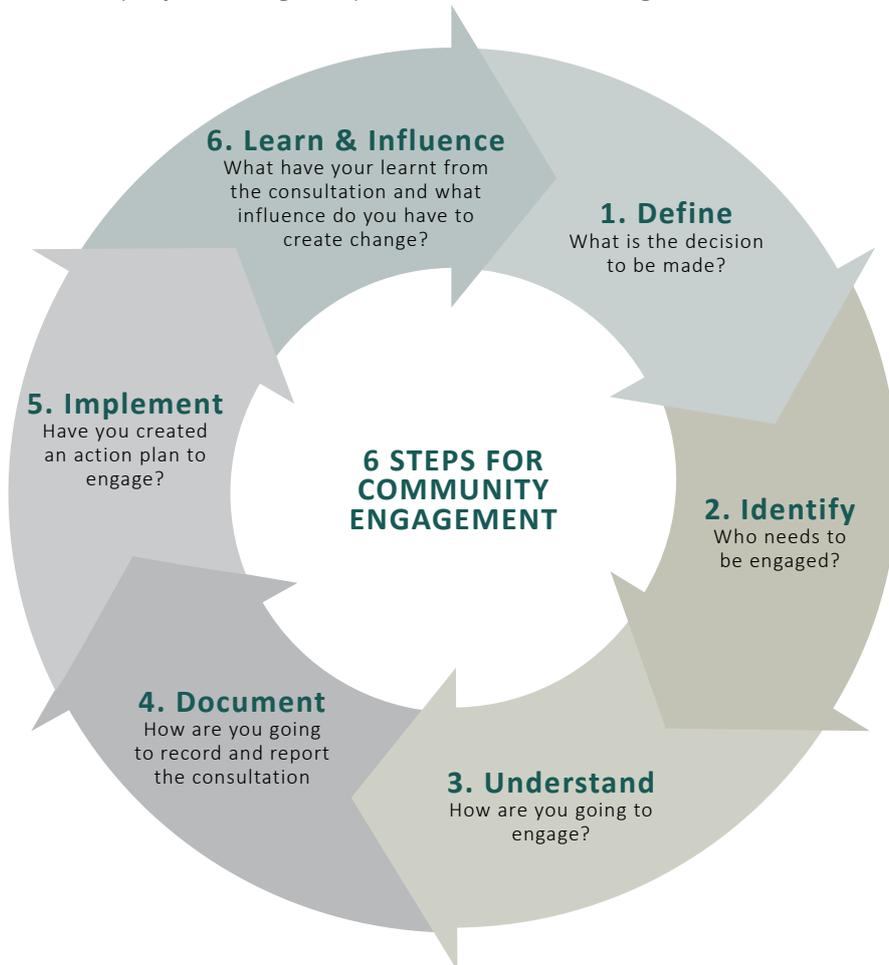
⁷ Attree et al. (2011). *The experience of community engagement for individuals: a rapid review of evidence*. *Health and Social Care in the Community*, 19(3), 250-260

⁸ Pettit, J. (2012). *Empowerment and Participation: bridging the gap between understanding and practice*

⁹ Human capital is defined by the OECD as the knowledge, skills, competencies and attributes embodied in individuals that facilitate the creation of personal, social and economic well-being.

Our Community Engagement Framework

We will always begin by establishing a full understanding of the issue or project using the process below as our guide:



An integral part of this process is to define our understanding of the project, identify our knowledge gaps, the objective of engagement (what we need to find out) and what stakeholders and the community can influence (or not influence – the non-negotiable elements) before developing the questions we need answered/ information we need to seek.

Our community engagement process is outlined in the following diagram:

