

THE CITY OF
GREATER GEELONG

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT POLICT REVIEW

ENGAGEMENT REPORT

SEPTEMBER 2025

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Executive Summary

The City undertook a hybrid engagement approach to capture the experiences and views of the Greater Geelong community in relation to the City's Community Engagement Policy that was under review. Participants were able to provide feedback through online surveys, direct outreach through email and written correspondence, as well as some face-to-face and physical interactions.

Feedback on the City's Community Engagement Policy highlighted both strengths and areas for improvement. The strongest call for improvement was for greater transparency, stronger feedback loops, and clearer reporting to build trust and show how input influences decisions. Concerns were raised about some engagement methods being perceived as tokenistic or predetermined, and a perceived reliance on digital platforms seen as a limiting participation. Respondents recommended an expansion of inclusive and deliberative approaches, such as co-design and broader use of face-to-face engagement to compliment digital channels of engagement.

Participants also emphasised the need for improved communication, accessibility, and inclusion to help increase reach and awareness of engagement opportunities. Suggestions included multi-channel outreach beyond social media, the use of simple and accessible language, and tailored strategies for underrepresented groups, including multilingual resources and disability-accessible formats. Some respondents also raised concerns about locality bias, while others recognised the City's strengths in consultation frequency, youth engagement, and efforts to include the community into its decision making.

Introduction

PROJECT BACKGROUND

Over several months in 2025 from January – August (including a formal community engagement period between 16 June – 3 August) we invited community, City employees, councillors and key stakeholders, to be part of conversations online, in person, and in community settings about what meaningful engagement looks like and how it can work better for everyone.

ENGAGEMENT PURPOSE

The purpose of this engagement was to invite the community to contribute to a review and update of the City's Community Engagement Policy. This policy outlines how and when input is sought from the community, and how that input informs decision-making processes. It demonstrates the City's commitment to inclusive and transparent engagement, in alignment with the principles of the **Local Government Act 2020**.

The existing policy, developed in 2021, is approaching its expiry in 2025. This presented a timely opportunity to refresh the policy to better reflect the evolving needs, expectations, and values of our community.

The engagement aimed to ensure the revised policy is clear, practical, and accessible - empowering all community members to understand and use it confidently. Most importantly, we want the policy to support the development of meaningful and respectful conversations between the City and its community, fostering trust and collaboration.

Through this process, we gathered insights, experiences, and feedback from diverse voices. We hope that by doing this, we will be able to shape a policy that truly represents our community and strengthen our shared commitment to community engagement to support decision making.

ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report presents the findings from the community engagement process undertaken to inform the update of the City's Community Engagement Policy. It is intended to support decision-making by councillors and the Executive Leadership Team (ELT), and to demonstrate to the community how their input was captured, considered, and used to shape the revised policy.

The report outlines the planning and delivery of the engagement, summarises the feedback received, and highlights key outcomes. It also serves to demonstrate transparency and accountability in how community input has shaped the development of the revised policy.

How we engaged

SNAPSHOT

The primary method of engagement was via the City's online Have Your Say (HYS) platform for a six-week period and was supported by employee engagement and workshops with Council, Youth Council, Wadawurrung Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation, Barwon Network of Neighbourhood Houses and written feedback from Cultura.

In-person engagement occurred at four events across the municipality:

- Tastes of Geelong
- Nature Festival
- Cultura Refugee Week Expo
- Korayn Birralelee engagement blitz

The formal community engagement period was between 16 June and 3 August for a total of 48 days.

Have Your Say online platform

An online HYS project page was designed to provide multiple options for community to submit feedback which included:

- Full Survey (35 non mandatory questions including 11 open text questions)
- Short Survey (10 non mandatory questions, no open text)
- Quick poll (single question survey)

Survey

The community was able to complete one of two surveys that asked questions relating to:

- What is their current experience engaging with the City like?
- What are the main challenges when engaging with the City?
- What would encourage them to engage more with the City?

The full survey provided a combination of both qualitative (open text) and categorical (multiple choice, drop down scale-type questions) inputs, while the short only provided categorical inputs. There was a total of 107 responses across both surveys.

In-person engagement

The Community Engagement team had conversations with community members from across the municipality at

four community events. Two 'sticky dot' activities were undertaken at each event, asking the following two questions:

- What makes it hard for you to share feedback on City projects?
- How do you prefer to share your feedback?

The events attended were:

- Cultura Refugee Week Expo, Norlane – 19 June
- Tastes Winter Festival, Johnstone Park – 20 June
- Geelong Nature Festival Family Fun Day, Fyansford – 12 July
- Korayn Birralelee Family Centre Engagement Blitz, Corio – 1 August

Community members at the events were also encouraged to complete the online survey.

Stakeholder engagement

Stakeholder engagement took place over a six-month period and included:

- Councillor Workshop – 18 February
- Wadawurrung Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation Cultural Consultation – 12 March
- Barwon Network of Neighbourhood Houses meeting - 24 June
- Youth Council Workshop – 28 July

Employee survey

All City employees were invited to complete a short survey (8 non mandatory questions, including 4 open text questions) with a direct call out to officers and teams involved in community engagement, specifically the City's Engagement Champions.

Who we engaged

WHO WE PLANNED TO ENGAGE

We aimed to involve a wide and diverse group across the community, including individuals, City employees, and key stakeholders, by attending local events, partnering with community organisations, and offering multiple ways for people to participate.

Engagement with First Nations voices

As part of the review of the Community Engagement Policy, the City sought to actively hear from our Greater Geelong First Nations community. This was more than a policy update – it was intended as an opportunity to deepen our commitment to ensuring First Nations peoples have a genuine voice in shaping how the City engages with community.

To support this, we invited internal stakeholders to help us connect with First Nations individuals, organisations, and networks by promoting the engagement process and sharing access to our suite of collateral (hard copy surveys, flyers, drop boxes, and an online survey). We also approached Wathaurong Co-op representatives directly. Despite these efforts, we received limited First Nations participation in this round of engagement. We acknowledge this as a significant gap and an area where we must do better.

The Wadawurrung Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation (TOAC) provided formal feedback on the current policy, which will be incorporated into the draft.

We remain committed to strengthening this important relationship while also building stronger, ongoing connections with the broader First Nations community across Greater Geelong.

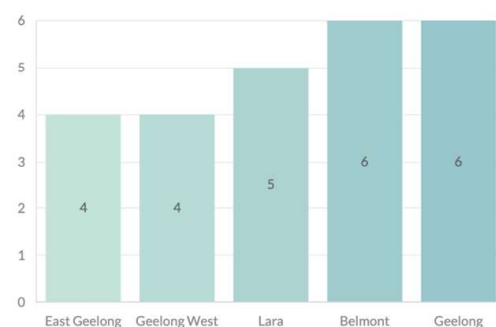
PARTICIPATION

Most of the feedback was provided through the two surveys hosted through the Have Your Say website. There were 56 responses to the short survey and 51 responses to the full survey. Feedback was also collected through an in-person 'sticky dot' activity with over 100 people interacting. Data was also collected from City employees and at stakeholder workshops and meeting with councillors, the Youth Council, Wadawurrung Traditional Aboriginal Owners Corporation, Neighbourhood Houses and Cultura.

DEMOGRAPHICS

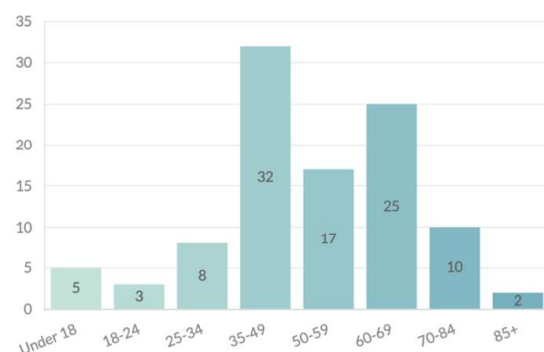
The highest levels of response from the combined surveys were from people who lived in the following suburbs:

- Geelong (5.6%)
- Belmont (5.6%)
- Lara (4.6%)
- Geelong West (3.7%)
- East Geelong (3.7%)

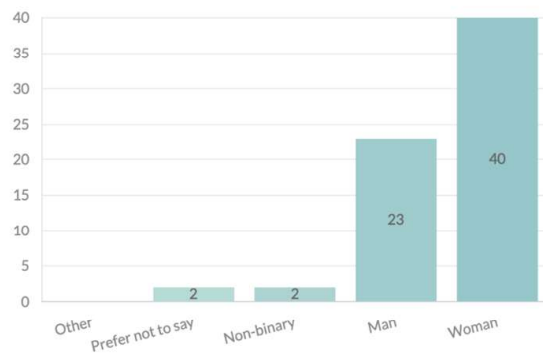


Most combined survey responses were from those aged between 35 and 69, with the following breakdown:

- 35-49yo (29.9%)
- 50-59yo (15.8%)
- 60-69yo (23.3%)



From those who self-reported their gender in the surveys, women were the predominant gender amongst respondents, with roughly a 2:1 ratio of women to men:



What we asked and what we heard

SUMMARY OVERVIEW OF KEY FINDINGS

Community feedback on the City's Community Engagement Policy highlighted both areas of strength and opportunities for improvement.

Across the consultation, the strongest message was the need for **greater transparency and stronger feedback loops**. Survey respondents expressed mixed levels of trust in the City's commitment to community feedback. When asked whether they agree with the statement, "I trust that the City of Greater Geelong takes community feedback seriously," 36% agreed or strongly agreed, 32% were neutral, and 33% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Many participants felt unsure whether their contributions had been considered, or how feedback influenced final decisions. The perceived lack of visibility created a sense of disengagement and mistrust, particularly when decisions appeared to contradict consultation outcomes or when certain groups were seen to hold disproportionate influence. Respondents recommended clearer reporting, ongoing updates throughout project lifecycles, and explicit explanations of what can and cannot be influenced to strengthen confidence in the process.

Concerns were also raised about **engagement methodology**, with some community members perceiving current processes as tokenistic or predetermined. Survey design was described as narrow or leading at times, with limited scope for nuanced responses. Short consultation periods and reliance on digital platforms were also seen as barriers for participation. In response, participants advocated for more inclusive and deliberative approaches, including co-design methods, broader use of face-to-face engagement, and more consistent application of ethical and transparent practices.

Awareness and communication emerged as another key theme, with participants emphasising that current approaches do not always reach the full breadth of the community. Reliance on social media was seen as excluding older residents, marginalised groups, or those less digitally engaged. Respondents called for multi-channel communication strategies that combine digital tools with more traditional methods such as radio, printed materials, letterbox drops, and local meetings. They also stressed the importance of clear, simple language and user-friendly tools, noting that accessible and easy-to-read information would better support busy residents and those with different levels of literacy.

The theme of **accessibility and inclusion** was strongly reinforced. Many participants felt that the voices of vulnerable, disadvantaged, or underrepresented groups

were often overlooked, while smaller but louder groups sometimes had more influence. Respondents suggested strategies such as multilingual resources, outreach through local organisations, tailored events for diverse cultural groups, and accessible formats for people with disabilities. More broadly, there was a call to ensure engagement processes reflect the city's diversity, making them more representative and equitable.

Finally, feedback highlighted perceptions of **locality bias**, with some community members feeling their suburbs or neighbourhoods were less valued or consulted compared to central areas. At the same time, several respondents expressed appreciation for the City's consistent efforts to engage the community, noting strengths in the frequency of consultation, the clarity of materials provided, and the overall transparency of the policy document. The City's efforts to engage young people and alignment with best practice were also acknowledged as positive steps to build on.

BREAKDOWN OF KEY FINDINGS

Below are the key themes that emerged from the data after performing thematic analysis from the qualitative data and categorical data.

Feedback loops and transparency

Feedback loops and transparency emerged as the strongest theme across community responses, and this was also reflected in Q24 of the full survey where the option “I can see how my feedback is going to help the project” being the top response for people when asked how they would be encouraged to provide feedback to the council:

Many participants expressed concern that their contributions were not meaningfully acknowledged or reflected in council decisions. A recurring issue was the absence of clear communication about how feedback was considered “**The outcomes to some my feedback have been successful but it’s unclear if council changed in response to feedback received or other circumstances**” leading to uncertainty about whether community input had influenced outcomes at all. This lack of visibility created a perception of disengagement and mistrust, where residents felt ignored, selectively represented, or sidelined during decision-making processes.

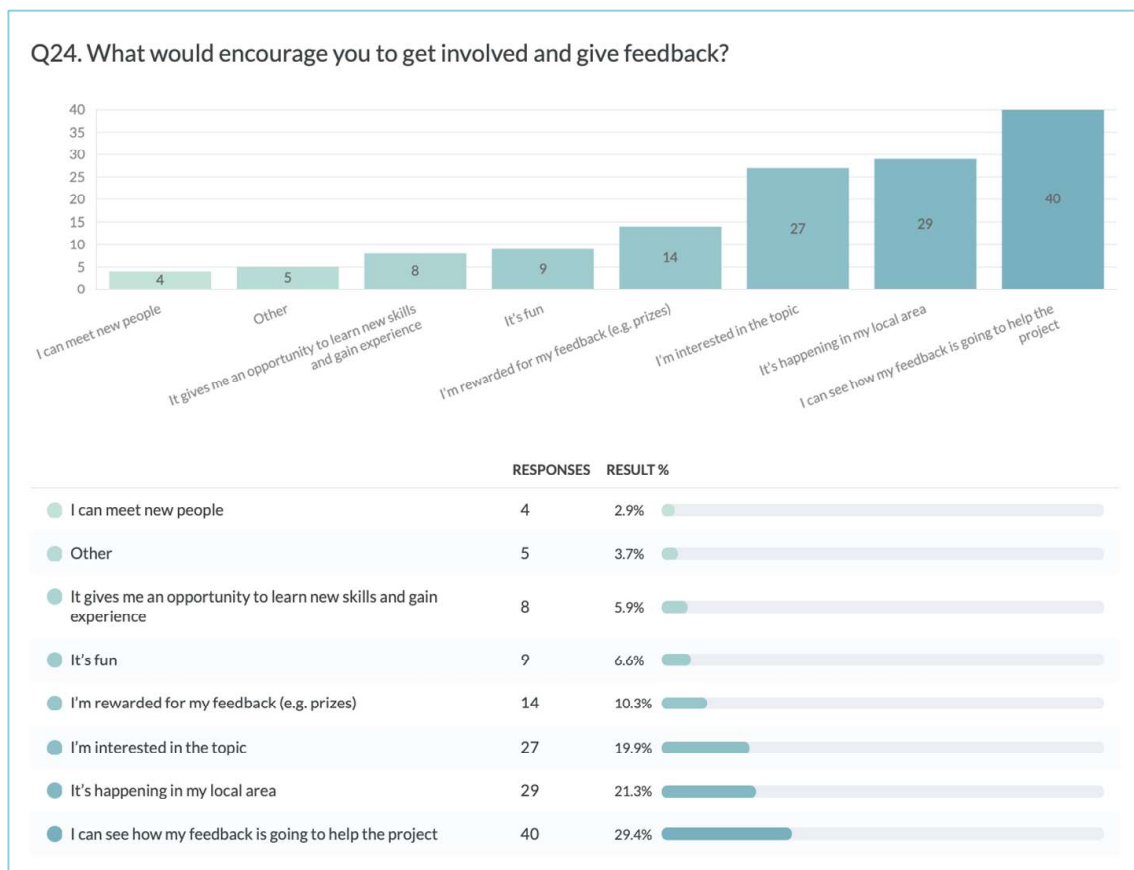
Participants also highlighted the opacity of decision-

making structures, noting that it was often unclear how responses were weighted or balanced against other factors “**I think COGG has mechanisms for listening to public opinion but (they are) not acting upon what appears to be what people want or popular opinion.**”

Several respondents raised concerns about the influence of special interest groups and private lobbying, suggesting these voices sometimes held disproportionate sway over council decisions compared to broader community feedback. The absence of transparent explanations of council processes, including how budgets and priorities are determined, added to a sense that decision-making was misaligned with community expectations.

To address these concerns, respondents recommended more robust and ongoing feedback loops, rather than one-off consultations before or after a process “**Email updates as the project progresses. You are required to sign up to follow a project then you don’t hear anything often until it’s all done and dusted**”.

Suggestions included providing regular updates during project lifecycles, publishing clear consultation reports that detail how feedback was considered, and setting clearer expectations about the purpose, scope, and budget of each engagement. By improving transparency and accountability, the City was urged to foster greater trust and demonstrate that community voices are not only heard but actively shape outcomes.



Engagement methodology

Engagement Methodology was a focus for respondents, with many respondents questioning whether current consultation processes are genuine or tokenistic “...**feel the outcomes are often pre-determined and the way feedback is presented is shaped to match the outcomes.**”. A recurring perception was that outcomes were predetermined, with surveys and feedback mechanisms designed to align with decisions already made. This led to frustration among participants, who felt their input carried little influence and that opportunities to shape outcomes were limited. The sense that engagement served more as a “box-ticking” exercise than a meaningful dialogue undermined confidence in the process.

Survey design and methodology were criticised for restricting genuine input “**Questions on surveys seemed worded to deliver desired outcomes rather than explore options. Some surveys seem to avoid obvious questions.**” Respondents noted that questions were often limited in scope or prevented nuanced responses, making it difficult for the community to provide comprehensive feedback. Short consultation periods, reliance on online platforms, and methods that excluded those with limited time or resources further compounded accessibility issues. Participants called for more inclusive approaches that catered to different preferences and circumstances, including randomised sampling, non-council-led forums, and opportunities for face-to-face engagement.

In addition to structural concerns, participants highlighted

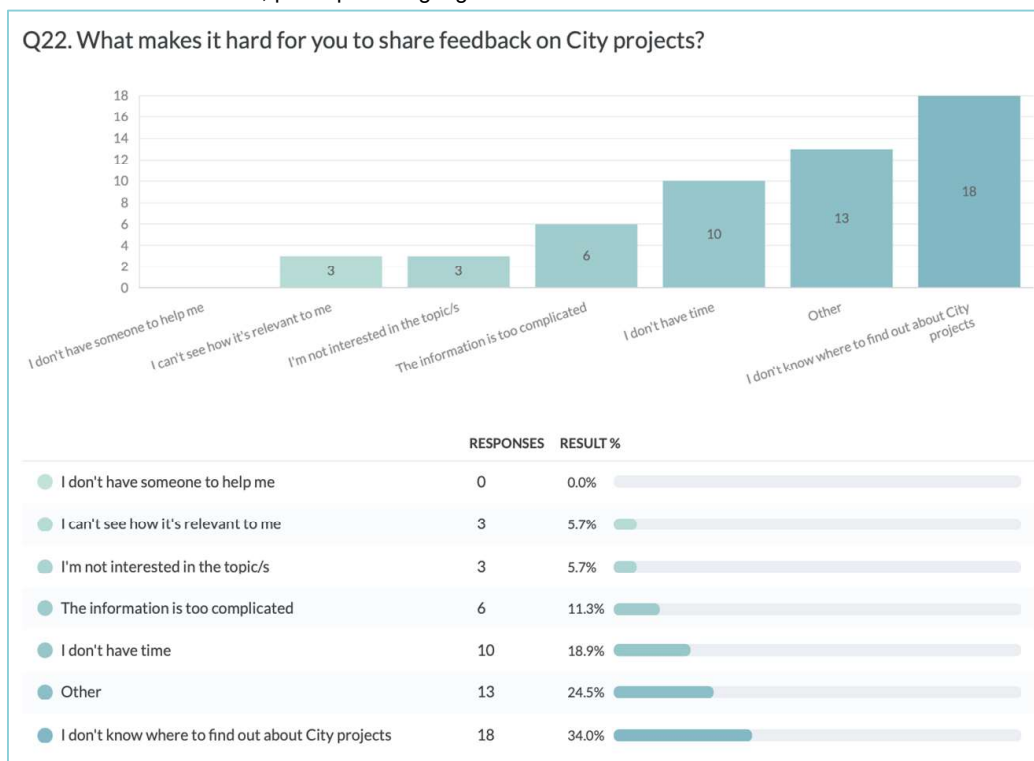
the need for greater transparency, ethical practices, and deliberative engagement. They advocated for clearer communication about how stakeholders are identified and included. Calls for co-design and deeper deliberative methods reflected a desire for collaboration rather than just consultation “**It would be good to see investment in more meaningful conversations, including proper deliberative engagement, rather branding normal workshops as being deliberative processes**”.

Suggestions also included a more consistent approach to communication, and greater use of multi-channel engagement. Overall, the feedback emphasised that genuine, transparent, and inclusive engagement methods are essential to rebuilding community trust.

Awareness and communication

Awareness and Communication was identified as a challenge in the City’s current engagement approach. In Question 22 of the long version online survey, the most common reason people found it hard to share feedback was because they “**don’t know where to find out about City projects**”.

Many participants felt that communication strategies were not reaching the full breadth of the community, with some community members citing a reliance on social media seen as excluding older residents, marginalised groups, and those less digitally engaged “**You need to make sure there are diverse ways of responding plus...**” and “**Advertise in multiple different formats. Social media and radio do not reach everyone**”. Respondents called for the use of diverse and accessible channels, including



letterbox drops, local radio, community meetings, and translated materials, to ensure broader and more inclusive participation. The need for plain English, clear visuals, and simplified language was also strongly emphasised to make complex information easier to understand **“Plain English versions, use of visuals and clear headings and subheadings to make content easy to scan. Dot points for key messages, and even consider the use of video as a tool to present information”**.

Concerns were also raised about the clarity, timeliness, and accessibility of engagement opportunities. Participants noted that awareness of consultations was often limited, with people only discovering opportunities late or after decisions had already been made. There were repeated calls for proactive awareness campaigns, clearer timelines, and more consistent updates so that community members could meaningfully contribute before policies or projects were finalised. Online tools such as the Have Your Say website could be improved, with some community members finding it confusing and difficult to navigate, reinforcing the need for more user-friendly digital platforms.

Improving the City's presence and visibility was seen as critical to building trust and engagement **“Better community communication- having a approachable council, not hidden away.”**. Suggestions included greater face-to-face interaction, more geographically distributed meetings across all neighbourhoods, and stronger follow-up after consultations to show how input was considered. Participants also wanted clearer lines of communication with decision-makers, quicker and more responsive feedback loops, and a more approachable council presence overall. By adopting a multi-channel, inclusive, and transparent communication strategy, council was encouraged to create greater awareness of engagement processes and ensure that all voices in the community have the opportunity to be heard.

Accessibility and inclusion

Accessibility and Inclusion emerged as a central concern with community members, with some respondents feeling that current engagement methods are not representative of different cohorts. Feedback suggested that the voices of vulnerable, disadvantaged, and underrepresented groups are often overlooked, while small but vocal interest groups appear to have disproportionate influence **“Listen to the community instead of giving in to developers”**. This imbalance contributed to a perception that the City is out of step with broader community sentiment, leading to frustration and reduced confidence in the engagement process.

Participants highlighted the need for more inclusive and accessible practices, including the use of multilingual resources, plain language, and formats suitable for people with disabilities. Concerns were also raised about barriers

created by online-only consultations, with many noting that the *Have Your Say* platform often favours those with the time, literacy, and resources to participate **“However it took me 2 or 3 goes of reading the letter in detail to fully understand what it was about... Being busy, I decided at that point not to participate”**. Respondents advocated for targeted outreach strategies, such as community events, partnerships with local organisations, and tailored approaches for different age groups and cultural communities, to ensure all voices can contribute meaningfully.

Suggestions also emphasised the importance of improving transparency and communication channels. Community members called for clearer dialogue with decision-makers, regular updates, and more opportunities for face-to-face interaction **“Do it before you have made decisions or spent money..”**, alongside more diverse and accessible communication materials in public spaces such as libraries. There was strong support for expanding inclusive events and activities, particularly those for multicultural groups and people with disabilities. By broadening participation and designing engagement processes that reflect the city's diversity, the City was urged to ensure its decisions are more representative, equitable, and trusted.

Locality bias

Locality bias was raised by some respondents as a concern, with some community members feeling that City engagement, investment, and responsiveness are unevenly distributed across Greater Geelong. There was a perception for some that they were being overlooked in favour of central areas **“Maybe involve all greater geelong council areas and the residents as well”**. They cited poor communication, a lack of local meetings, and limited opportunities to contribute to decision-making as evidence of this imbalance. Local knowledge offered by residents was also seen as undervalued, with participants reporting that their input was frequently dismissed or ignored.

WHAT WE ASKED

The following summaries are a further breakdown of the key themes, analysed from responses to the qualitative (open text) questions asked in the full survey in the HYS online platform. The categorical question responses can be found in the appendix.

Q4: Why didn't it meet your expectations?

- This question was only posed to respondents if they responded to the previous question “How was your experience providing feedback?” with the response option “didn't meet my expectations”.

Community members expressed frustration with both the design of surveys and the broader engagement approach. Some respondents felt that survey questions were **leading, constrained, or inconsistent**, limiting the ability to provide genuine feedback. For example, one person noted that **“questions are limited and leading, often covering several factors that don’t match to a single response option.”**

A recurring theme was the **lack of feedback loops and transparency**. Several people reported submitting input but not receiving acknowledgment or updates on how their contributions were used. One respondent described it as feeling like **“...a black hole – I provided feedback but I received no responses.”** Others noted disappointment that they did not see changes resulting from their engagement, reinforcing a perception that input was not always fully considered.

Some participants also raised concerns about **limited opportunities for meaningful engagement**, with a sense that activities relied too heavily on surveys rather than providing space for genuine deliberation. A few felt that engagement was promoted mainly through social media, which excluded parts of the community. Others pointed out that **local issues were overlooked or dismissed**.

Overall, the responses reflect an interest in more transparent, inclusive, and responsive engagement processes—where questions allow for nuance, community voices are acknowledged, and outcomes are clearly communicated.

Q7: How well do you think the City listens to and involves the community in decisions?

Responses to this question reflected a wide spectrum of views, from frustration with consultation processes to acknowledgement of positive steps being taken. A number of participants felt that while the City claims to listen, opportunities to influence decisions are limited and often shaped through surveys with pre-determined questions. One respondent commented that **“surveys with poorly thought out questions are not going to feel engaging or meaningful to participants.”**

A recurring theme was the lack of **feedback loops and transparency**. Several participants said it was not always clear how responses were weighted or how community input influenced the final decision. For example, one noted that they were **“very disappointed that you asked for feedback... then took no notice of the responses you received.”**

Some community members also raised concerns about **accessibility and inclusion**, suggesting that disadvantaged or less represented groups were not adequately heard, while those with more time or

resources were overrepresented. One participant observed that **“the Have-Your-Say process heavily favours those who have time, literacy and resources to participate.”** Suggestions included greater outreach to multicultural groups, younger residents, and those less engaged online to ensure policies meet diverse community needs.

While much of the feedback was critical, there were also positive reflections. A few respondents praised initiatives such as open council meetings and Friday internet updates, and another commented that **“Council’s communication about engagements I have seen so far are really clear and concise, help people understand what they can influence and what is fixed already.”** Some also acknowledged that councillors and officers were motivated by the broader interests of the City.

Overall, the responses indicate a need for more transparent decision-making, clearer communication of how feedback is used, and more inclusive engagement methods that allow for meaningful participation across a broader cross-section of the community.

Q14: How can we better provide clear and easy-to-understand information?

Community members highlighted the importance of clear, accessible, and relevant communication to support engagement. A recurring theme was the need for **plain English and simplified explanations**, with participants noting that technical or policy terms can act as barriers. One respondent explained that **“the policy should be written in plain English... a regular person wouldn’t understand what participatory and deliberative forms of engagement means.”** Another emphasised that **“more simple language and clear explanations”** would help ensure information is accessible to all.

Participants also expressed a preference for **information that is concise and easy to scan**, recognising that some people in the community are time-poor. One participant shared that after receiving a detailed consultation letter, **“it took me 2 or 3 goes of reading... I decided at that point not to participate... I value succinct messages and... communications that are short, clear and easy to skim and scan.”** Suggestions included dot points for key messages, use of visuals, clear headings, and even video as a tool to support understanding.

There was also strong support for **multi-channel communication**, with respondents recommending face-to-face meetings in different neighbourhoods, links between engagement information and council minutes, and the use of both digital and traditional channels such as radio, newspapers, and mail. One person suggested including **“buttons”** or links alongside questions in surveys

to provide additional background context for those who need it.

Overall, respondents encouraged the City to adopt a **flexible, multi-format approach** to communication that combines simple, plain language with visuals and accessible formats, while also linking engagement information more clearly to Council's decision-making processes.

Q15: How can we ensure we are seeking feedback at the right time in the process?

Participants emphasised the importance of **seeking input early**, before key decisions are made or resources are committed. Several felt that engagement often comes too late, leaving little opportunity for meaningful influence. As one respondent put it, **"do it before you have made decisions or spent money..."** Another noted that engagement should occur **"before the draft documents so as to influence their development,"** rather than after extensive work has already been completed.

Respondents also highlighted the value of **ongoing and transparent engagement throughout project stages**. Suggestions included setting out clear timelines, showing what aspects are open for input, and keeping the community updated as decisions progress. One person explained that **"if you always know where you're at, recognise when you need to engage, and do that at each stage you will get the feedback you need and the community will feel heard."**

Several comments pointed to the need for **stronger relationships with community organisations and leaders**, particularly where proposals could impact vulnerable groups. As one respondent suggested, **"by developing relationships with community organisations... you can quickly learn whether a proposal impacts unfairly on vulnerable people."**

There were also practical suggestions for **broadening awareness and accessibility**, such as using community meetings, shopping centre drop-ins, and online platforms to increase visibility. One respondent felt it should be made clearer when decisions are still open, noting that **"it often appears that decisions have already been made, and the 'engagement' is just a governance box ticking exercise."**

Overall, the responses point to a desire for engagement that is **earlier, more transparent, and continuous**, with clearly defined opportunities for community influence at each stage of decision-making.

Q16: How can we ensure we are reaching a diverse mix of people in our community?

Participants emphasised that ensuring diversity in engagement requires both **broader outreach methods** and **tailored approaches** for specific groups. Many noted the importance of using multiple channels to share information, pointing out that reliance on digital tools alone risks excluding parts of the community. One respondent suggested that **"pamphlet drops reach most... posters in libraries, community hubs, and shopping centres"** and remain essential, particularly for older residents. Another emphasised that **"advertise in multiple different formats. Social media and radio do not reach everyone."**

Some respondents encouraged the City to **meet people where they are**, engaging through existing community events, forums, and organisations, rather than relying solely on council-led sessions. As one participant put it, **"by meeting community where we are at on key issues we care about... rather than expecting us to come to Council-led sessions."** This included suggestions to strengthen connections with faith-based groups, multicultural groups, and people living with disability, with targeted events and outreach seen as key to inclusion.

Others pointed to the importance of **representative and unbiased participation**. This included calls for better demographic data collection and the use of stakeholder mapping to ensure that all affected groups are identified and invited. One participant recommended that **"ensure you have a thorough stakeholder matrix for each engagement and consider who is interested, impacted or affected... and that each group has suitable engagement methods to reach them."** Concerns were also raised about panels or formats that might inadvertently exclude certain groups, such as working parents or those with limited availability during the day.

A smaller number of responses highlighted tensions around whose voices should be prioritised, with some suggesting limits on who should be consulted, while others argued for more inclusive practices such as multicultural events that reflect the City's growing diversity.

Overall, the feedback underscores a desire for **multi-channel communication, inclusive engagement design, and stronger outreach to underrepresented groups**, to ensure that engagement reflects the diversity of the community.

Q17: How can we be clearer about how much community input can influence decisions?

Participants emphasised that clarity and transparency are key to building trust in the engagement process. Many called for **clearer framing at the outset** of what can and cannot be influenced, along with explanations for why

certain elements are fixed. One respondent suggested that the City should **“better frame the objectives and options under consideration – as well as any parameters... which will not be considered and why.”** Another echoed this by noting that while the City does state what is open to change, **“you explain which bits the community can change and which they can’t but not why.”**

Several participants shared experiences where they felt their input had little effect, highlighting the importance of showing how feedback is incorporated. One person said, **“be specific and publicly announce what information given by the public was instrumental and what changed directly as a result,”** while another described **“we listened and acted”** as too vague and therefore not readily believable.”

There was reflection on past engagement processes where methods may have unintentionally polarised the community. One participant, referencing social housing engagement, felt that providing a simple yes/no choice limited opportunities for compromise and collaboration. They explained that **“the process Council created polarisation as it was simply given a yes/no question to respond to... there was no opportunity to bring sides together to hear the needs and address these.”**

While many responses emphasised areas for improvement, there were also positive reflections. Some participants acknowledged that the City is already making efforts to be clear about the scope of influence. As one respondent put it, **“I think you do a great job by making sure you state ‘what can be influenced’ for each engagement and then what can’t be.”**

Overall, participants called for **greater upfront transparency, clearer explanations of why some matters are fixed, and stronger communication of how feedback has shaped decisions**, to help reduce scepticism and build confidence in the process.

Q19: How can we improve on reporting back on how your feedback shaped the decision?

A strong theme from participants was the need for **greater transparency and clarity** in reporting back. Many wanted the City to explicitly show how community input influenced decisions, with one respondent suggesting reports should say, **“we were going to do x but feedback guided towards y.”** Participants emphasised that clearly explaining what feedback was adopted, what was not, and why, would help build trust.

Respondents also called for **more consistent and ongoing feedback loops**, rather than updates only at the conclusion of a process. Suggestions included project email updates, regular communication as drafts are refined, and individual responses where contact details

are provided. One person explained that **“you are required to sign up to follow a project then you don’t hear anything often until it’s all done and dusted.”**

Several participants highlighted the importance of **using multiple communication channels** to reach a wider audience. Alongside digital updates, suggestions included public meetings, radio, printed newspapers, and face-to-face interactions. A younger respondent reflected on the challenge of reaching their demographic, noting that **“most people my age don’t use Facebook, we mostly use TikTok or Instagram... even though you are doing all the reporting and making it available, it’s just not coming through to my demographic.”**

There were also calls for the City to be **more visible and approachable** in its communication, with one participant stating simply, **“be visible to show you care.”** Others suggested more formalised approaches, such as producing a Community Engagement Consultation Report after every activity, or publishing decisions and reasoning directly on the City’s website.

Overall, participants encouraged the City to provide **clearer, more specific, and more visible reporting** across multiple channels, ensuring that community members can see both how their input shaped outcomes and why some ideas could not be adopted.

Q20: Is there anything else you’d like to share about how we can improve the Community Engagement Policy?

Responses to this question reflected a wide range of perspectives, from concerns about tokenism and unclear processes to appreciation for the policy’s transparency. A recurring theme was the need for **greater clarity on how community engagement principles are put into practice**, with some participants observing that **“the high-level principles are just principles and do not commit the City to ensure meaningful and accessible interaction.”** Others felt that current engagement sometimes appeared to be **“a tick-the-box experience rather than a genuine consultation.”**

Several respondents called for **more opportunities for meaningful and deliberative engagement**, including co-design processes that go beyond surveys and consultation. One participant cautioned, **“don’t say you’re doing deliberative engagement or conducting representative processes unless you really are – this should be real actions, not just a label you use.”** Another reflected that **“the ladder of engagement seems to indicate that most of Council’s decision-making is at the Inform and Consult stage and rarely reaches beyond that level.”**

Feedback also highlighted the importance of **better communication and reporting**, with participants seeking

clearer follow-up on how input has shaped decisions. Some asked for longer consultation periods to allow more time for participation, while others raised issues with survey design, accessibility, or the requirement to provide personal details when anonymity should be an option.

In addition, respondents emphasised the need for **greater inclusivity and outreach**. This included tailoring approaches to the City's diverse community, providing events for people with disabilities, and using a wider range of communication channels beyond social media and email. One participant noted, "**letter drops are still an effective way to reach greater numbers and are often read by more people.**" Others suggested more face-to-face opportunities such as town hall meetings, as well as creative tools like visuals, case studies, or short videos to make the policy more accessible.

While many comments raised areas for improvement, there were also positive reflections. The policy was described as "**a transparent document... that makes it really clear and easy to see that people's voices matter,**" from one respondent, and another commented that "**the policy was a joy to read. It clearly conveys respect for the community's input into decisions.**"

Overall, participants expressed a desire for the Community Engagement Policy to move beyond principles and ensure **practical, inclusive, and transparent practices** that make community influence clearer, broaden participation, and strengthen trust in decision-making.

Q23: What would make it easier for you to have your say?

Many participants highlighted the importance of **accessible and flexible ways to engage**, ensuring that opportunities to provide input suit people's different needs, schedules, and preferences. Several respondents emphasised the value of having more options beyond online channels, with suggestions such as postal surveys, hard copies in libraries, and face-to-face meetings. As one participant noted, "**accessibility should be enabled for all residents... information and surveys should be available at all libraries... in hard copy as well as via a tablet/computer.**" Another added, "**do postal surveys so you can get feedback from the greater population.**"

There was a strong call for **better communication and timely updates** to help people stay informed and engaged. Many wanted direct and proactive notifications, rather than relying on individuals to check the Have Your Say page. One respondent explained, "**if you sign up to follow a project, provide email updates and provide email reminders... people shouldn't have to search other places to get updates.**" Another described receiving reminders from another council, saying, "**some**

councils even alert you before a project you are following is going before Council – that's great."

Participants also stressed the need for **clearer and more user-friendly information**, with requests for plain English, shorter summaries, and easier website navigation. One person commented that "**consultation communications [should be] succinct, in plain English and easy to skim and scan,**" while another felt that "**the Your Say website is confusing... there should be a clear section for 'Engagement Open.'**"

Other suggestions included more opportunities for **direct interaction with decision-makers**, longer consultation timeframes, and technology improvements such as a more user-friendly Council app and accessibility tools for people with vision impairments. A few respondents also raised concerns about tokenism, with one noting that "**years of acute frustration... makes one reluctant to invest in any more time in a policy that is not genuine but rather tokenism.**"

Overall, the responses indicate that making it easier for people to "have their say" requires a **multi-channel, transparent, and inclusive approach**, combining direct communication, accessible formats, and clearer pathways for participation.

ADDITIONAL DATA COLLECTED

Feedback provided by City employees and other key stakeholders have been taken into consideration alongside the findings of this report and when drafting the revised Community Engagement Policy and supporting tools, resources and procedures. Stakeholder feedback broadly aligns with what was heard through the community engagement process.

A short synopsis of the stakeholder feedback can be found below.

Councillor Workshop

The councillors were presented with the current engagement policy and asked for feedback on how it could be improved. The key themes discussed were:

- **Who will we engage with?**

Engagement should include both those directly and indirectly affected by council decisions, with approaches tailored to the scale and impact of the issue, and efforts made to reach hard-to-engage groups. Many constituents unaware of the opportunities to have their say.

- **When will we engage?**

Engagement should occur when changes to services, spending public money, or altering people's rights are involved, but consider carefully if engagement is required for minor issues. Be clear with the community

that other sources in addition to community feedback will be considered when making decisions.

- **How will we engage?**

Effective engagement requires varied methods beyond online channels, support for advisory committees, and clear distinction between qualitative engagement and polling data, ensuring all voices are heard. Inclusion of the IAP2 engagement spectrum in the policy to articulate level of input possible from the community was encouraged.

- **How will we report on engagement?**

Reporting should use plain English, clearly explain outcomes, and proactively address high-profile issues, with processes in place to ensure safety and informed consent for vulnerable cohorts.

Youth Council Workshop

The Youth Council was engaged through a workshop to share their ideas on the City's engagement policy, with their contributions lining up with the broader survey responses. Themes of transparency and feedback, "Focus on transparency – people want to see the "fruits" of their labour, don't want to feel like they're talking into a void", improving awareness of engagements through multi-channel communications "QR codes in high-traffic areas for young people and in locations where people may have complaints" and "Attend music festivals" as well as making it simple and clear when communicating "Explain and highlight the benefits - What's in it for "you".

Wadawurrung Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation (WTOAC) Cultural Consultation

Feedback from WTOAC focused on language, definitions and references in the current policy. All recommendations will be considered when drafting the revised policy.

Barwon Network of Neighbourhood Houses meeting

The meeting focused on strengthening relationships between the City and neighbourhood houses, and recognising the vital role neighbourhood houses play within their communities. They want to be acknowledged as valuable conduits between the City and its residents, including as accessible venues for community engagement activities and events.

Cultura written feedback

Written feedback from Cultura focused on what's working well with the current policy, and what could be improved:

- The policy demonstrates a strong commitment to equitable engagement by acknowledging barriers such as language, culture, and accessibility, and by offering inclusive methods and principles that align with best practice.

- The policy lacks targeted strategies for multicultural, migrant, and refugee communities, and relies too heavily on digital channels, which may exclude residents with limited access or literacy.

Employee Feedback

Employees were engaged through an online survey and asked to provide feedback on the Community Engagement Policy. Feedback emphasised the need for greater accessibility, particularly for people with disabilities, through inclusive practices **"People may have a range of disabilities and having some prompts to make us think across the spectrum of disabilities and hints on how to meet the needs would be great."** They also called for more detailed practitioner support and for integration of engagement plans into broader project planning **"A cheat sheet of the steps involved in various types of engagement would be great..."** Respondents recognised engagement as essential to effective service delivery, but stressed the complex nature of the engagement process, requiring more robust resources and clearer documentation to ensure both accessibility and efficiency **"I think we view engagement as one step in a larger project, but in reality, it is a project in itself with many steps, which all need to be done well."** Overall, the policy is viewed positively but would benefit from improvements to better support practitioners and strengthen inclusive engagement practices.

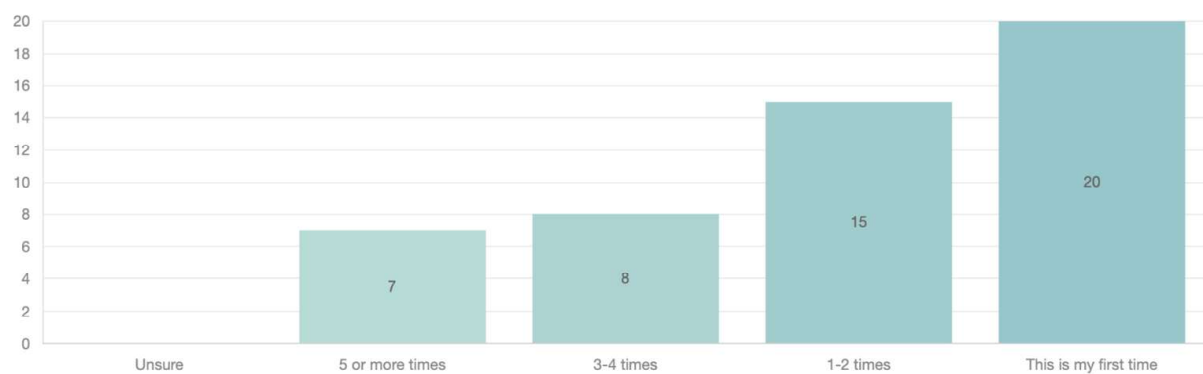
Next steps

This engagement summary report will be presented to Council alongside the draft Community Engagement Policy on the 28 October 2025 seeking endorsement to proceed with a second stage of community engagement on the draft policy.

The next stage of engagement will involve a check-in with community members, stakeholders, and employees to confirm the draft policy's direction and gather final input before Council adoption in early 2026.

Appendix A – Community Engagement Policy Review Full Survey Quantitative Questions

Q2. In the past 12 months, how many times have you provided feedback on a City of Greater Geelong community engagement?

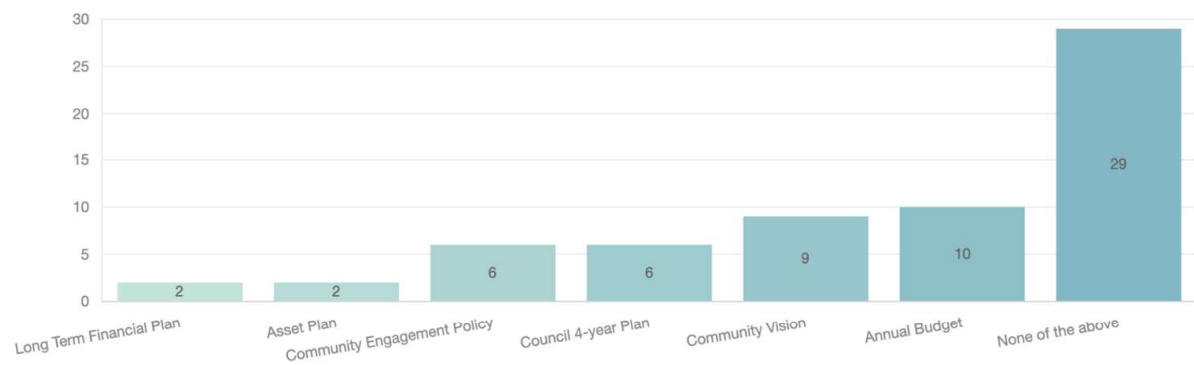


	RESPONSES	RESULT %	
Unsure	0	0.0%	
5 or more times	7	14.0%	
3-4 times	8	16.0%	
1-2 times	15	30.0%	
This is my first time	20	40.0%	

Q3. How was your experience providing feedback?

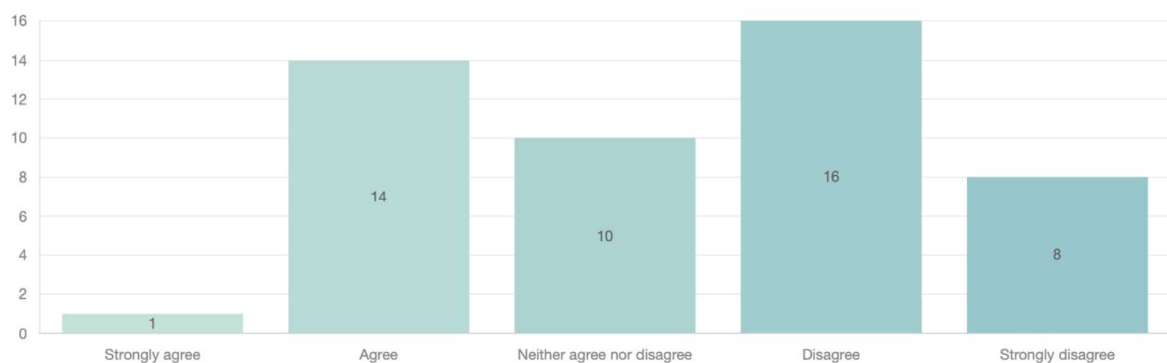


	RESPONSES	RESULT %	
Exceeded my expectations	3	10.3%	
Met my expectations	12	41.4%	
Did not meet my expectations	14	48.3%	



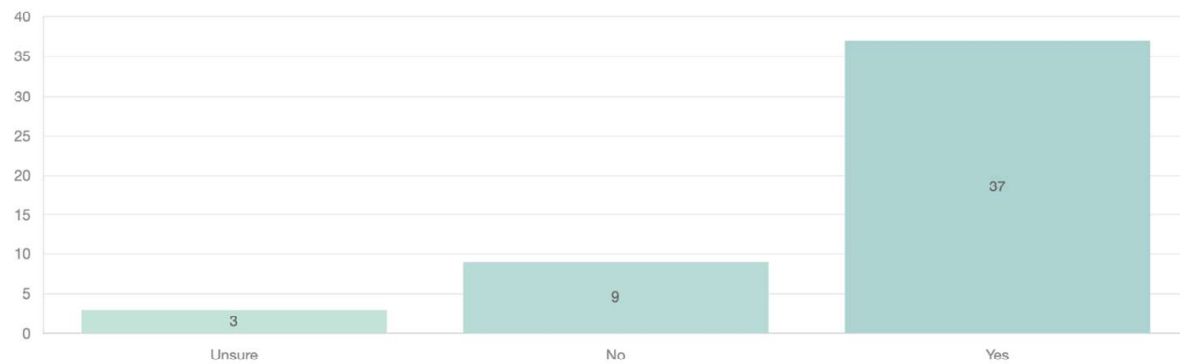
	RESPONSES	RESULT %	
Long Term Financial Plan	2	3.1%	
Asset Plan	2	3.1%	
Community Engagement Policy	6	9.4%	
Council 4-year Plan	6	9.4%	
Community Vision	9	14.1%	
Annual Budget	10	15.6%	
None of the above	29	45.3%	

Q8. How much do you agree with the following statement: I trust that the City of Greater Geelong takes community feedback seriously



	RESPONSES	RESULT %	
Strongly agree	1	2.0%	
Agree	14	28.6%	
Neither agree nor disagree	10	20.4%	
Disagree	16	32.7%	
Strongly disagree	8	16.3%	

Q9. Have you read the City's current Community Engagement Policy?



	RESPONSES	RESULT %	
Unsure	3	6.1%	
No	9	18.4%	
Yes	37	75.5%	

Q10. How easy was the policy to read and understand?

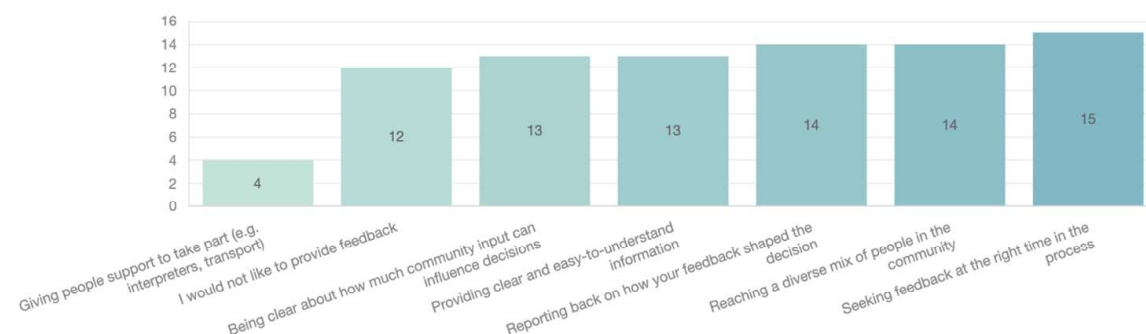


	RESPONSES	RESULT %	
Very easy to read and understand	10	27.0%	
Mostly easy to read and understand	25	67.6%	
Difficult to read and understand	2	5.4%	



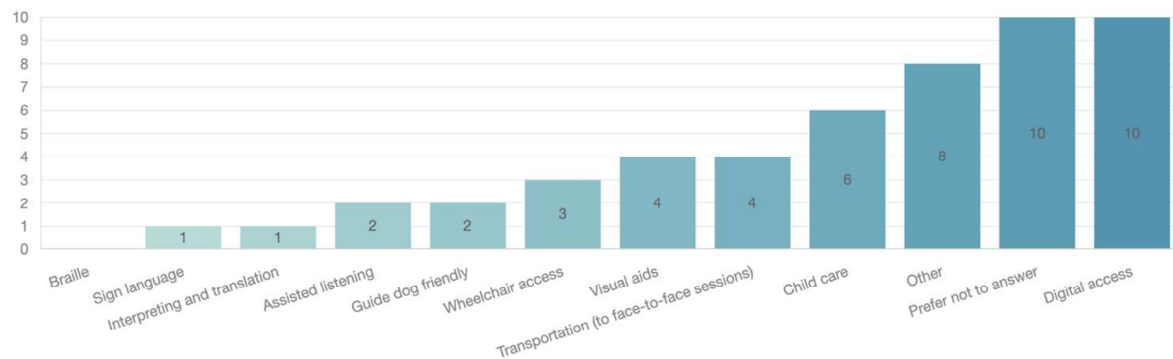
	EXCELLENT	GOOD	FAIR	POOR	UNACCEPTABLE	UNSURE
Providing clear and easy-to-understand information	4 8.0%	18 36.0%	14 28.0%	8 16.0%	3 6.0%	3 6.0%
Seeking feedback at the right time in the process	5 10.2%	18 36.7%	8 16.3%	12 24.5%	3 6.1%	3 6.1%
Reaching a diverse mix of people in our community	4 8.2%	14 28.6%	9 18.4%	13 26.5%	5 10.2%	4 8.2%
Being clear about how much community input can influence decisions	5 10.2%	12 24.5%	10 20.4%	13 26.5%	7 14.3%	2 4.1%
Giving people support to take part (e.g. interpreters, transport)	4 8.3%	14 29.2%	9 18.8%	8 16.7%	4 8.3%	9 18.8%
Reporting back on how your feedback shaped the decision	2 4.2%	12 25.0%	8 16.7%	15 31.3%	8 16.7%	3 6.3%

Q13. Would you like to provide feedback on how we can better deliver on any of these promises?



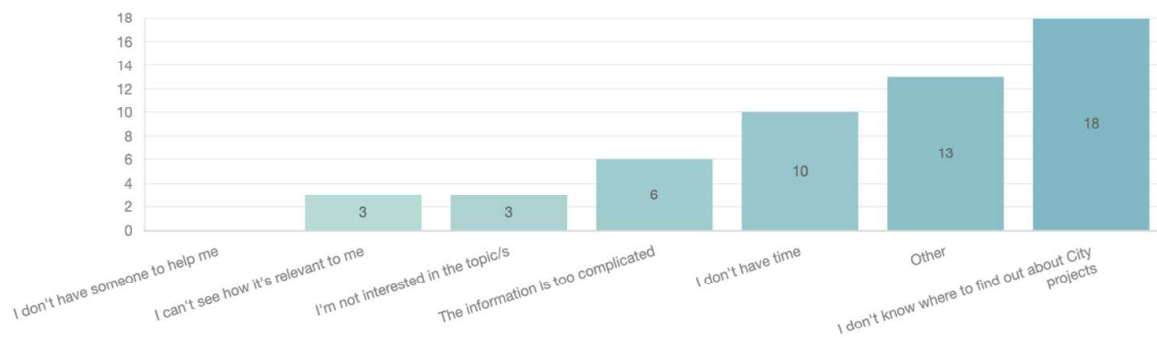
	RESPONSES	RESULT %
Giving people support to take part (e.g. interpreters, transport)	4	4.7%
I would not like to provide feedback	12	14.1%
Being clear about how much community input can influence decisions	13	15.3%
Providing clear and easy-to-understand information	13	15.3%
Reporting back on how your feedback shaped the decision	14	16.5%
Reaching a diverse mix of people in the community	14	16.5%
Seeking feedback at the right time in the process	15	17.6%

Q21. Would access to any of the following supports make it easier for you to take part in future engagement activities?



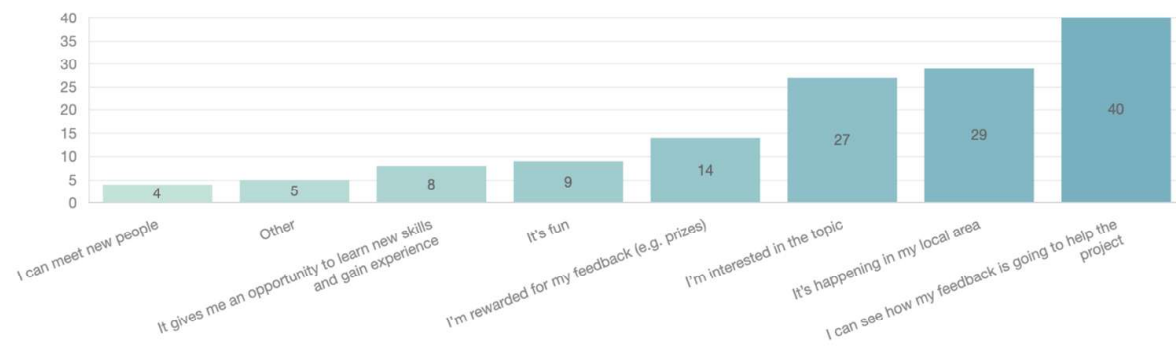
	RESPONSES	RESULT %	
Braille	0	0.0%	
Sign language	1	2.0%	
Interpreting and translation	1	2.0%	
Assisted listening	2	3.9%	
Guide dog friendly	2	3.9%	
Wheelchair access	3	5.9%	
Visual aids	4	7.8%	
Transportation (to face-to-face sessions)	4	7.8%	
Child care	6	11.8%	
Other	8	15.7%	
Prefer not to answer	10	19.6%	
Digital access	10	19.6%	

Q22. What makes it hard for you to share feedback on City projects?

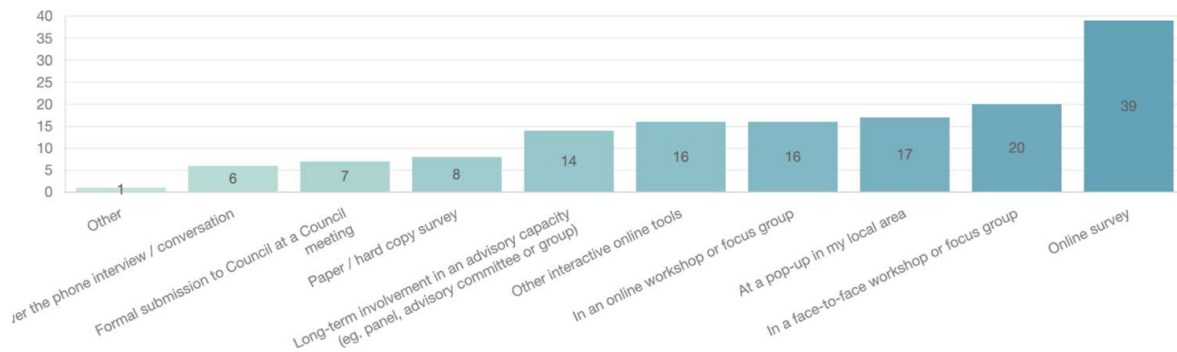


	RESPONSES	RESULT%	
I don't have someone to help me	0	0.0%	
I can't see how it's relevant to me	3	5.7%	
I'm not interested in the topic/s	3	5.7%	
The information is too complicated	6	11.3%	
I don't have time	10	18.9%	
Other	13	24.5%	
I don't know where to find out about City projects	18	34.0%	

Q24. What would encourage you to get involved and give feedback?

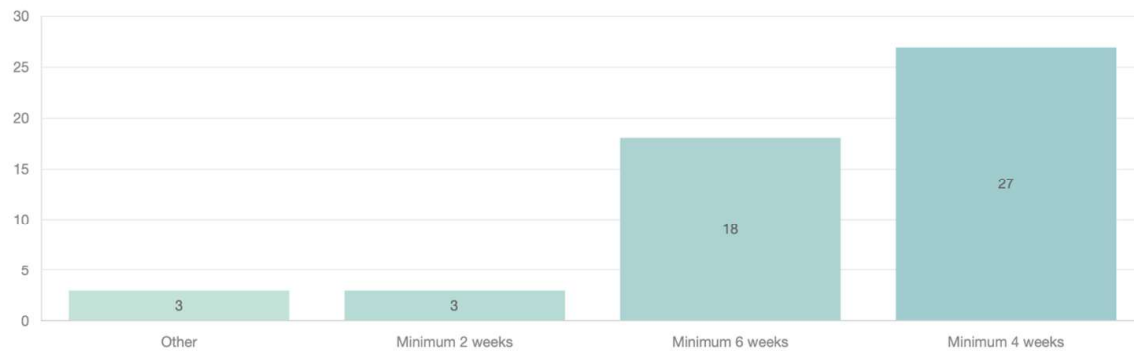


	RESPONSES	RESULT %	
I can meet new people	4	2.9%	
Other	5	3.7%	
It gives me an opportunity to learn new skills and gain experience	8	5.9%	
It's fun	9	6.6%	
I'm rewarded for my feedback (e.g. prizes)	14	10.3%	
I'm interested in the topic	27	19.9%	
It's happening in my local area	29	21.3%	
I can see how my feedback is going to help the project	40	29.4%	



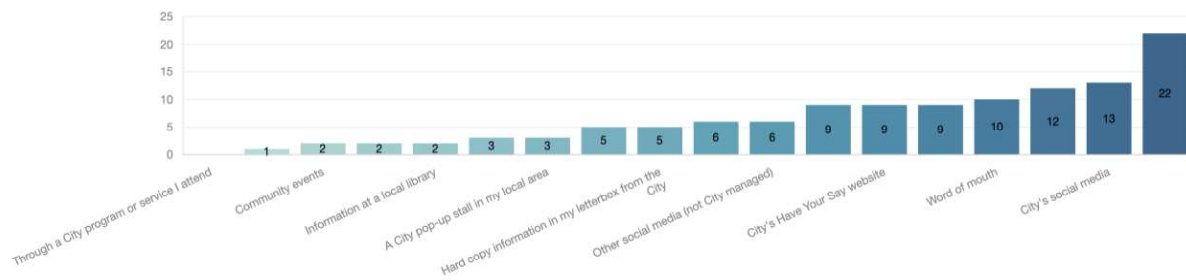
	RESPONSES	RESULT %	
Other	1	0.7%	
Over the phone interview / conversation	6	4.2%	
Formal submission to Council at a Council meeting	7	4.9%	
Paper / hard copy survey	8	5.6%	
Long-term involvement in an advisory capacity (eg. panel, advisory committee or group)	14	9.7%	
Other interactive online tools	16	11.1%	
In an online workshop or focus group	16	11.1%	
At a pop-up in my local area	17	11.8%	
In a face-to-face workshop or focus group	20	13.9%	
Online survey	39	27.1%	

Q26. How long should an engagement project be open for community feedback?

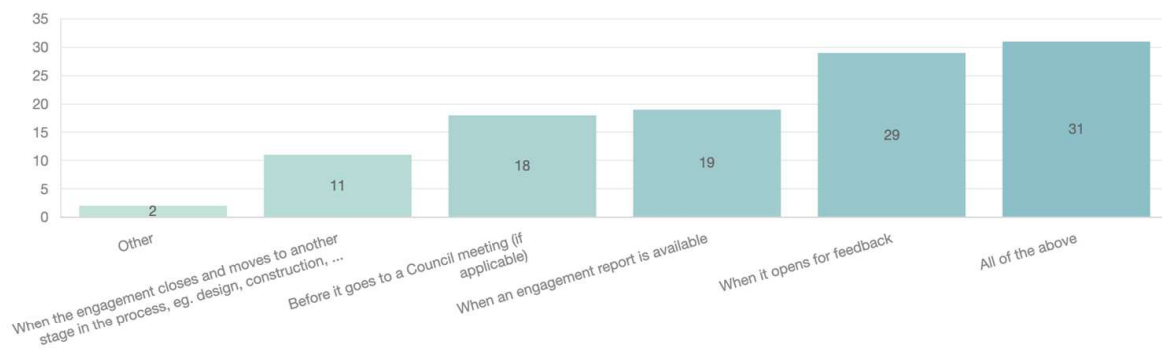


	RESPONSES	RESULT %	
Other	3	5.9%	
Minimum 2 weeks	3	5.9%	
Minimum 6 weeks	18	35.3%	
Minimum 4 weeks	27	52.9%	

Q27. How do you usually hear about opportunities to have your say?

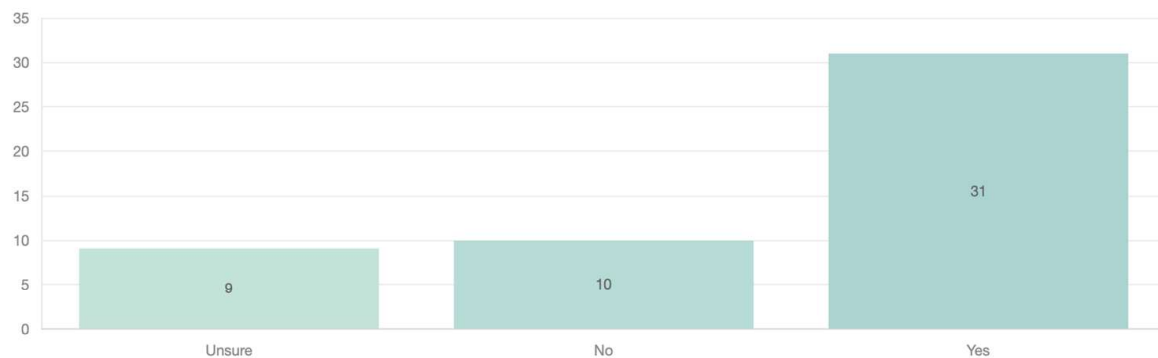


	RESPONSES	RESULT %	
Through a City program or service I attend	0	0.0%	
Information in a customer service centre	1	0.8%	
Community events	2	1.7%	
Posters or signage	2	1.7%	
Information at a local library	2	1.7%	
Information from a local community group or leader	3	2.5%	
A City pop-up stall in my local area	3	2.5%	
Newspaper advertisement	5	4.2%	
Hard copy information in my letterbox from the City	5	4.2%	
Other	6	5.0%	
Other social media (not City managed)	6	5.0%	
Email from the City	9	7.6%	
City's Have Your Say website	9	7.6%	
City's website (Geelong Australia)	9	7.6%	
Word of mouth	10	8.4%	
City e-newsletter	12	10.1%	
City's social media	13	10.9%	
By being a member on the City's Have your say page	22	18.5%	



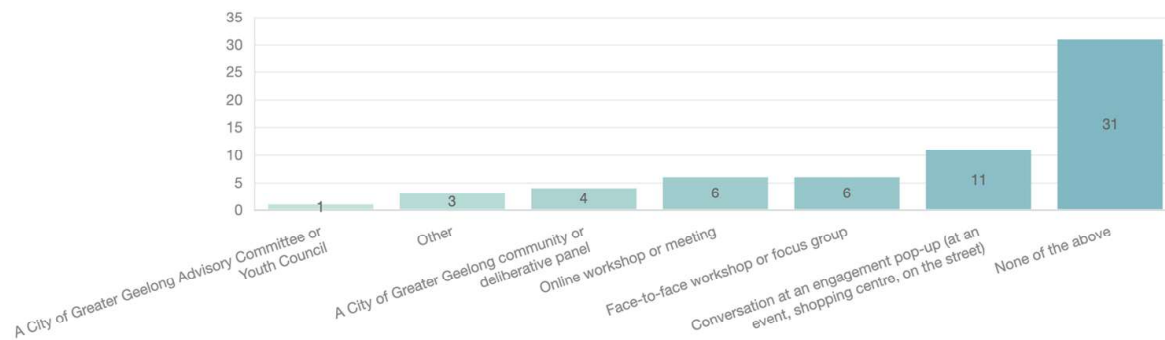
	RESPONSES	RESULT %
Other	2	1.8%
When the engagement closes and moves to another stage in the process, eg. design, construction, awaiting funding	11	10.0%
Before it goes to a Council meeting (if applicable)	18	16.4%
When an engagement report is available	19	17.3%
When it opens for feedback	29	26.4%
All of the above	31	28.2%

Q29. Do you support the idea of a community panel to represent City of Greater Geelong residents? This panel would be representative of residents in Greater Geelong and would meet regularly to discuss and provide feedback on key issues.



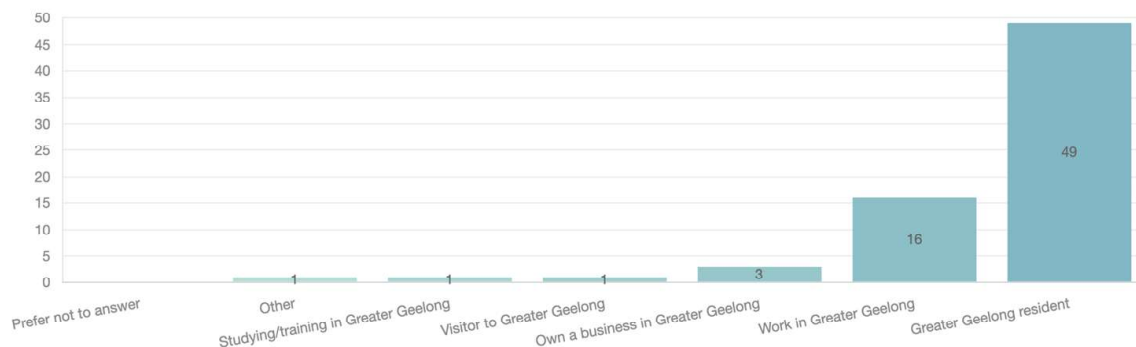
	RESPONSES	RESULT %
Unsure	9	18.0%
No	10	20.0%
Yes	31	62.0%

Q30. Have you taken part in any of the following community engagement opportunities in the past four years?

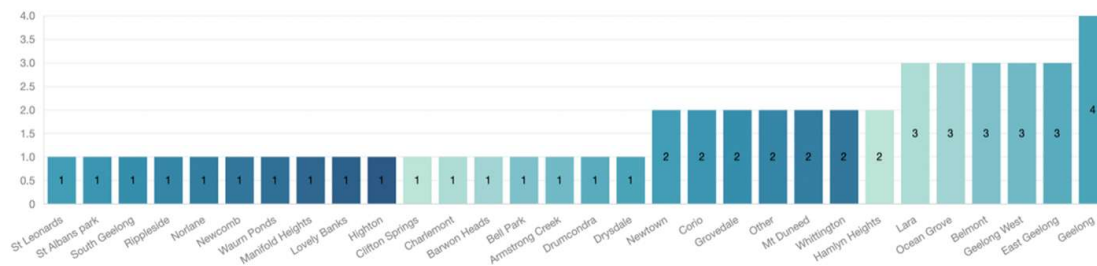


	RESPONSES	RESULT %	
● A City of Greater Geelong Advisory Committee or Youth Council	1	1.6%	
● Other	3	4.8%	
● A City of Greater Geelong community or deliberative panel	4	6.5%	
● Online workshop or meeting	6	9.7%	
● Face-to-face workshop or focus group	6	9.7%	
● Conversation at an engagement pop-up (at an event, shopping centre, on the street)	11	17.7%	
● None of the above	31	50.0%	

Q31. Which of the following best describes your connection to the Greater Geelong?

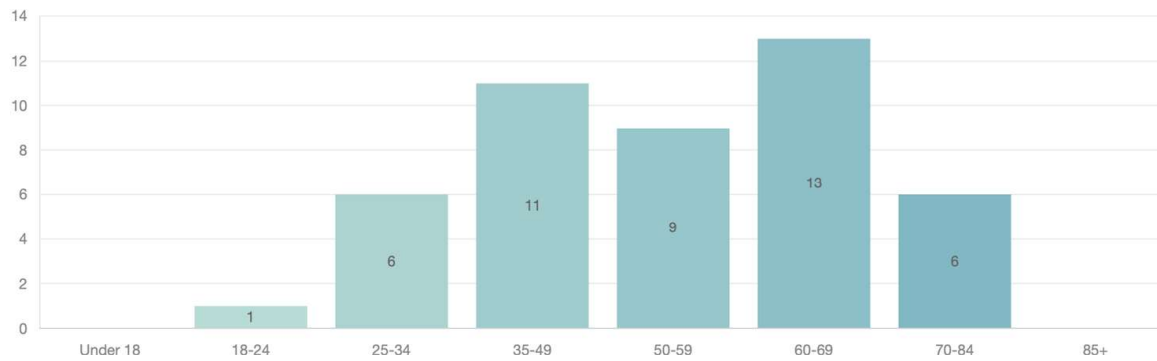


	RESPONSES	RESULT %	
● Prefer not to answer	0	0.0%	
● Other	1	1.4%	
● Studying/training in Greater Geelong	1	1.4%	
● Visitor to Greater Geelong	1	1.4%	
● Own a business in Greater Geelong	3	4.2%	
● Work in Greater Geelong	16	22.5%	
● Greater Geelong resident	49	69.0%	



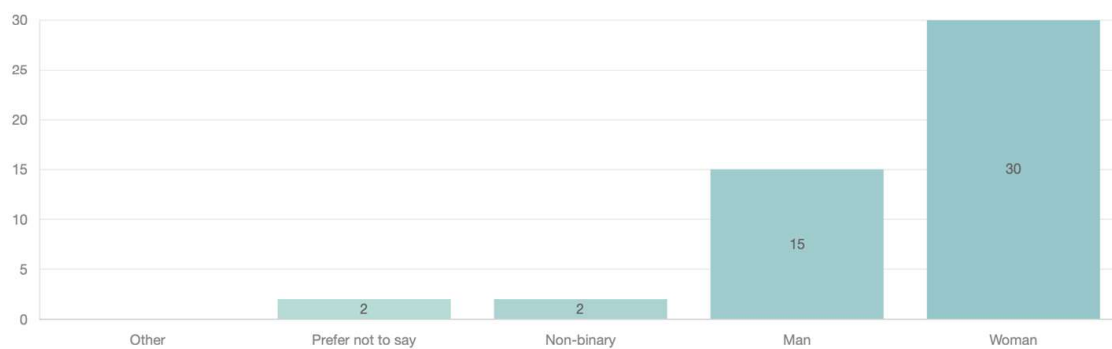
	RESPONSES	RESULT %
● St Leonards	1	2.0%
● St Albans park	1	2.0%
● South Geelong	1	2.0%
● Ripplside	1	2.0%
● Norlane	1	2.0%
● Newcomb	1	2.0%
● Waurm Ponds	1	2.0%
● Manifold Heights	1	2.0%
● Lovely Banks	1	2.0%
● Highton	1	2.0%
● Clifton Springs	1	2.0%
● Charlemont	1	2.0%
● Barwon Heads	1	2.0%
● Bell Park	1	2.0%
● Armstrong Creek	1	2.0%
● Drumcondra	1	2.0%
● Drysdale	1	2.0%
● Newtown	2	4.0%
● Corio	2	4.0%
● Grovedale	2	4.0%
● Other	2	4.0%
● Mt Duneed	2	4.0%
● Whittington	2	4.0%
● Hamlyn Heights	2	4.0%
● Lara	3	6.0%
● Ocean Grove	3	6.0%
● Belmont	3	6.0%
● Geelong West	3	6.0%
● East Geelong	3	6.0%
● Geelong	4	8.0%

Q33. Age Group

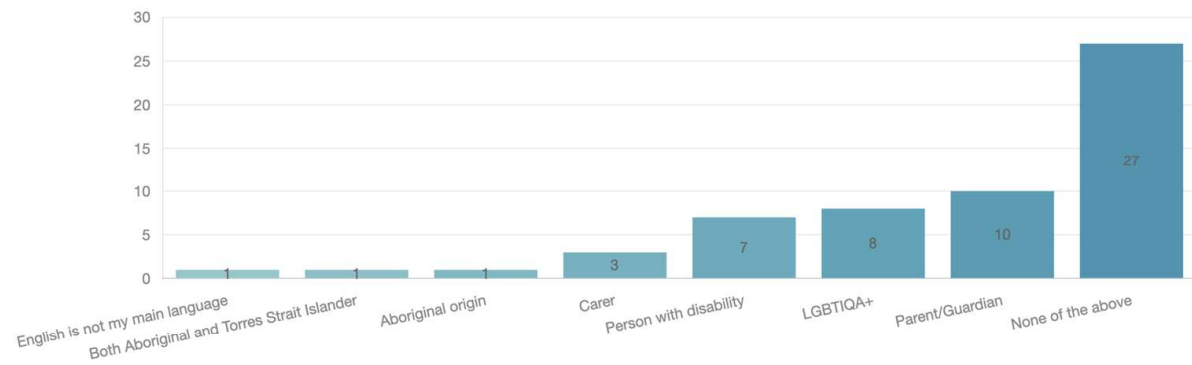


	RESPONSES	RESULT %	
Under 18	0	0.0%	
18-24	1	2.2%	
25-34	6	13.0%	
35-49	11	23.9%	
50-59	9	19.6%	
60-69	13	28.3%	
70-84	6	13.0%	
85+	0	0.0%	

Q34. What is your gender?



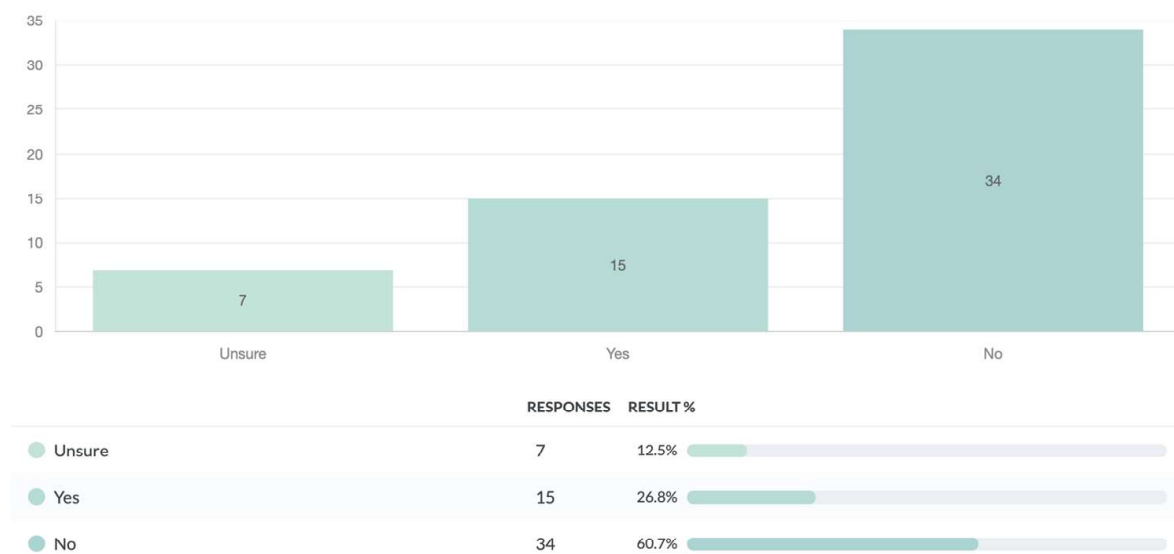
	RESPONSES	RESULT %	
Other	0	0.0%	
Prefer not to say	2	4.1%	
Non-binary	2	4.1%	
Man	15	30.6%	
Woman	30	61.2%	



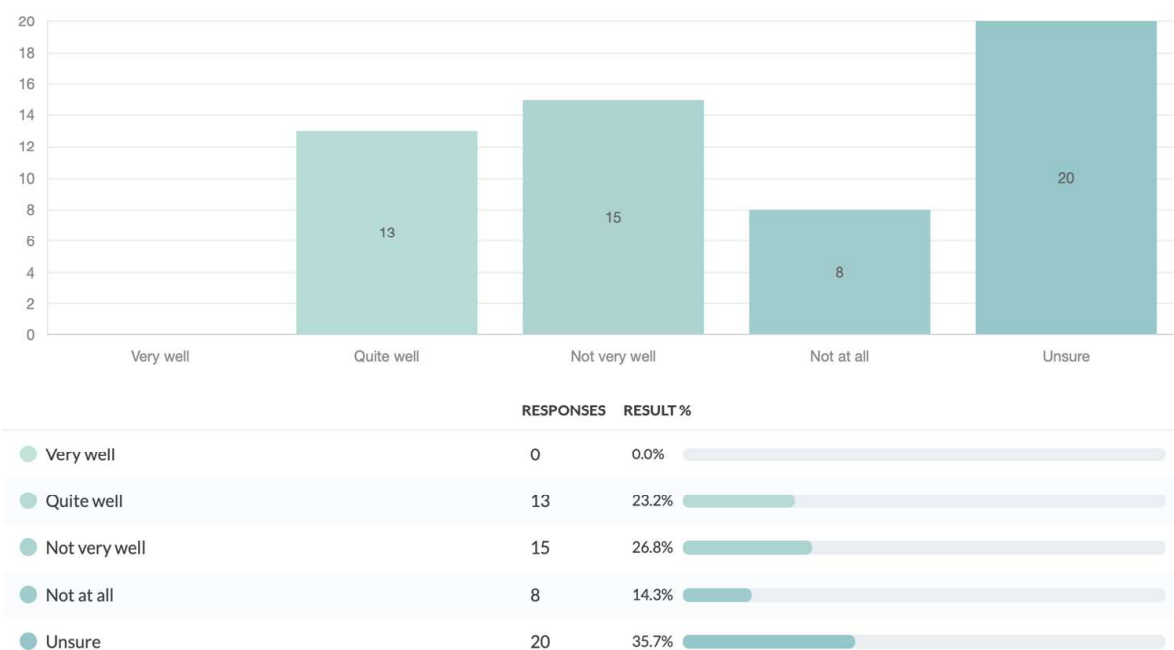
	RESPONSES	RESULT %	
English is not my main language	1	1.7%	
Both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander	1	1.7%	
Aboriginal origin	1	1.7%	
Carer	3	5.2%	
Person with disability	7	12.1%	
LGBTQIA+	8	13.8%	
Parent/Guardian	10	17.2%	
None of the above	27	46.6%	

Appendix B – Community Engagement Policy Review Short Survey Quantitative Questions

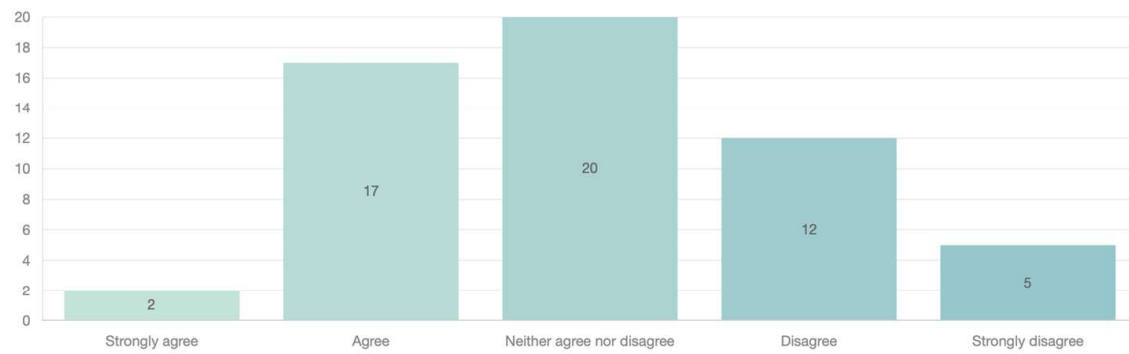
Q2. In the past 12 months, have you given feedback on a City of Greater Geelong community engagement?



Q3. How well do you think the City listens to and involves the community in decisions?

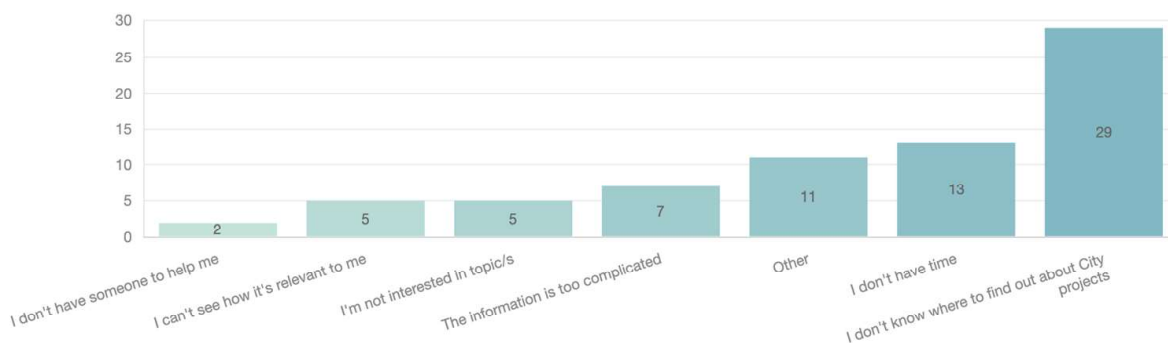


Q4. How much do you agree with the following statement: I trust that the City of Greater Geelong takes community feedback seriously.



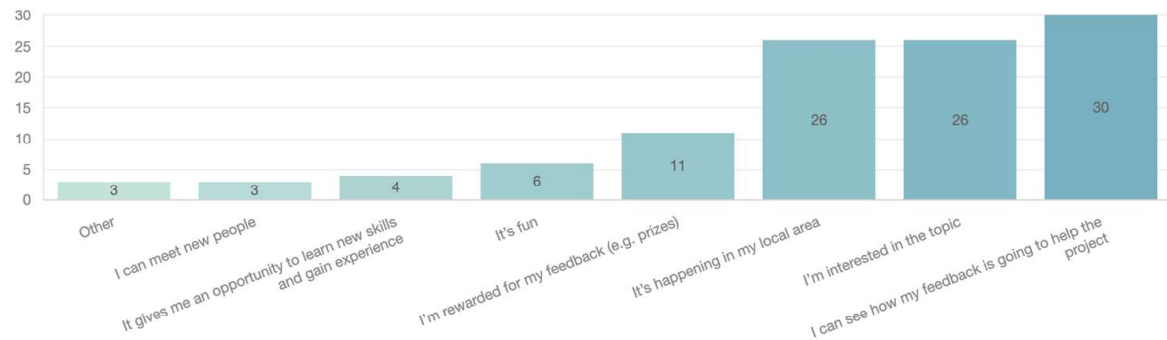
	RESPONSES	RESULT %	
Strongly agree	2	3.6%	
Agree	17	30.4%	
Neither agree nor disagree	20	35.7%	
Disagree	12	21.4%	
Strongly disagree	5	8.9%	

Q5. What makes it hard for you to share feedback on City projects?



	RESPONSES	RESULT %	
I don't have someone to help me	2	2.8%	
I can't see how it's relevant to me	5	6.9%	
I'm not interested in topic/s	5	6.9%	
The information is too complicated	7	9.7%	
Other	11	15.3%	
I don't have time	13	18.1%	
I don't know where to find out about City projects	29	40.3%	

Q6. What would encourage you to get involved and give feedback?

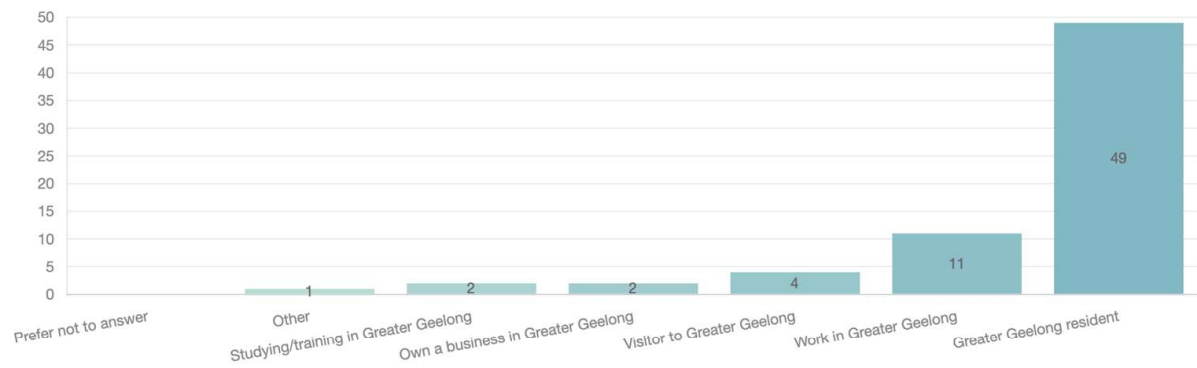


	RESPONSES	RESULT %	
Other	3	2.8%	
I can meet new people	3	2.8%	
It gives me an opportunity to learn new skills and gain experience	4	3.7%	
It's fun	6	5.5%	
I'm rewarded for my feedback (e.g. prizes)	11	10.1%	
It's happening in my local area	26	23.9%	
I'm interested in the topic	26	23.9%	
I can see how my feedback is going to help the project	30	27.5%	

Q7. Overall, how would you rate the City's community engagement efforts?

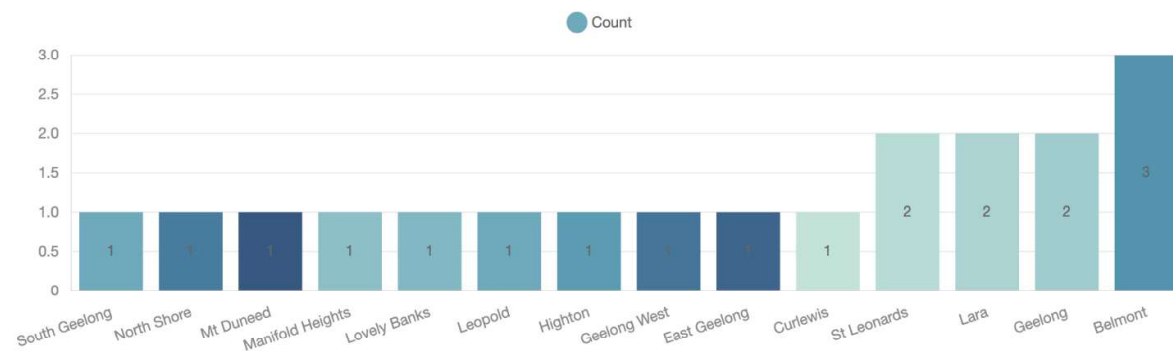


	RESPONSES	RESULT %	
1	5	15.2%	
2	8	24.2%	
3	7	21.2%	
4	2	6.1%	
5	11	33.3%	



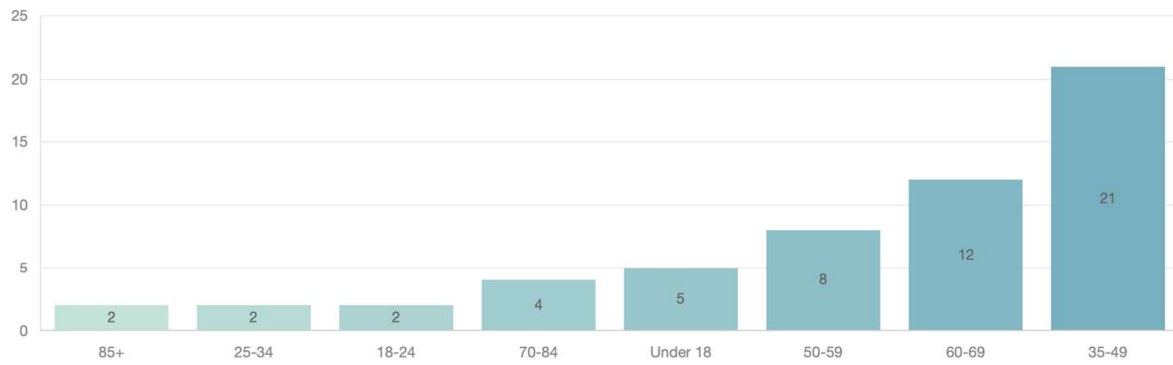
	RESPONSES	RESULT %	
● Prefer not to answer	0	0.0%	
● Other	1	1.4%	
● Studying/training in Greater Geelong	2	2.9%	
● Own a business in Greater Geelong	2	2.9%	
● Visitor to Greater Geelong	4	5.8%	
● Work in Greater Geelong	11	15.9%	
● Greater Geelong resident	49	71.0%	

Q9. Town or Suburb



	RESPONSES	RESULT %	
South Geelong	1	5.3%	
North Shore	1	5.3%	
Mt Duneed	1	5.3%	
Manifold Heights	1	5.3%	
Lovely Banks	1	5.3%	
Leopold	1	5.3%	
Highton	1	5.3%	
Geelong West	1	5.3%	
East Geelong	1	5.3%	
Curlewis	1	5.3%	
St Leonards	2	10.5%	
Lara	2	10.5%	
Geelong	2	10.5%	
Belmont	3	15.8%	

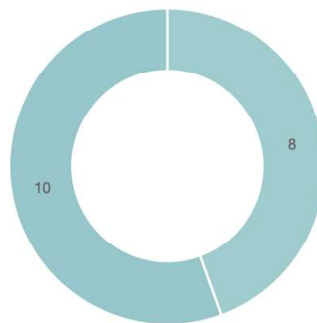
Q10. Age Group



	RESPONSES	RESULT %	
85+	2	3.6%	
25-34	2	3.6%	
18-24	2	3.6%	
70-84	4	7.1%	
Under 18	5	8.9%	
50-59	8	14.3%	
60-69	12	21.4%	
35-49	21	37.5%	

Q11. What is your gender?

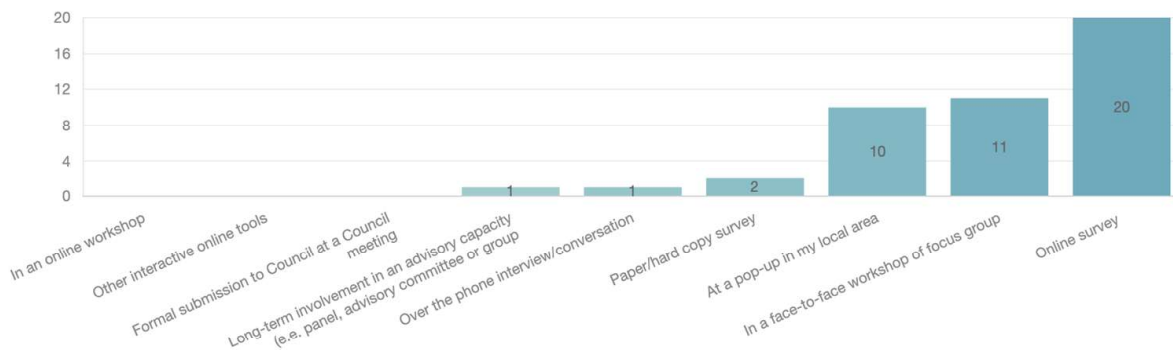
Other Prefer not to say Non-binary Man Woman



	RESPONSES	RESULT %	
Other	0	0.0%	
Prefer not to say	0	0.0%	
Non-binary	0	0.0%	
Man	8	44.4%	
Woman	10	55.6%	

Appendix C – Conversation Wall Contributions

How do you prefer to share your feedback?



What makes it hard for you to share feedback on City projects

