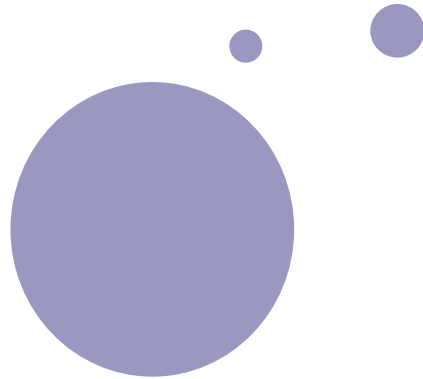




The Whittlesea Community Engagement Framework



Research Findings & Final Report

The Whittlesea Community Engagement Framework has been developed through extensive consultation with Whittlesea community members, and aims to increase community involvement across the Whittlesea municipality. The framework details a set of locally developed community engagement principles to guide the development of new initiatives in Whittlesea and ensure that opportunities for involvement and decision-making are responsive to local needs and aspirations.

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Executive summary

The Whittlesea Community Engagement Framework has been developed and defined by local Whittlesea residents and outlines key strategies to achieving full community participation and engagement. In actively participating in this project, the community of Whittlesea has demonstrated a strong commitment to enhancing community involvement through service planning, delivery and evaluation. In order to achieve these outcomes, the framework provides specific guidelines for how organisations and governments can effectively engage the community of Whittlesea.

The framework has been developed by Whittlesea Community Connections, funded by the Department of Planning and Community Development. A project reference group, consisting of local community members, organisations and government representatives provided additional guidance.

The Whittlesea Community Engagement Framework has been developed through extensive community consultation. A total of 357 local residents participated in a range of research methods, ensuring that the framework represents the diverse experiences and aspirations of the Whittlesea community. The research design was underpinned by a commitment to inclusion and participation in both the process and outcomes.

Research findings indicated that a high level of community involvement, both informal and formal, is already occurring in Whittlesea. Whittlesea residents are actively involved through volunteering, helping others in the community, participating in community groups and in decision making committees. The reasons for becoming involved in the local community included:

- Meeting community needs, 'making up for the shortfall' in poor service provision and lack of infrastructure
- Creating a pathway to employment, education and further involvement
- Promoting mutual learning, diversity and cultural awareness
- Helping to build a sense of community and local ownership
- Having a say in decisions which impact on their communities.

Despite the high level of community participation and clear articulation of its benefits, respondents identified a range of barriers and lack of appropriate opportunities to strengthening this involvement. Findings highlighted that greater opportunities for community engagement are particularly needed for families, young people and people with a disability. The emphasis was also placed on developing local opportunities. Strategies to improve community engagement opportunities, particularly with marginalized groups included:

- Having an open and flexible approach to consultation, including offering a variety of options for participation.
- Involving the community in all stages of research, maximising opportunities for mutual learning.
- Providing feedback about how information is used, sharing findings and providing opportunities to verify what communities have said.
- Expanding the way that organisations and governments provide information in Whittlesea, with most local people preferring personal, face-to-face contact.

- Addressing participation barriers to ensure opportunities are inclusive of a broad range of people who would like to get involved.
- Supporting diverse and inclusive involvement by providing affordable activities, transport, childcare, respite support and appropriate facilities.
- Addressing the systemic causes of disadvantage when developing local infrastructure, establishing greater equity in community participation.
- Strengthening opportunities for diverse groups to come together.
- Expanding opportunities for involvement at the local level.

The range of consultation processes undertaken through this project has demonstrated the capacity and willingness of Whittlesea communities to provide quality, innovative and realistic contributions. This indicates that the community is well informed of broader community needs, as well as appreciating the processes involved for organisations to engage communities. Local contributions have helped develop community engagement principles, which aim to shape the enhanced involvement of Whittlesea residents and communities in service planning, delivery and evaluation.

The Whittlesea Community Engagement Framework Principles are:

- **Information** - The provision of information empowers local communities to make decisions about how to be involved in their community and ensures people have access to appropriate services and resources. Organisations in Whittlesea will ensure that the community is informed about local services, opportunities and activities. Community participation and engagement opportunities will be promoted broadly, so the community is informed about how they can get involved.
- **Integrity** - It is important that there is openness and honesty about the scope and purpose of engagement, that there is a willingness to trust the community's views, experiences and aspirations
- **Inclusion** - It is important a diverse range of people in the community have a chance to be involved in the community and have their say, and that community engagement processes seek to include and support those who may otherwise not be involved
- **Building relationships** - It is important that people have the chance to meet other people and form relationships with others when they get involved or have a say in the community. Community engagement activities in Whittlesea will foster relationships, between organisations and communities and within communities, based on mutual understanding, trust and respect
- **Influence** - It is important that when people participate in the community or have a say, that it makes a difference or changes the way things are done. The policies, services or ways organisations work should reflect the input and involvement of local people
- **Accessibility** - It is important that governments and community organisations help people who have difficulty participating to get involved and have a say. Community engagement activities should consider and address issues such as affordability, transport, venues, language needs, childcare, literacy levels and physical accessibility
- **Local** - It is important the opportunities to have a say and get involved in the community are available locally (within the City of Whittlesea) and that resources

- available for community engagement in Whittlesea prioritise meeting the community participation needs, aspirations and interests of Whittlesea residents.
- **Sustainability** - It is important that opportunities to get involved or have a say have lasting community benefits, and that activities that meet current needs will have positive influence on communities ability to meet future needs

Whittlesea Community Connections is excited about the opportunity to collaboratively implement the Whittlesea Community Engagement Framework with local organisations and local communities. Whittlesea Community Connections will be taking proactive steps to strengthen its own processes and strategies, by implementing the framework across the organisation.

Whittlesea Community Connections will be working in partnership with local organisations, local government and local enterprises in order to implement the framework across Whittlesea. Broad commitment to the framework will ensure that the needs and aspirations for community involvement are realised. The community engagement principles are important foundations for meaningful and inclusive participation. It is recommended that these principles be adopted as a first step for organisations to effectively engage Whittlesea communities.

Chapter 1: Background to the framework

1.1 Whittlesea Context

The Whittlesea local government area is located on the metropolitan fringe, approximately 20kms north of Melbourne, and covering 490 square kilometers. The municipality faces significant challenges including having to balance simultaneously being urban and rural, without the bedrock of social and physical infrastructure found in the older, inner city suburbs (Marston, 2003).

Rapid growth characterises the municipality, with its current population of 124,647, which is a 9.2% increase from 2001 and expected to effectively double by 2030. This growth however, is being achieved without the associated growth in community and human service infrastructure, which means that 'capacity is stretched across the range of service provision, particularly where families, children and young people have complex needs (City of Whittlesea, 2004). Transport has consistently been identified as a barrier for Whittlesea residents, in their ability to access services and participate in the community.

The City of Whittlesea is a highly diverse municipality. Just over one third of residents of the City of Whittlesea were born overseas (the average for the MSD is 29%). Of those born overseas, 57% were born in non-English speaking countries; this is higher than the MSD or Victoria. Whittlesea is characterised by a diverse range of cultural groups, with over 140 countries stated as the Countries of Birth for Whittlesea residents (ABS, 2006). For about 40 of these countries there were fewer than 10 residents, while there were more than 100 residents for 46 countries of birth, excluding Australia.

Of the city's population, 47.1% speaks a language other than English at home, higher than the state average of 24.5% (ABS, 2006). There is equally linguistic diversity, with 35 different language categories within Whittlesea and still many, 4189 (3.4%), stating 'other', which includes several other small community languages and dialects. Additionally, only 53% of Whittlesea residents state that they speak English well, with 8.5% identifying that they speak English 'not well or not at all' (ABS, 2006), indicating that language is a barrier for many in Whittlesea.

Similarly, Whittlesea's residents are religiously diverse and have a high proportion of residents professing a religious affiliation. Within the City of Whittlesea the religious affiliation identified in the 2006 Census is predominately Christian (75.1% of all residents) while almost 12% of residents express non-Christian religious affiliation. Growth in the Hindu group has been particularly strong, while the other main non-Christian religious groups include Islam and Buddhism.

The municipality is also home to many newly arrived migrants and refugees, 3975 new arrivals settling in the city with over the last 5 years, (ABS, 2006). New arrival communities in Whittlesea have originated from over 40 different countries including Lebanon, Sudan, Burundi, Iraq, Sri Lanka and India, with many new arrivals having no established networks or pre-migration history in Australia (WCC Settlement Plan, 2006).

Whilst there is a great diversity of new arrivals with only small numbers, the largest increase in birthplace groups occurred for people in Iraq, India or Sri Lanka.

The City also has a relatively large indigenous population. Although indigenous people make up a small proportion of the total population, the number of indigenous persons measured by the Census increased by 24% between 2001 and 2006, to a total of 844 persons.

In all four of the SEIFA Indexes produced by the ABS, the City as a whole scores very poorly. Whittlesea is the fifth most disadvantaged municipality in the Melbourne Statistical Division (MSD) and also ranked the fourth lowest in metropolitan Melbourne's Index of Education and Occupation. However, looking at the SEIFA index scores at a Precinct (Suburb) level, a clear geographic picture of relative disadvantage across the municipality can be seen. There are distinctive areas of even greater disadvantage than the average for the City of Whittlesea, in the southern suburbs.

Losses to Electronic Gaming Machines (Pokies) continue to be high for the municipality. With 616 machines in the area, just over \$87.4 million was lost in the 2007-2008 financial year. This equates to an average loss of \$885 per adult in the municipality. These are the second highest losses per machine in the State (excluding the Casino).

Disadvantage and rapid growth also exist within poorly developed human service infrastructure which means that 'capacity is stretched across the range of service provision, particularly where families, children and young people have complex needs (City of Whittlesea, 2004). The identification of major social, economic and environmental impacts associated with rapid growth and specification at the local, state/territory and national levels of key infrastructure priorities and service needs to promote sustainable growth have recently been highlighted by the National Growth Area Alliance (2007). Transport has consistently been identified as a barrier for Whittlesea residents, in their ability to access services and participate in the community.

1.2 Why do we need a Community Engagement Framework in Whittlesea?

A Community Engagement Framework for Whittlesea provides a cohesive approach to engaging Whittlesea communities, based on the needs, experiences and aspirations of local communities. The framework provides a guide for the community participation activities of local organisations, governments and developers to actively engage Whittlesea residents to get involved, and to develop an awareness among governments and organisations of the strategies to involve Whittlesea's diverse, marginalised and isolated communities.

Local experience and research has demonstrated that Whittlesea communities are keen to be involved in, and contribute to their community. For example, in the first four years of service (2003-07), Whittlesea Community Connection's Volunteer Resource Service has had contact with over 4000 community members expressing an interest in participating in their community. However, Whittlesea residents' ability to get involved in their community and to volunteer is limited by the opportunities available locally. Residents have indicated the need to expand the range of options for volunteering in the municipality, commenting that 'wider options of volunteering opportunities are needed' and emphasised the need for participation opportunities that meet community needs (WCC, 2005). Much social capital is lost when community members with many

strengths, skills, enthusiasm and good-will are not provided with relevant opportunities for participation in local services and programs.

Additionally, local research undertaken with newly arrived migrant and refugee communities in Whittlesea, has highlighted the need for initiatives that connect and strengthen opportunities for participation within Whittlesea. Social isolation among newly arrived migrants and refugees has been closely linked with the inability to build a sense of community belonging because of language and cultural barriers. Local research recommends that 'mainstream community needs to do more to promote connectedness and participation, particularly as racism was raised as a common issue impacting on new arrivals such as African communities' (WCC 2005). A further study into the experiences of newly arrived young people in Whittlesea, also found that there is a high level of capacity and willingness of newly arrived and refugee young people to become more involved in community participation opportunities and that services can help by assisting new arrival and refugee young people to make new friends, improve their English and volunteer in other activities (WCC, 2005).

The Department for Victorian Communities (DVC, now DPCD) *Indicators of Community Strength report (2005a)* provides further evidence for the need for cohesive community engagement approaches in Whittlesea. The indicators, collected as part of a pilot study of neighbourhood data, highlighted that City of Whittlesea scored lower than the State average in response to many of the community strength indicators. For example, Whittlesea residents felt valued less by society (State average=74.1%, CoW=46.4%) and felt that there was not always opportunities to have a real say on issues (State average=59.6%, CoW=37.3%). The municipality also scored lower than the metropolitan average in relation to participation in organised sport, volunteering, organised groups and boards and committees, with specific suburbs being significantly lower in their participation (DVC, 2005b)¹.

To address community engagement in Whittlesea, and to consult with the local community and government sector about volunteer participation locally, Whittlesea Community Connections (WCC) held a Community Engagement Forum (2005). Attended by over 80 local workers, community groups and volunteers, there was broad consensus to work together to develop a Community Engagement Framework for Whittlesea' (WCC, 2005). A 'framework' would involve establishing basic principles to under-pin the development and sustaining of community involvement and participation approaches relevant to local needs.

In order to develop the framework, Whittlesea Community Connections, in partnership with a project reference group, consisting of community members, local government and community organisations, undertook a process of research to generate a locally relevant set of community engagement principles. A review of relevant literature was the first step in this research project.

¹ For example, participation in organised sport was significantly lower for Thomastown residents (26% compared to 40% metropolitan average) and membership in organised groups was significantly lower for Epping residents (38% compared to 50% metropolitan average). The Whittlesea township however, scored the same or above the metropolitan average for 5 of the 6 participation indicators.

Chapter 2: Literature Review - What do others say about Community Engagement?

A literature review was conducted to identify relevant experiences of others in:

- Defining community engagement
- Identifying the benefits of community engagement
- Identifying forms of community engagement
- Addressing challenges in practice, and
- Engagement among disadvantaged communities.

2.1 What is community engagement?

A plethora of research and government publications discuss and debate concepts, theories and definitions of community engagement, and what it means for communities. For the purposes of this project, and drawing on some of this literature, the reference group agreed that community engagement be defined as the following²:

Community³ engagement empowers local communities by encouraging and supporting people to have a say in the decisions which affect their lives and to be actively involved in developing their community .

Good community engagement builds agreement around issues and creates momentum for communities to address local issues. It includes:

- *Communities and public organisations working together to bring about change by identifying and meeting community needs*
- *Creating processes and opportunities for involving communities in the planning, development, delivery and management of services.*
- *Following a process that ensures representation of all or key stakeholder groups and that communities determine local priorities.*
- *Mobilising the strengths, capacities and assets of residents to build and strengthen local communities.*
- *Understanding that when people decide they are going to be part of the solution, local problems start getting solved.*
- *Understanding that people can be connected to their communities by 'helping out' in activities that do not fit within a traditional framework of institutional community engagement.*

Community Engagement often involves partnerships and coalitions in which all participants work together as equals to create solutions, and change policies, programs,

² A range of sources has been used in the development of this definition: Passport to Community Engagement, UK 2004; Our growing Understanding of Community Engagement, Tamarack, an Institute for Community Engagement, Ontario 2006; Maribyrnong City Council, Community Engagement Framework, Melbourne 2000; Queensland Government Community Engagement Improvement Strategy, Brisbane 2003; Scottish Centre for Regeneration, Community Engagement How to Guide, Glasgow 2006; Community Engagement: Definitions and Organizing Concepts from the Literature, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Public Health Practice Program Office, US; Dept. of Sustainability & Environment, Victoria , 2005

³ 'Community' in this context can refer to people connected by geographic location (i.e. people who live in a particular suburb or LGA); people connected by a common identity (eg people sharing the same culture, language, ethnicity or age); or people connected by a shared interest (e.g. a sporting club).

and practices. Community Engagement can be initiated by any of the stakeholders, including local residents, organisations and government.

It is also recognised that valuable community engagement processes and outcomes can be on-going or episodic. They are not limited by time. Both short-term and long-term community engagement projects and activities can have significant impacts on communities.

2.2 Benefits of community engagement

Within recent times, engaging and connecting community members with each other and with organisations has become an important public policy imperative, whereby 'governments at all levels are seeking to change the way they work with communities to encourage people to be more active, more engaged and more prepared to be self-governing' (Brackerz, Zwart, Meredyth, & Ralston, 2005).

This approach is reflected in Victorian government policy, where 'Growing Victoria together' (2001, 2007), the Victorian Government's vision for the next ten years, states that a 'vibrant democracy is achieved through greater public participation and more accountable government' and where 'a measure of success identified in the document is that more Victorians from all backgrounds are given the opportunity to have a say on issues that matter to them' (p.44). A Fairer Victoria further articulates the government's objectives to give individuals, families and communities more choice & power to make decisions for themselves.

Reasons cited for this increasing emphasis on community engagement are many and varied. A growing body of evidence that links social capital and community connectedness to better public health outcomes & increased community well being has been influential in shaping a community strengthening agenda in Victoria. While overseas, community involvement in governance is premised on the idea of accountability; that 'participation in the policy process by those who will be affected, will lead to better outcomes and wider acceptance, as well as enhancing the democratic legitimacy of decisions' (Klausen & Sweeting, 2002, cited in Brackertz, 2006, p.7).

There is also an increasing acknowledgement that governments are not the experts and do not always have the knowledge, influence or resources to address complex community issues (Queensland Government, 2005). Engagement with communities is therefore viewed as a way of involving the community to actively address their own issues, needs and interests, as well as seen as a way of enhancing the ability of governments and organisations to respond to the emerging needs and aspirations of diverse communities (Brackertz, 2006). More recently the inherent value of community engagement processes (as opposed to outcomes of community engagement) have been highlighted as important in and of themselves, whereby establishing relationships, between organisations, governments and communities and between people within the community are legitimate reasons for engagement (VLGA). Creating action, and influencing decisions that impact on communities however, remains the primary goal of effective community engagement activities.

2.3 Forms of community engagement

Numerous models have been developed to rank levels or types of community engagement, derived from Arnstein's (1969) ladder of citizen participation. Arnstein described different levels of influence afforded to citizens by governments, ranging from manipulation to citizen control; or non-participation, to tokenism through to citizen power. Specifically, Arnstein (1969) describes the ladder as a guide to seeing who has power when important decisions are being made, pointing out the critical difference between going through the empty ritual of participation and having the real power needed to affect the outcome of the process.

More recently, the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) have developed a model of public participation, which depicts a continuum of public empowerment, ranging from an information provision role for governments through to an empowering one. Table 1 is an adoption of this model, and describes the role for communities in influencing final decisions made by governments and organisations.

Models such as IAP2 have been widely adopted by governments, and may be useful in so far as they make explicit the level of influence usually expected with each type of engagement activity. However, as the Outer Suburban Interface Services Development Committee (2006) warns, the goal is not to always move to the right of the continuum (towards empowerment). 'Consultation fatigue' can occur in communities where input is sought on every issue, therefore engagement techniques need to be led by the level of interest in the community on the topic at hand, and the perceived importance (or impact on the community) of the decision to be made.

Additionally, adopting a linear, hierarchical model of empowerment both risks overlooking the empowering role each level of participation can play on one hand, and masking lack of real decision-making power on the other. As Arnstein (1969) points out, *Informing citizens of their rights, responsibilities, and options can be the most important first step toward legitimate citizen participation... (whereas) in the name of citizen participation, people are placed on rubberstamp advisory committees or advisory boards for the express purpose of "educating" them or engineering their support*" (p. 217). Furthermore, such typologies of engagement do not take into account whether empowering communities means giving them a major role in decision making or simply an opportunity for some kind of limited role in the process, and whether a say in some but not other decision making processes constitutes real empowerment (Murphy & Cauchi, 2004).

Much of the literature and government attention towards community engagement has tended to focus on consultation; viewing engagement as a once off event designed to address a particular issue or decision to be made. Forms of consultation include surveys, public meetings and inviting public comment. The ongoing relationship between communities and institutions, which impact on their lives, and the inter-relationship between the roles residents play in the planning, delivery and evaluation of services, has been less discussed in the literature. Involvement through volunteering or community groups, while have been widely recognised as a beneficial activity for communities, have not been explicitly linked to community engagement approaches or outcomes.

Problems with consultation

While consulting can be a legitimate step towards participation, consultation can 'suggest simply providing information to a community and requesting feedback, but carries no undertaking that there is to be any shift in what is done or how it is done' (Hashagen, 2002). Arnstein (1969) similarly warns that if consultation *is not combined with other modes of participation, this rung of the ladder is still a sham since it offers no assurance that citizen concerns and ideas will be taken into account... and participation is measured by how many come to meetings, take brochures home, or answer a questionnaire. What citizens achieve in all this activity is that they have "participated in participation." And what powerholders achieve is the evidence that they have gone through the required motions of involving "those people"*(p.220). Effective consultation therefore, needs to have power to influence decisions which impact on communities lives, and alone is not sufficient to engage communities.

2.4 Volunteering as a form of community engagement

Volunteering has been defined as an activity by which individuals give freely of their time to benefit themselves and others, without financial payment in a community organisation, group or in their neighbourhood. Volunteering has mutual benefits. For individuals it offers the opportunity for 'giving' to their community, a chance to make links with others and develop skills. For organisations, there is an opportunity to extend the services provided to communities, as well as a chance of involving the community in service planning, delivery and evaluation. For communities, the benefits are many. Community members are the recipients of services provided by volunteers, community networks are strengthened through the involvement of local people as volunteers, and opportunities for the development of mutual understanding, trust and awareness are enhanced.

Volunteering in Australia however, has evolved within a traditional framework, whereby involvement by community members was sought in order to meet a community need and/or to meet the resource gaps of not for profit organisations. Lyons & Tinney (2001) notes that, while this traditional form or definition of volunteering points to community engagement, not all volunteer programs within this approach promote community engagement. Examples cited which may not promote community engagement include those that make decisions on behalf of clients, and do not ask them about how they'd like to be involved, have rigid roles for volunteers so no individual strengths or initiative can flow from volunteers input, have rigid boundaries that divide, client, volunteer and organisation, do not enable broader connection to the community, where services are 'provided' to the client, and the clients' strengths are not seen as an important part of the relationship.

A recent study undertaken by Volunteering Australia (2007) further suggests that many volunteers are still not engaged in decision making processes, with the study reporting that 22% of volunteers surveyed identifying that they did not have any opportunities to participate in decision-making and/or would like more opportunities to do so. Additionally, a third of volunteers (33%) do not have opportunity to influence the strategic directions and actions of the organisation and/or would like to have more opportunities for influence (Volunteering Australia, 2007). This research demonstrates that, if volunteering is not

accompanied by other forms of participation, such as involvement in decision-making, then community engagement outcomes can be limited.

Volunteering as community engagement?

Lyons & Tinney (2001) discusses the 'Old Friends' volunteer visiting program in NSW, as an example of a volunteer program that 'aims to think differently to change the way we interact with volunteers, participants and clients of the program' (p.2). The program seeks to match an older person with a volunteer or possibly introduce a small group of people to connect. The program departs from a traditional 'community visitor program' in that the benefits for the volunteer, client and wider community (as reciprocal) are equally a focus, there is a belief that participants (volunteers and clients) have much to offer the organisation and have a say in the direction of the volunteer role, that the strengths of participants, including life experiences, are drawn upon to form relationships and supporting the growing of networks is considered an important objective. Outcomes of the program include connections beyond the volunteer role (contact was maintained beyond the volunteer program), reciprocity in relationships (older residents (clients) taught volunteers skills such as history and cooking), networks and learning opportunities were provided (information on dementia was provided, and ideas for new activities were discussed with volunteers), volunteers and clients shared reflections with the organisation to improve the program (eg; Disability stickers would assist activities), and volunteers brought their own networks into the program (parents brought their children along).

2.5 Other forms of community engagement

Alongside formal volunteering, there is an enormous amount of informal assistance in the form of helping out in schools, assisting with transport, or helping of neighbours, friends and communities. These informal activities are often not measured, nor considered to be volunteering, 'yet are the primary form of volunteering in many communities' (Interface, 2006). People who engage in these activities may or may not consider themselves 'volunteers', and often these forms of community involvement don't 'make it into the official count' (MAV, 2007).

This may especially be the case in disadvantaged communities. For example, a study into low-income communities in the USA found that volunteering happens in low-income communities but is not called volunteering. As a recent Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) report reports 'often these communities have a long history of helping, sharing and giving back, but don't do it under the auspices of a formal organisation. As a result, volunteering in low-income communities often receives little credit for the impact it has on building communities and strengthening families (MAV, 2007, p.8). The challenge is for governments and organisations to recognise this important form of community involvement, and ensure policies and structures are developed to support, and not undermine this form of participation.

Similarly, the role of community and social support groups as a form of community engagement has often been overlooked within the community engagement literature. Community groups, such as playgroups, seniors groups, cultural groups and sporting clubs 'create social capital by providing opportunities for people to volunteer and participate in local activities, mix with others, build trust and a sense of belonging' (Interface, 2006, p.89). The role of groups and networks in interface areas and emerging

communities is particularly important, with the potential they present as valuable entry-points into the community, and as rich sources of social interaction and support (Interface, 2006). Community networks in particular, are a key coping and survival mechanism for emerging refugee communities, particularly where there are language or cultural barriers (WCC, forthcoming). In addition, groups, such as residents associations or action groups can also play a critical role in empowering local residents to participate in local decision making processes, while the governance structures of many groups enables local people to occupy positions of influence in their community.

The failure to see community groups as an important form of community engagement has perhaps resulted in inadequate support for their continued functioning. For example, Murphy & Cauchi (2004) identify that community groups are often not supported by governments and community organisations due to lack of information provided to them, by them not being part of larger, mainstream networks, through the funding application processes which impede rather than assist their efforts, with difficulty obtaining basic operating costs (such as accessible, affordable venues) and by having to contend with restrictive funding processes. Alternatively, Hashagen (2002) suggests that helping to establish new groups where they are needed can both strengthen the infrastructure of communities, as well as make engagement more productive.

Table 1: Levels of Public Engagement & Empowerment (adapted from IAP2, 2004)

Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Objective				
Provision of balanced information to assist in understanding the issues and decisions	A process to listen and acknowledge concerns, then provide feedback on how input has influenced a decision	Concerns and issues are reflected in decisions made, through direct involvement by community throughout the process.	A partnership approach is adopted, where communities have a say in development of alternatives & identification of preferred solutions.	Final decisions are determined by the input of the community
Examples				
Fact sheets Service brochures Media articles Websites Information sessions with groups Translated information	Public comment Focus groups Surveys Public meetings	Workshops Deliberative polling	Citizen Advisory Committees Consensus-building Participatory decision making	Citizen juries Ballots Delegated decisions
Role of communities				
Communities are passive receivers of information, don't have the ability to influence decisions or make changes to existing services or structures. They are 'told' what is happening.	Communities have an opportunity to provide their feedback and respond to proposed activities or decisions. But there are no 'guarantees' that their input will make a difference to the decisions made.	Communities have an opportunity to be involved in an ongoing way, and to provide their perspective and identify alternatives. There is some influence on final outcomes.	Communities are invited to provide their perspectives and solutions, and this input has an influence over final decisions made.	Communities have the final say in decisions that affect their lives.

2.6 Challenges in practice

Involving communities in decisions which impact on their lives, which although is not new⁴, challenges traditional approaches to decision-making, where government representatives have been elected to make decisions on behalf of residents and community organisations funded as experts to provide services within a particular community⁵. While the rationale and drivers for a community engagement agenda may be clear, challenging this traditional culture or way of working with the community, particularly within governments, has proved to be less easily achievable in practice. The degree to which organisations and government are willing and able to embrace a culture of engagement varies, as guidelines for good practice are poorly defined, or in some situations, decision-makers are unwilling to change the way they work with communities. The MAV (2007) suggest that there is a line between genuinely affirming and facilitating the decision making capacity of communities and maintaining control over processes and outcomes, and that governments need to 'let go' of this control. Additionally, As Brackertz (2005) points out in relation to local government:

There is a need for councils to build their own capacity to conduct successful citizen participation and grow these skills within the organisation. A key element to this is the dissemination of knowledge across various departments and functional units to enable successful consultation to become a 'way of doing business' rather than a one off event. Councils need to develop their capacity – intellectually, organisationally and in terms of resources – to create a culture of citizen engagement, both within the organisation and the wider community p.19.

Further reluctance by decision makers and governments to involve the community in programs and policy decisions is based on the view that community members are not capable of dealing with complex issues, do not have the same understanding or 'expertise' needed to participate or make decisions and/or will be self-interested when having a say. A recent inquiry undertaken by the Outer Suburban/Interface services & Development Committee (2006) cites several informants who highlight that the community are more likely to be sensible and practical (not radical) when provided with the opportunity to have a say in the local planning process. For example, researchers have found that 'typical citizens are capable of dealing extremely well with complex issues....with attention being paid not to self interest, but to the common good' (p.42). As Gillgren states 'clearly, without community input, it is difficult for governments to fully understand the values of the community or impacts that are felt by community members in their everyday lives' (p.43).

Similarly, concern about usurping the role of elected representatives when communities are engaged in decision making is refuted by the report which points to the work of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development who argue that effectiveness of elected officials, and of democracy more generally, is strengthened rather than diminished by involvement of citizens in decision making processes. (p.43). The 'Good Governance Guide' for Victorian local governments supports this view, claiming that

⁴ Characteristic of much community development work in the 1970's and 1980's

⁵ As Brackertz (2006) points out, in relation to governments 'in a representative democracy general acceptance of political decisions is predicated on the principle that each vote counts equally when electing representatives and that beyond elections, everybody has the same right to attempt to influence political decision making through lobbying and advocacy prior to decisions being made' (p.3).

local government is more likely to gain the trust and confidence of its community if they are engaged in and involved with its governance.

At the other extreme, some commentators have cautioned against a current trend of pursuing community engagement as a panacea for all community issues and needs, as 'government-funded community building in Australia promises to be the cure-all for our community problems' (Murphy & Cauchi, 2004, p.1). Murphy & Cauchi (2004) for example, point to the irony in espousing a rhetoric of (and resourcing) community building approaches, while continuing to ignore structural causes of disadvantage (such as socioeconomic background, income, employment & education), questioning 'can a community be truly empowered if a proportion of its population remains disempowered because of poverty and disadvantage?' (p.4). Similarly, many are cautious about this policy direction 'fearing that it services to position communities to fill gaps in service provision and social policy left by the shrinking of the state' (Brackertz, 2006, p.7).

Additionally, Brackertz (2006) highlights problems associated with an 'add on' approach to community engagement, citing the example of Councils receiving additional resources to undertake highly publicised 'flagship' exercises, while continuing to undertake 'business as usual': *It was, for example possible for a council to be reticent about community consultation and participation in decision making, and yet be involved in a high profile community building project in the same municipality. In this instance the community building initiative becomes a political vehicle rather than a way of establishing participatory practice and ongoing relationships with the community P.17.*

The rationale for community engagement therefore needs to be transparent, and activities that seek to engage communities founded on strong values and principles.

2.7 Community engagement and disadvantaged communities

The literature points to some groups being 'hard to reach' for governments and organisations. Brackertz (2006) defines the 'hard to reach' as 'those sections of the community that are difficult to involve in Council consultations' (p.13). Groups that have been traditionally marginalised, such as young people, those from CALD backgrounds, indigenous people, newly arrived migrants, single parents and people with a disability are typically not represented in consultation processes.

Participation barriers for newly arrived migrants and refugees for example, include language barriers, real or perceived discrimination by mainstream organisations, distrust of volunteer organisations and a lack of information about their work, and lack of compensation for out of pocket expenses (Interface, 2006).

Refugees face additional difficulties in their ability to get involved in the community. Refugee experiences of displacement significantly contribute to the loss of internal community support structures, and the loss and destruction of social support networks exacerbates the difficulties faced by refugee communities. A focus on migrant and refugees recovering their community means special attention must be given to the role of social connections, and engagement with refugee communities by organisations need to take account of the context within which refugees are settling in Australia (WCC, forthcoming).

Similarly, people with disabilities experience exclusion from mainstream activities, including community participation and volunteering activities. According to a study undertaken by Scope, people with disabilities were generally viewed in the community as beneficiaries of care, rather than contributing community members with skills and abilities that can help others' (Interface, 2006, p.151). Furthermore, many people with disabilities also report a more subtle form of discrimination, where they are given unskilled or menial volunteer roles due to a perception that their disability means they could not do other tasks (Russell, 2005, cited in Interface, 2006).

In addition, growing disadvantage means that often people are living in 'severely impoverished circumstances are preoccupied with meeting their own basic needs for survival, and are less inclined to take an active interest in wider community concerns and join in with others to address them' (Murphy & Cauchi, 2004, p.12). The causes of their disadvantage need to be simultaneously addressed if full participation is to be encouraged.

Alternatively, the literature identifies the vast array of informal activity that occurs within disadvantaged communities, and particularly within many CALD communities. A recent report by the MAV (2007) suggests that as long as volunteering and community participation are understood as 'add on' activities, rather than within more democratic terms, as participation in decisions affecting members of the community, existing inequalities will be reinforced.

With this in mind, the concept of 'hard to reach' can be re-framed to be understood in the following terms: *It is not the community that is hard to reach, but hard to reach is symptomatic of organisations failing to reach out and engage a diverse range of the community (Brackertz, 2006).*

2.8 A framework for Community Engagement

In order to address the challenges involved in implementing community engagement initiatives, many governments have developed frameworks of community engagement, which set out the principles, aims, strategies and desired outcomes of engaging with communities (eg; Queensland Government, Victorian Department of Sustainability & Environment & City of Maribrynong). Examples of good frameworks contain the following important elements.

- *Understanding the local community's needs, assets and history (beyond demographic profiles)*
- *Founded upon Community Engagement Principles, which govern community engagement processes. Principles adopted frequently include Responsiveness, Inclusiveness, Deliberation, Accountability and Accessibility. See appendix 6 for a comprehensive list of principles.*
- *Ensuring that the rationale & benefits of community engagement are clearly articulated, including questioning where community engagement may be associated with cost shifting from the government to community sector (MAV, 2007)*

- *Ensuring there is a balance between community engagement processes and creating action*, so that while efforts to build relationships are undertaken, people have the opportunity to contribute to decisions made, and action is taken to make positive changes in the community.
- *Addressing barriers to community engagement* by providing support for a diverse range of people to get involved, particularly ensuring that those who may be marginalised have an opportunity to participate.
- *Evaluating & sustaining outcomes* to ensure local lessons are learnt and processes are improved upon, as well as that benefits of engagement activities have sustainable, long term economic, social, cultural and environmental benefits.

Chapter 3: Research methodology - How we did the research

3.1 The Purpose of the Research

The purpose of the research was to generate information from community residents to inform the development of a community engagement framework. The elaboration of an associated set of locally Community Engagement Principles was a key component of the framework. It was considered important that the framework was reflective of the specific needs and aspirations of individuals and groups in the Whittlesea community.

The research objectives were to;

- Identify how local people were currently participating in their community, and their experience of involvement,
- Ascertain the personal, organisational and community factors that facilitate or inhibit involvement in community,
- Find out the ways in which local residents want to get involved & participate, and
- Identify strategies to improve and enhance opportunities for people living in the City of Whittlesea to become involved in and contribute to the community.

3.2 Research Design

It was considered important to canvass the views of a wide range of individuals and groups within the municipality, and to provide them with an opportunity to share their perspectives on community participation. A mixed methods research design was adopted. The specific design used was a sequential exploratory strategy (Cresswell & Plano-Clark, 2007). This strategy incorporates a focus on generating data using qualitative methods with a supporting quantitative data collection element. Qualitative techniques included consultation interviews, and focus group interviews. A small-scale telephone survey with a random sample of community residents was undertaken to generate additional information and confirm qualitative findings.

The research was underpinned by a commitment to consultative processes and participation in both the process and outcome of the research. In practice this involved identifying opportunities for community members to participate in the research, encouraging participation from a wide range of individuals and groups, and involving collaborative analysis procedures within a group context.

3.3 Research Methods and Procedure

The research was conducted in two main phases. In the first phase consultation interviews and focus groups were undertaken. The emphasis of phase 1 was on using qualitative techniques to generate systematic, information rich data from Whittlesea residents. In the second phase a telephone survey was undertaken with a random sample of residents. Table 1 summarises the range of methods used, and the number of participants in each group or method.

Table 1: Summary of research methods and number of participants

Method	Number of groups	Number of participants
Phase 1: Qualitative methods		
Focus groups	9	58
Group consultations	15	116
Individual interviews	N/a	48
Presentation of findings (new participants only)	3	7 (31 in total)
Emerging communities consultations	3 focus groups (24 individual interviews)	75
Phase 2: Quantitative methods		
Random telephone surveys	N/a	53
Total	30	357

A description of the specific methods adopted in this study is provided below. As the focus groups were the core area of focus for generating the framework, the processes and procedures adopted are described more fully than other data collection strategies.

3.3a) Phase 1: Qualitative research interviews

Rationale

Focus groups and consultations with groups are commonly used to generate a range of perspectives about an issue or topic of interest, and are of particular value when there is a need to understand the way individuals talk and experience an issue or topic. While community engagement frameworks and principles have been developed in other areas, there was little local information available about the needs and perspectives of local residents. The diversity of residents in the Whittlesea community also necessitated the use of a research approach that gave participants an opportunity to share perspectives and give voice to a range of experiences. Individual interviews complemented focus group interviews, and provided capacity to generate in-depth information for the study. A standardised, open-ended interview approach was adopted, which consisted of the same set of questions being asked of each respondent (Patton, 1990). This interviewing approach was considered most appropriate, given time limitations, and that many people conducted the interviews.

Sampling Processes

A combination of strategies was required to recruit hard to reach and isolated populations, and to generate information from a diverse range of participant groups. A purposive sampling strategy (Patton, 1990) was adopted to recruit participants for the focus groups, group discussions and interviews. Purposive sampling is designed to select information rich cases, and in this research was used to identify groups which would provide insight into the research questions. Additionally, a snowball sampling approach was used to recruit young people, and refugees from newly emerging communities, as the above approach was not effective in reaching these groups. Snowball sampling relies on a series of referrals that are made within a circle of people who know each other or are loosely connected (Atkinson & Flint, 2001, cited in Brackertz, 2007). While this sampling approach resulted in the target groups being involved in the research, there are potential limitations in terms of the homogeneity of the resulting participant group.

Participants

It was considered important to gather perspectives from these diverse target groups to inform the framework. Along with a range of focus groups and interviews conducted by the researchers, findings and interviews from a study by WCC into the needs of emerging refugee communities were also incorporated into the study, as this research also addressed community involvement in Whittlesea. Participant groups (including those from this study) are summarised in the table below, and have been clustered according to sub-groups of interest.

Table 2: Methods and target groups in the Qualitative phase

Target populations	Focus groups	Group consultations	Individual interviews
Volunteers	3 focus groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CFA Volunteers • BECC Volunteers • WCC settlement Volunteers 	Volunteers from a range of organisations were interviewed
Rural residents	1 focus group		Residents from Kinglake & Whittlesea township were interviewed ⁶
Disability (Including carers)	1 focus group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bundoora Stroke Group 	Participants with a disability were identified through the Whittlesea Disability Network
Young people	2 focus groups (Under 18, and 18-25 years)		Participants were recruited from the Scullin Youth Expo and through Youth Services
Newly arrived migrants & refugees	1 focus groups (3 focus groups were conducted as part of emerging communities study)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • English Language class at Lalor Living & Learning Centre • Arabic Women's 	Refugees were interviewed as part of the emerging communities study
General/open	1 focus group		Participants were interviewed at Women's Art in the Park event, the Whittlesea Community Festival, at the Mill Park library
Residents in new estates		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resident group • 2 Playgroup in a new estate 	Participants were referred by local developers, and through attendance at a community event in a new estate
Parents		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Single mothers group • 4 Playgroups (including the 2 above) 	Participants were recruited through local family services.
Indigenous people			Participants were local residents recruited through Indigenous workers. ⁷
Older residents		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whittlesea U3A • Bundoora Retirement Village 	Participants were recruited through local seniors groups.

⁶ The Whittlesea Community Building Initiative promoted the project to its members, and Kinglake Neighbourhood House distributed and collected surveys with Kinglake residents.

⁷ Two of the indigenous residents were also local workers. One participant did not identify as Indigenous, but discussed indigenous issues extensively due to her experience within this community.

Three hundred and four participants were interviewed as part of the qualitative phase of the research. Summary statistics about the background characteristics of 230 participants (including those who participated through a random survey) were generated and are attached in Appendix 3. Demographic information was not included for the emerging communities study, and some group consultations (playgroups) and individual interviews did not complete demographic data due to practicalities (parents left the group early and/or were looking after their children).

Qualitative process & analysis

Each focus group was limited to members of the relevant group of interest (e.g., Youth, Newly Arrived Migrants), while groups were focused around a particular characteristic or interest. This encouraged the participants to share information as they all had something in common. Homogeneity is a key principle in sample frames within focus group research. A facilitator and assistant moderator were present for all groups and shared the associated research tasks. The facilitator took responsibility for the focus group, directing questions to participants and managing the flow of the discussion. The assistant moderator took extensive notes during the discussion and was responsible for managing tape recording. The assistant moderator role was important also in validating the preliminary themes that arose during the interviews.

Focus group analysis was undertaken based on a tape-based analysis technique (Krueger, 1994), whereby relevant information that related to key questions was transcribed while listening to the tapes. Interviewers took notes during the individual interviews and group consultations.

Following the transcription of focus groups and completion of interview notes taken during the focus group by the assistant moderator, information was coded, and themes were identified both across groups and in relation to the key research questions. Themes were then crosschecked by a second researcher, to ensure they were grounded in the data. Two workshops were then held, which involved members of the reference group and community members to further confirm the identified themes. Key quotes representative of the core themes were then selected to illustrate participants' perspectives..

Finally, a process of participant verification was undertaken (Krueger, 1994). A series of presentations of findings back to community members was undertaken to validate research findings, and provide an opportunity for research participants to respond to, and provide further input, in light of others' responses.

Consultation with Organisational Representatives

While the focus of the research was gauging the views and experiences of Whittlesea residents, consulting with local community organisations, government departments and Developers was considered important to ascertain current experiences and potential opportunities for organisations to increase community engagement activities locally. Thirty-three workers from 13 organisations participated in individual interviews, or in one of four group consultations conducted (Open consultation, Council workers, Whittlesea Community Futures group and Whittlesea Community Connections Leadership group. Notes were taken during these consultations, and themes identified following the interviews. A full list of participating organisations is listed in Appendix 1)

3.3 b) Phase ii: Random Telephone Survey

Rationale & sampling approach

A simple random sampling approach was adopted for the second phase of the research, to expand on the findings in the first phase of the research and ensure bias towards who is included in the study was minimised. Participants for the telephone survey were selected randomly from the the latest edition of the Whitepages, a widely used approach to random sampling for small populations (ABS, 2004).

The 10-minute telephone survey was undertaken to gather information from a wider range of community members who may not have had the opportunity to participate in the focus groups or consultation interviews. A random sample of telephone numbers was generated and a group of 6 researchers undertook the telephone survey over three consecutive weeks.

Participants and analysis

A total of 53 telephone surveys were completed, with a response rate of 13%. Descriptive analysis was undertaken to identify convergent and divergent views from Phase 1 findings. It should be noted that because of the small sample size, the survey results are not statistically generalisable to the broader municipal population. The survey data however complements phase 1 of the study by broadening the collection of information beyond the in-depth data obtained through focus groups and interviews.

The findings from phase 2 provide support the themes generated in the first phase of the research, and validate the principles of community engagement, generated through phase 1 of the study. Detailed demographics of participants can be found in Appendix 3.

3.4 Research Integrity

The research was conducted by staff within Whittlesea Community Connections. There was a range of personnel included on the research reference group to provide guidance to the researchers and to ensure that key stakeholder organisations were represented. Members of these organisations represented on the reference group participated in the analysis workshops, which involved reading transcripts and validating themes identified in preliminary analysis by the researchers within Whittlesea Community Connections. Additionally, the reference group assisted with reviewing literature for the framework, provided input on the choice of research methods adopted, and commented on emerging findings. These processes maximized the validity of the ensuing analysis by incorporating a range of different perspectives on the data generated.

One worker also acted as an independent researcher by conducting an interview with Whittlesea Community Connections staff, so they could contribute their views and experiences as part of the project. This enabled WCC staff to focus on being research 'participants' and mitigated any actual or perceived of conflict of interest, which may have arisen otherwise.

An experienced social researcher was engaged to provide training in qualitative methods, specifically in conducting and analysing focus group information. This researcher also provided expert advice on research methodology throughout the research process, while an experienced locally based quantitative researcher provided guidance for the conduct and sampling of the random telephone survey

3.5 Research Ethics & Limitations

A range of ethical issues were identified and addressed through the research. A full description of the issues addressed can be found in Appendix 4, and includes:

- Language & literacy barriers
- Representation of social groups
- Representation of organisations
- Informed consent
- Privacy
- Confidentiality
- Meeting emerging needs
- De-briefing

A random sampling approach was adopted in order to support the findings from phase 1 of the research, caution should be exercised in drawing generalisations given the small sample size, and the non-representative nature of the data generated.

Additionally, despite support offered to assist Whittlesea residents to participate, language barriers, lack of access to transport, childcare, or respite may have prevented full participation in the research. Finally, given the focus of the study was on developing a local community engagement framework, applications of the findings to different areas and contexts must be tentative.

3.6 Learning from the process

The research process itself provided much learning about the benefits, preferences and barriers of community engagement in Whittlesea. Overwhelmingly participants provided high quality, realistic input, demonstrating that the community is informed about their own, and others needs, as well as appreciating the processes involved for organisations to engage communities. Despite barriers of language, confidence and potential challenges in understanding the complexities of the structures and processes of organisations, participants articulated clearly the ways in which they would like to be involved, and their ideas for how organisations could work better to engage communities.

Personal connections and a personal invitation are important for people to get involved, with many of those attending focus groups involved due to their connection to the project in some way. This was reinforced by comments by participants that attended the presentation of findings: “I heard about the project through my volunteering and decided to get involved” and “A friend got me involved”. This was particularly the case for one of the Youth focus groups, where after 2 attempts of running a Youth focus group (where no-one attended), participants were invited via their peers, by mobile phone. As a result,

a group of young people, all of whom knew at least one other young person, participated, and felt confident in doing so knowing others they knew would be there.

On the contrary, the 'open' focus groups, which invited members of the general public to attend, only resulted in 2 participants attending. Despite promotion in the local media and via other organisations to client groups, and offering flexible options for participation, the response rate to this form of promotion was not highly effective. This was reinforced by the random telephone survey, which resulted in only 13% response rate. However, while numbers for both these methods were low, those who participated this way would not have been involved in the project otherwise. For example many worked full time, had no connection with community organisations, or had difficulty attending a group due to caring responsibilities or health barriers. The experience of this project would suggest however, that these methods (promoting to the general public and random telephone surveys) should not be the only methods relied upon when undertaking consultation in Whittlesea.

The flexibility of participation options resulted in more Whittlesea residents being able to participate in the research. For example, offering focus groups on different days, various times (including evening), a range of venues, conducting individual interviews (for those unwilling or unable to attend a group) and group consultations (going to existing groups) resulted in diverse participation. As one participant commented 'I can't come to that meeting as my husband works and I look after the kids, but I'd like to do a telephone survey'. Additionally, support provided to ensure participation was accessible meant that a range of Whittlesea residents could get involved. Transport, childcare, and interpreters and used, and those with limited literacy were assisted with written participation. Having an open, flexible approach to consultation, according to the experience of this project, is key to diverse engagement in Whittlesea.

This project sought community involvement throughout the research process. Involvement of the community at each level of project, in the formation of research aims and questions, as research participants, in the transcription of research data, in the analysing of information, to validate the findings (eg; through the presentation of findings) and finally in the presentation & relaying of their experiences in the research process, had ensured that the research is grounded in the experience and aspirations of Whittlesea residents. Furthermore, it has maximised opportunities for participants to learn from each other; "It was good to hear other people's opinions, the experiences and work they do in the community" (Volunteer, Presentation of Findings). In several groups, participants exchanged details to gain further information about community participation opportunities.

The attendance of over 30 people at the presentation of findings suggests Whittlesea residents are keen to gain feedback when involved, as one of them commented when asked what they had gained from the research "Satisfaction that our voices have been heard". Another commented "(they were satisfied that) all the concerns and issues raised in our group were captured in the findings". There was also an opportunity to highlight issues which may have been missed, for example on participant suggested "there needs to be more opportunity for younger people with a disability and respite for carers so they can get involved, this was discussed in our group".

Chapter 4: Findings – What Whittlesea says

This section outlines findings from the research in four broad sections:

- Experiences of community engagement
- Benefits of community engagement
- Barriers to community engagement
- Ways to enhance participation in Whittlesea, including research evidence for a set of locally developed community engagement principles.

4.1 Local experiences of community engagement

Research findings indicated that a high level of community involvement, both informal and formal, is already occurring in Whittlesea. Whittlesea residents are actively involved through volunteering, helping others in the community, participating in community groups and in decision making committees. Table 1 details the local experiences of involvement in Whittlesea.

Informal involvement

All groups, and most individuals interviewed were involved in an informal way in the community. Informal support included helping neighbours, being involved in a cultural or religious community, assisting others with transport, shopping, gardening or childcare, accompanying others to appointments and services, and by helping with interpreting and translating. This informal involvement was particularly prevalent among new arrivals, parents, rural & indigenous communities, all of whom contribute significantly to keeping the Whittlesea community active and ensuring essential needs are met through their involvement.

“I help people in need informally by helping neighbours, friends and strangers, for example, people filling out forms or getting transport” (Disability)

When I first came here (Australia), I stayed in this area but was not involved in volunteering, I was with my own community because at that time there was no professional religious people or prayer room, so there was a community house, so we started our prayers here, and all people came to know us, so we helped them (Volunteers)

If someone is in need, you need babysitting they'd be there...if the family is sick, or bills need to be paid, driving, someone else makes social contact. I know it happens a lot in the community... I don't know an elder that hasn't taken someone in...(Indigenous)

Community and support groups/networks

Many focus group participants stated that they either belonged, or had belonged to a community or social group at some stage in their life. The types of groups that Whittlesea residents are or have been involved with varied enormously and included playgroups, parents groups (including single parent groups), youth groups, sporting clubs, cultural and language groups, seniors and learning groups, disability support groups and interest groups (such as book clubs or gardening clubs). Groups provide members with information, significant mutual support, learning opportunities, and a sense of belonging, therefore reducing isolation in the community. Groups also provided people with opportunities for participating and volunteering, and provide an avenue for

members to have their say, both through the setting of the direction of group activities and by taking part in consultations about local issues and services.

Along with above benefits, for new and emerging refugee communities, community networks also provide members with advice on how to live in Australia, are an avenue to teach and share ideas, an opportunity to come together in a respectful, understanding and peaceful way, provide an important way of organising community activities and support the settlement process.

"I play for a local sporting club, it makes you feel like you are part of the community...because you travel around and meet different people" (Youth group)

I had never heard of University of the Third Age, then I saw them at the plaza, now I'm a tutor with them and on the committee (Older Residents Group)

Coming to the group helps us to learn English...my children also get to meet other children (New Arrival group)

Volunteering

Volunteer participation changed according to people's life situation (for example young people participated in formal volunteering less due to multiple competing priorities such as study, work and family responsibilities), while older residents were more involved in formal volunteering, as they had more time to give following completion of paid work and/or families growing up. Participants had volunteered on once off occasions, in an ongoing way, and had volunteered for some periods, stopped, then started again. There was a clear pathway of volunteer participation for many Whittlesea residents, whereby they may have started volunteering in one role for an organisation, and this had led to volunteering in multiple roles in the organisation, and/or volunteering in many organisations. Volunteering was not always a choice made by people, with some identifying they volunteered due to the lack of essential services, and others identifying that Centrelink policies had been the reason they'd started to volunteer.

I volunteer in the Legal service, it helps that it is after hours...it's also good as it's not every week, just once per month (Open)

I've been in the area for 35 years in Thomastown and I didn't know there is so much going on, its only when you get in it (volunteering) you find out there is so much to do (volunteering, helping)...it's good for people to do this, especially when you retire to keep you active...so much to help other people (Volunteers)

Involvement through children & families

Parents interviewed agreed that they were involved in the community through activities related to their children. This included participation in playgroups, community childcare centres, playgroups, kindergartens and schools, as well as in sporting and recreational activities. Parents also participated in events and activities as families, and identified that options for families to do things together was important.

"When we came here we had a young family and I volunteered on the kinder & school committees" (Rural)

I've been in the Whittlesea shire for about 38 years, I was involved in little athletics, I volunteered at the school, I help out in the classroom for 8 years. I also helped run under 12 swimming clubs ...I've always done something in a sense in the voluntary field (Volunteers)

Community festivals & events

Almost all participants interviewed had attended at least one community event. Community events attended included the Whittlesea Community Festival, Women's Art in the Park, the Whittlesea show, Refugee week events and events as part of University's and schools. Events were particularly identified for the opportunities they offered for diverse cultural and age groups to come together, and for families to participate together.

Even doing NADOC, people get involved, organise activities, people volunteer on boards, give up time to get involved in programs – its not formalised or documented (Indigenous)

I love multicultural festivals...they bring people together and make people realise Australia is a multicultural place (Youth)

Consultation & decision-making

There were mixed experiences of being involved in a consultation or being involved in a decision-making capacity. Many participants didn't know what opportunities were available to have a say in their community, while others were aware of how to be involved but had not previously participated in decision making roles. Of those who had been involved, participation in committees of groups or organisations was the most frequently discussed experience, while others shared experiences of attending meetings with Council or being involved in decisions made as part of their volunteer involvement in organisations.

As a resident you don't feel there are enough decision-making opportunities...in South Morang there should be more consultation... the fields are gone, it has just happened (Older residents)

You can be involved as much as possible, but if it doesn't change anything, people will be reluctant to get involved again...I am still involved (in committees) as I don't want my kids to miss out on what I did (Rural)

Findings from phase 1 of the research are supported by results of the random telephone survey, which are detailed in the below table. The random survey results suggest that informal support, attending festivals and involvement through families are the most popular community engagement activities, while consultation and decision-making are not activities which Whittlesea residents have participated actively in.

Table 3: Local experiences of community involvement

(Percentage of total participants, participants could respond to multiple forms of involvement)

Form of involvement	Number (percentage)	
Informal Helping (eg; Driving neighbours, helping with childcare, translating for community)	25	47%
Community event or festival (eg; Attended Community Festival, Whittlesea Show)	23	43%
Involvement through children & family (eg; helps at child's school, playgroups)	21	40%
Community or self-help group (eg: seniors, cultural. Women, youth, sporting group)	19	36%
Volunteer (freely giving time to benefit self & others, without payment, either within a community organisation/group or in neighbourhood)	17	32%
Decision making (eg; committee of management, board)	10	19%
Consultation (eg; attended local consultation or completed a survey about services run by Council)	6	11%
None of the above	5	10%
All of the above	3	6%

4.2 Community engagement among Whittlesea organisations

Organisations understanding and practice of community engagement in Whittlesea varied significantly. Where some organisations made no distinction between delivering services to clients and engaging community members in service planning and delivery, others were actively supporting groups to determine their own priorities for the use of organisational resources.

Most organisations identified undertaking one or two forms of community engagement but almost none of those surveyed demonstrated strength across the range of the community engagement spectrum. For example, local developers discussed the achievements they had made in welcoming new residents and facilitating community events, but discussed the challenges in involving residents in real decision making. Alternatively, others spoke about facilitating vibrant committees, but offered no volunteer participation opportunities within the organisation.

Additionally, some organisations, while stating an awareness of language and concepts around community engagement, could not provide actual evidence of practice engaging communities, while others were open about the gaps in their work, and identified the need to be more engaged with the community.

Some examples provided of local community engagement activities undertaken by the organisations interviewed include:

- Facilitating community committees
- Negotiating lease arrangements with community groups
- Council Advisory committees
- Leisure activities for older residents

- Evaluating events and festivals
- Facilitating events, such as NADOC week
- Asking groups in the community what they need
- Conducting yearly survey to clients/parents/care givers
- Welcoming new residents to Whittlesea
- Being open to respond the community interests and requests
- Supporting groups to make decisions about the use of agency resources
- Involving volunteers in service delivery roles
- Offering a short course as a pathway to involvement.

4.3 Local reasons for, and benefits of participation

All groups and most individuals interviewed agreed that being involved in the community was important. A diverse range of reasons were given for being involved in the community, and many benefits of participation were identified, for individuals, families, communities and organisations. No one reason was identified as more important or more frequently than any other reason for community involvement, however reasons & benefits of involvement differed according to the groups interviewed, and life situation of participants.

Meeting a community need and to address lack of services

Whittlesea residents frequently cited their reason for being involved was to 'help others' by meeting essential community needs and/or because there were not adequate services to meet community need. Participants noted that the lack of services within Whittlesea was particularly noticeable (for example in comparison to other municipalities), and that their involvement was essential to 'make up for the short fall' of resources in the area. Community needs met by the voluntary efforts of Whittlesea residents included settlement in Australia, settlement in Whittlesea, transport, childcare, language support, respite, caring for the elderly, employment support, accessing essential appointments and the provision of information.

"...you'd be surprised, there are about 30 or 40 groups in the township...in a country town people have to look after themselves, they can't run around the corner for services"(Rural)

"We are trying to adapt when services are not there, or where there are services they are too expensive - for example the maintenance service at council is only for older residents, but as single parents we fall through the cracks" (Single mothers group)

I have seen that there is not very many services around or waiting lists are too long so this got me thinking how can I help so in the past two years I have been ringing around requesting what help is available and asking what can be done (Disability)

Learning & involvement as a pathway

Participants from all groups identified learning from their involvement. Much of this learning was informal and based on the sharing of life experiences, such as learning about resources available in the community, sharing different parenting experiences and finding out about different cultures and religions. Other participants discussed acquiring specific skills, such as learning English for new arrivals and gaining work skills for those looking for employment and for young people studying. In this way, involvement in the

community, particularly volunteering, is a pathway; a pathway to employment, settlement and to more community involvement.

"(by being on the childcare committee) I've learnt heaps about what they do with the children, about routines and hand/eye coordination" (Rural)

"As a new migrant coming from another country, (volunteering) was an initial way of being exposed to the accents/language, culture, courtesy - everything is different from my country..." (New Arrivals)

"I want to be a teacher, so going to school, seeing what it's like...for me personally, I want to help also for selfish reasons...I want to put on my Resume, but while I'm doing it I get a sense of satisfaction" (Youth)

"Getting involved I have learnt about different services in the community" (Open)

You learn a lot you know...we raise subjects, you learn a lot, it's an education process...sometimes you may have problems in your own life, and discussing it with other volunteers you realise you are not alone... talking about life experiences you can assimilate what others have been through (Volunteers)

...once you become a volunteer, like here (WCC), you do have a say in decisions...but you do have to be a volunteer first (Volunteers)

Promotion of diversity & cultural awareness

Almost all participants identified that diversity was strength in Whittlesea, and that involvement in the community provided opportunities for diverse groups to come together. Many participants identified learning about diverse cultures, religions, languages, and experiences from personal involvement with others. Community involvement enabled the exchange of ideas and experiences, which enhanced diversity and reduced isolation and discrimination. Many migrants discussed feeling welcomed and part of their new community, by actively participating as volunteers.

...it's important for people to participate, it's given us a different perspective...we haven't had interaction with many other cultures, just to be aware of other cultures and life experiences, it has been an eye opener... (Volunteers)

"We can share our culture. Community work gives us opportunity to take pleasure from what we give others..." (New Arrivals)

"...gives you a deeper understanding of people, everyone is different, I'm different from them, we have to build on each others strengths.." (Rural)

I used to be involved in my own community but I'm now volunteering in other communities, I didn't know there are so many migrants coming to the Whittlesea community...I just came to know by volunteering... (Volunteers)

Family benefits

Participants discussed the benefits that families gained from community involvement. Parents discussed learning from others about the experiences of parenting, young people identified that they were involved as a result of their parents' involvement, and

increasing opportunities for children were also identified as an outcome of parental involvement in the community.

"During the last 3 years I have ventured out, to the Whittlesea Disability Network & Special Olympics. Prior to this I did every little and since becoming active, my son has started to blossom" (Disability)

"I am still involved (in committees) as I don't want my kids to miss out on what I did" (Rural)

"We as families of children with disabilities, talk for us, only we are qualified to speak for our children" (Open)

Building relationships & developing a sense of community

Meeting others and forming connections with people in the community was a reason and benefit of community involvement identified by most participants. Community participation enabled friendships to be formed, reduced isolation and provided those involved with a sense of belonging. In addition to the outcomes of involvement (such as helping others or making local decisions), the process of involvement was identified as important to local people, in the opportunities to form connections with others.

"I held a variety of positions with the playgroup where many friendships were formed" (Disability)

"Being involved through children's sporting club, you form a bond, get to know people and things, (there's) a sense of achievement involved at different levels" (Disability)

"Your local community can be stable, whereas university is big and changing, you can get support (from your local community..." (Youth)

"It's only by getting involved in things that you meet people and become part of the community." (Volunteers)

"Through volunteering in the community I feel part of this country" (New Arrivals)

"I was driving past and saw the lights on...it's a place to go to escape the real world, somewhere else to go to have a chat with others, have a cuppa and confide in others"(Volunteers)

Empowerment & sense of well being

Many participants stated that they were involved because they wanted to make a difference in their community, either through volunteering or by taking part in decision-making processes. Where experiences of involvement were positive, participation enabled participants to gain greater control over their lives and gave a sense of satisfaction knowing they were assisting to make things better for others.

"I have been involved with COTA (Council for Ageing) they asked about our opinions and this was used to take decisions that go to parliament" (Disability)

"Giving something to people, they do not know they give us something back too. It makes us feel important. Somebody needs me, a very special feeling" (New Arrival)

*"...being involved you are given a chance to have your say and give your opinion"
(Disability)*

"...it makes me feel so good to help others, its part of me, I can't say no! I take pride in being able to help people, especially people in worse situations..." (Volunteers)

"People get caught up in the lunatic world of spending money...(through volunteering) I feel I'm doing something good" (New Arrivals)

We are entrusted with a lot of equipment, almost 1.2 million dollars worth of infrastructure...we hold the keys to the fire station, there is a trust there and we have a lot of faith in each other (Volunteers)

.. but we really feel like we are doing something, because after the summit, we get comments back and we compile them.. and the skate park came about (Youth)

4.4 Barriers to Community Engagement in Whittlesea

While participants agreed that being involved in the community was important, many reasons prevented them from effectively participating in their community. These barriers leave specific groups in the community, such as older people, people with disabilities, rural residents, and those in new estates and newly arrived migrants particularly isolated. Overwhelmingly, a lack of information about how to get involved, and about the services, activities and opportunities for local people, and the impact of poorly developed infrastructure were biggest hurdles to effective participation in Whittlesea.

Lack of appropriate information (including language barriers)

Every group, and almost every individual interviewed identified lack of appropriate information as a barrier to community involvement. Participants felt they did not receive adequate information about local services or activities, did often not know how to get involved in participating in the community or how to be involved in making local decisions. Participants noted that where information was available, it was often not communicated in a timely way to meet their needs. For example, information was primarily in written form and in English, when much of the community did not read English and preferred face-to-face contact, was on the Internet, when many did not have access or use the Internet, was communicated too late (the meeting had been held) or contact points within organisations did not have adequate knowledge to provide the requested information. Organisations with a primary function of providing information were not often known within the community (eg; Whittlesea Community Connections), and participants felt that organisations which were visible to the community, and often seen as first contact points for gaining information, often did not provide adequate information (eg; Council, Centrelink). Residents in new estates were particularly isolated, with many saying they received no information at all in the mail. For some, particularly young people, and those who worked full time, lack of information was also linked to lack of time.

"this centre (WCC) is not known to the community, they don't know there is a service to help out, my neighbour doesn't know about this community" (New arrival)

"We have a lot of trouble getting a local paper delivered, we don't get any information here" (New residents)

"If I knew more options for volunteering it would be easier...but we don't have time to find out how to get involved..." (Youth)

I don't know where the places are or how to find places. Nobody talks to us about this until we came to school (New Arrival)

Lack of local opportunities

Many participants commented that they were not involved due to the lack of opportunities available in the City of Whittlesea. This included lack of meaningful volunteer roles, lack of opportunities to have a say and be involved in decision making activities, not enough local festivals and events, and lack of social activities and events, especially for young people. Young people, newly arrived migrants and refugees, people with disabilities and new residents were particularly identified as groups, which did not have opportunities to participate locally, with many in these groups traveling outside the municipality to participate. Many groups also identified the lack of opportunities for diverse groups and cultures to come together locally. Lack of participation locally was also linked to inadequate local transport and the lack of appropriate spaces and/or venues for groups to use.

...there are very little services for families with a child with a disability, for example there is nothing for autistics kids in the Northern suburbs (Disability)

There is a lack of social options for those aged 18+...I don't do anything in Whittlesea. I have to go outside the community, I am more connected with Hume/Moreland (Youth)

There is nothing here after 5pm, just shopping centres (Volunteers)

...because there is no physical presence for the indigenous community in Whittlesea, its difficult... in the western region there is the gathering place...it's a good model, a place to go, a voice, it makes a difference...(Indigenous)

Discrimination & exclusion from opportunities

While for some it was lack of opportunities that prevented their involvement, for others it was feeling and being excluded from existing opportunities. This sense of exclusion worked at an individual, organisational and community level, and while may not have always been intentional, had the effect of 'leaving out' certain people in the community. Young people identified schools 'selecting the good kids' to participate, 'newcomers' to small rural communities spoke about not feeling like they were welcomed to take part, and newly arrived migrants discussed experiences of discrimination which in effect worked to exclude them from involvement. At an organisational level, failure to provide adequate supports, such as an interpreter, childcare or transport at meetings meant certain community members 'missed out' on getting involved, while at a community level, failure to actively include a diverse range of groups and cultures in community events and activities, was linked to a lack of opportunities for diverse groups to come together. For migrants and refugees, discrimination was also cited as a barrier to further involvement.

...Because we wear the hijab/veil we experience discrimination, when we knock on doors (to fundraise) people don't understand us, need to mix with communities, to educate community about who we are and what it means...we are positive people (New Arrival group)

I used to volunteer at Sunshine hospital; I'd like to volunteer at the hospital here, but it feels more closed, like the auxiliary is a secret society" (Open)

...it was all very clicky (school committees), it's the personalities involved...and they seem to be there year after year, and there is no chance for you to do anything, this limits you (Volunteers)

In my school, the thing that happens with the speaking out thing ... it is favouritism that happens.. just a few people get chosen to represent the school...we went to the National Women's day.. there was a big function, ..Among those people who went, I was among the academically smart people. I feel it is a discrimination against people who are not academically smart (Youth)

...often a lot of people in the township are involved in a lot of things, they pop up everywhere, and this puts people off, they sort of think, well let them do it, and sometimes people that are doing it, need to step back and let other people do it, sometimes they don't respect the opinion of someone new who has a new idea (Rural)

Negative attitudes and/or experiences

Along with a sense of exclusion, participants also identified that negative attitudes by others towards community involvement, including a lack of understanding about the benefits of participating may prevent or stop people from getting involved. Specifically, community participation was compared to paid work, as participants identified pressure to justify their unpaid involvement to others in their families or communities. Additionally, many participants spoke about negative experiences being involved, which had put them off further involvement. These experiences included not being trained or supported adequately to participate, being undermined or treated unfairly once being involved, not feeling their involvement was meaningful or influenced the way things were done, and experiencing conflict or 'politics' through their involvement. These experiences had impacted upon participant's future participation, with many reluctant to get involved again.

I'd turn up (to volunteer) and there was nothing to do (Disability)

"There is a fear that if you do volunteering, you will be given a boring job because we are young...that stops me going and doing more..." (Youth)

"There is a mentality among others that if it's free, why do it; you feel that you are looked down upon compared to paid work" (Open)

"You can write all the letters you want but decisions are made at the big table...when you do express opinions, they are handballed to others... it is very discouraging to have a say when its like that"(Open)

Competing priorities

Participants frequently identified that other aspects of their life were prioritised over community involvement. Many suggested they were short of time, with some participants working 6 days a week. Lack of time was also linked to work commitments and travel distance, particularly for those who commuted to the city from new estates and rural areas, or who needed to catch more than one form of public transport within the municipality. These participants, and many others suggested that spending time with family was a priority, and that often they felt conflicted between being involved in the community (particularly volunteering) and being with their family. Equally, those with young children stated that they didn't have time to be more involved, as they were busy raising their children. In this way, some participants saw involvement with their family, as separate to community participation, as opposed to a way of spending time with family while being involved in the community.

For refugees in emerging communities, family separation was identified as having a significant impact on the community. For women, managing community and family expectations in the absence of family members was particularly difficult. Additionally, loss of community elders has impacted on the ability to resolve community and family issues.

For many in Whittlesea, including those from emerging communities, time and effort is spent meeting basic survival needs, which means formal or traditional forms of involvement in the community are not always a priority or indeed possible. For these people, health, financial, emotional, and cultural barriers prevent more broader participation. However for many participants in these situations, much informal involvement occurs, and community participation is linked to the meeting of survival needs. For example, among new arrival communities, informal networks assist in times of crisis, particularly around accommodation. There was also a recognition among participants that their voices need to be heard so that the conditions that prevent them being fully involved are changed.

I used to volunteer providing emergency relief but I had to stop as had university and work to do (Open)

“People have mortgages and young families, when they come into the area they are paying off their mortgages...its not uncommon for people here to work 6 days a week, and for the bloke to work during the day and the woman at night...its hard to get volunteers when families are starting out” (Volunteers)

I was busy looking after my family, looking after them, so in that case I didn't want to do other things because I wanted to look after my kids properly so that they could get an education...(Volunteers)

...a lot of people volunteer because they need something else in their lives, but in our community we are too concerned with getting a roof over our head, feeding our children, and getting them to go to school...(Indigenous)

Our volunteers have their own needs...some of these needs are financial, legal, settlement...but people can manage complex needs and still be able to contribute, it can take some time and resources, but people give back, there are mutual benefits (Organisation)

Formality of involvement

For many participants the 'red tape' involved in community participation was a barrier for getting involved. Volunteers identified the amount of written documents; paper work and onerous background checks as a deterrent for becoming involved, while others suggested that consultations conducted as formal meetings, or where lengthy written submissions had to be made were off putting. Similarly, those involved with community groups and on committees, agreed that funding accountabilities were time consuming, and not always relevant to the objectives of the group, while the personal risks (eg; legal liability) members took on were a concern for many.

"At Council you have to write before the meeting, then they read out the letters, but you can not respond...its not option for many people in Whittlesea" (Open)

I can go to a meeting (to have a say) but that bores me to tears (Youth)

When I do consultations with the group, an informal approach works better...as soon as I bring out paper they are reluctant to make suggestions (Indigenous)

Cost & inaccessibility

Related to transport, was the issue of cost of involvement to participants. Many suggested that the out of pocket expenses incurred through volunteering (eg; petrol, phone calls), the unaffordable nature of activities available for children, people with disabilities, newly arrived migrants, single parent families, and young people and the costs associated with running a community group (eg; venues & administrative costs) were all deterrents to full participation in the municipality.

The expense is too great when you are on a pension. My son would like to go to a gym but can't afford a membership (Disability)

Some of us are in survival mode, living in crisis, but we still like to participate...we always make sure lunch provided and transport provided when organising events (Indigenous)

The Whittlesea show is good but its expensive...(Youth)

Money can stop people; a lot of people say they can't afford petrol (Older residents)

Sustainability

While participants spoke about some very positive experiences of involvement, they suggested that many good activities were once off, did not continue and/or did not have positive long-term benefits. This included experiences of participating in consultations or decision-making forums, which tended to be once off and the impact on final decisions made was unclear. It also included support groups or courses, which typically ran for a short period of time (eg; 4 weeks or 3 months), after which time participants were keen to remain involved, but the supports (eg; venue, facilitator, transport, childcare) were not longer available for them to continue meeting.

"We need a continuity of services, rather than a lot of small, short term projects" (Open)

Inadequate infrastructure

Every group and most individuals identified that the lack of infrastructure impacted on their ability to get involved. As a municipality facing significant growth, participants commented frequently that infrastructure had not developed at a pace equal to the population growth, which had impacted significantly on their ability to participate. Lack of accessible, affordable, safe and available transport was identified by almost every participant as a barrier to involvement, with one stating 'how can we be connected if there are no connections'.

In addition to transport, inadequate facilities or venues for participation to occur, was also cited as a barrier for community involvement. Members of community groups particularly identified the lack of affordable, accessible and appropriate venues as an issue for them, stating that not having facilities to meet meant that their activities were restricted, and their ability to involve people was limited. Participants from emerging refugee communities also identified the need for a multi-purpose venue, which would cater for community meetings and programs.

Finally, the poor service infrastructure across Whittlesea means that many residents are caring for others, due to the lack of support services available to access. This was particularly the case for childcare, aged care and respite services. Participants identified the need for more of these services in Whittlesea, and linked their lack of participation to the need to care for family members (children, aging parents or disabled family members).

"If it was easy to get to - I don't drive, that's another big thing, public transport, it's a joke...in a newish area, there's no public transport, they put houses there but no transport to get people around..." (Youth)

"You have to weigh up your time, for me its hard to get care for my daughter, I only get one respite session per month, and to get other care costs \$30 an hour" (Open)

It would be great to have more child care centres (Open)

We don't have a place to call our own (no building or base)...people always ask 'where is U3A), we need a base, this stops people from getting involved (Older residents)

I volunteer in the City of Yarra, its easier to get to the city and volunteer than to get around the City of Whittlesea...also there is no reimbursement for travel in Whittlesea (Volunteers)

Table 4 details the findings from the random telephone survey, for barriers to community involvement. Lack of time and work priorities, caring responsibilities and lack of local opportunities were the main barriers identified by participants, however it is important to note that 6 of the barriers were identified by more than a third of participants.

Table 4: Barriers to community involvement

Barrier	Number (percentage)	
Work Commitments/Lack of Time	37	70%
Caring Responsibilities (for children, person with a disability, older person)	26	49%
Lack of local opportunities (no volunteer roles in Whittlesea, have to travel to get to events)	24	45%
Cost (Affordability of opportunities/Out of pocket by getting involved)	19	36%
Lack of appropriate information (Don't know how to get involved, information not accessible)	18	34%
Lack of Transport (affordable, available, accessible)	17	32%
Lack of physical venues to meet	10	19%
Sustainability (activities did not continue/ were only once off)	8	15%
Formality of involvement (Red tape, bureaucracy of organisations)	6	11%
Previous Negative experiences of involvement (previous negative experiences, lack of influence)	3	6%
Not interested	3	6%
Other	3	6%
All of the above	1	2%
None of the above	1	2%
Lack of understanding the benefits of volunteering (principles of volunteering)	0	0%

4.5 Barriers for organisations

Many barriers were identified by organisations, in their ability to engage Whittlesea communities. Some organisations focused their discussion on the barriers, identifying a range of reasons why they believed community engagement is a challenge.

Organisational/cultural barriers

Workers identified a range of organisational barriers which prevent effective engagement. Reasons cited included Departments of large organisations not working together; 'we are all working separately, we need something to bring us together', lack of leadership around community engagement; 'senior buy in is just not there' and having to justify engagement activities within organisations. Onerous processes for the engagement of community members in organisational activities, and a reluctance to be open to new ideas were also identified as barriers to effective engagement.

Community engagement seen as an 'add on'

Some workers identified they were 'too busy delivering services' to undertake community engagement activities, suggesting that 'there's deadlines to meet' and 'workloads are enormous'. These comments indicate that many workers see community engagement as an additional activity, to be undertaken on top of existing business or work. There is a failure, by these workers to acknowledge community engagement as an integral part of all service provision, and to recognise the potential benefits of engaging the community in planning, delivery and evaluation of services. This view was reinforced by workers who identified short term projects that they perceived as good examples of community engagement, but failed to identify changes in regular practices of working with the community.

Time/resources

Workers felt that community engagement was a time intensive approach, and that long consultation processes can easily be replaced with quick decisions made by organisations. One worker conceded that she had conducted a focus group with workers, rather than community members as it was quicker than consulting the community, while a developer commented that 'at the end of the day we are all here to make money...the commercial reality is that we are here to sell land'. Alternatively, another organisation noted that 'Due to DHS policy, training necessary, you have to provide statistical data about how many volunteers are involved, and what they do. Reporting requirements are onerous...its not a recognition of their worth, or an organisations' ability to get a job done...it just adds to our workloads...'.

Mistrust in the process

Several organisations expressed a fear that if they consulted the community, that they may make unreasonable demands, 'if we engage with the community, there is pressure to deliver...the customer is always right'. Additionally, another worker questioned 'what if we get a vocal person coming along, who is not representative of the community, but is very vocal'. Workers are fearful of letting go of the control they have over the process, and are not confident in their skills to facilitate effective engagement. These views were summarised by one worker who admitted it was 'daunting to involve people in meaningful ways, it was complex and difficult'.

No clear purpose for engagement

Some workers spoke about the lack of clarity about the purpose of engagement, particularly community consultations, feeling like constant demands by government and community organisations was a threat to the 'trust developed with the group'. Sometimes not consulting may be the best outcomes, if there is not a clear reasons for consulting.

Infrastructure

Agencies agreed with community members consulted, about the impact of the lack of adequate infrastructure. Transport, childcare and poorly developed service structure were identified as obstacles for getting people involved: 'I organised a group of Mum's to get together to talk about an issue, but none of them turned up due to lack of transport and childcare'

4.6 Enhancing community engagement in Whittlesea

The research also addressed participants' ideas about how community engagement could be enhanced in Whittlesea. Whittlesea residents made many suggestions about what they felt could be done to increase community participation locally, including one focus group, planning how a local consultation would take place. The results of these findings are organised around four different forms of community engagement; information, participation and volunteering, and consultation and decision-making. The Whittlesea Community Engagement Principles are then discussed.

4.6a) Provision of appropriate information

Every group interviewed identified that organisations and governments needed to provide more information to communities across Whittlesea. They suggested that

- More information about services and activities was required, as well as promotion of ways to get involved.
- A variety of methods for providing information were required to meet Whittlesea's diverse needs, with a preference for personal contact (similarly, word of mouth was also cited as a popular method of communication)
- The use of interpreters and translated material was considered essential for reaching non-English communities, with many reinforcing that some migrants are not literate in any language (hence the importance of personal contact)
- Promoting regularly in the local media was also frequently identified as an effective promotional medium, as was providing information to existing groups and networks.
- Having community members formally and personally welcome others (eg; new residents, newly arrived migrants), involving those who speak community languages to support others in their communities
- Ensuring organisations provide new community members with a range of essential information, especially when they first move to the area. The provision of an information kit was suggested as important for new residents and new arrivals.
- For most participants, the Internet was not suggested as the preferred way to receive information in Whittlesea. The exception to this however, was for some participants who worked full time, some residents in newer estates and some young people, who all felt that due to time limitations, the Internet was preferable due to its ease of access
- Organisations that had frequent contact play a key role in providing information, and should be kept up to date with participation opportunities. Such organisations were Whittlesea Community Connections, Council (eg; front reception staff, maternal child and health), Centrelink, Real Estate Agents, Doctors and Libraries were identified as key information organisations..

Senior citizens groups and other such groups, you could do visits; I took my parents last Tuesday to a Macedonian club at Epping and there were around 500 people there (Disability)

Information translated in other languages (Disability)

Involve community members of different nationalities to work with you to help to get information to their communities/ groups (Disability)

promoting where people go...at the plaza here...I think you also have to bring to the attention of the community what you stand for and what you do, and that you are looking for this...more or less advertise...(Volunteers)

When Council has new people moving in, they should have a kit to show what opportunities are available locally...10 years ago they had one (Older residents)

4.6b) Participation & volunteering

Promoting participation

Participants suggested that the benefits of involvement, particularly volunteering needed to be more broadly promoted within the community. Specifically, highlighting the benefits individuals gain from being involved (as opposed to solely what the community gains), that any amount of participation is valuable and that everyone in the community can participate were suggested ways of improving participation.

you need to sell it to people, it doesn't have to take over their life, just do something small (Rural)

...just put up the benefits, what they will have from this, not the money but all of the benefits, you can get a job...(Volunteers)

Promotion of a broad range of roles...there are many roles people can play...there are other people out there that we are not attracting, for example mothers who are at home while their kids go to school, and those who are retired (Volunteers)

...a lot of people don't volunteer...you may feel it is not for you...I'm not a doctor/teacher, I'm ordinary, you don't need a PHD ...there's always something there even making sandwiches for kids...(Volunteers)

Meaningful & supported involvement

Providing opportunities that are meaningful to those involved, and make a difference in the community is also an important strategy to ensure increased participation. Specifically, creating volunteer roles that are mutually beneficial to volunteers, organisations and communities was identified as important. Welcoming new participants, and providing ongoing support and training for people to participate was also linked to a strong sense of satisfaction and ownership for volunteers, and therefore to be encouraged among organisations.

When we see new people we make them feel welcome...we offer them a cup of tea, explain what we do, explain the procedures...we are very welcoming of new members (Volunteers)

We need to feel comfortable. We need training too. We need somebody to hold our hand to take us out (New Arrival)

Providing more local opportunities for participation

Most participants identified the need to develop more local opportunities for participation. Specifically, the need for more activities that encourage diverse groups to come together and promote multiculturalism were suggested, as well as specific activities for young people, families and for people with disabilities. Participants also suggested that

opportunities for participation need to be affordable, to ensure accessibility among a broad range of Whittlesea residents.

“Provide local things to do, ...if its local more interacting with local people...if its closer its not such an impact on your time, as you don’t have to travel so far. I have to travel to Preston, which is not far, but if I could get involved in Greenbrook, I wouldn’t think twice” (Open)

Provide more opportunities here rather than in Moreland/Hume...if Whittlesea can give more opportunities people will give here (Youth)

Providing opportunities for diverse groups to come together

Many participants identified the need for more opportunities to bring diverse groups together. This included promoting cultural diversity, bringing together different age groups, providing opportunities for people of all abilities to participate in the mainstream community and enhancing opportunities for families to participate together.

Similarly, participants in the emerging refugee communities’ study expressed a desire to share and learn about each others’ culture, and to be involved at community events.

“make sure there are activities for each age group, and somewhere that age groups can mix together for example grandparents and young people working together” (Youth)

Many more multicultural activities and festivals other than the main annual event (Whittlesea Community Festival), as well as transport to link the people to these events, and free activities...(Youth)

Supporting community groups & networks

Given the important role that community groups play in engaging Whittlesea residents, participants suggested that governments and organisations could provide more support to community groups by providing a facilitator, affordable, accessible venues, and funding which meets the needs of group activities and priorities.

The emerging refugee communities study highlighted the need for committees consisting of local refugee communities, to identify and address settlement needs, and specifically to manage resources in times of crisis.

“Networks (for parents with children who have disabilities) need support; they need ongoing support, you can’t just start something up on your own, the funding is almost a waste of time, we need long term funding” (Open)

Developing infrastructure to support community participation

Along with facilities/buildings for groups to meet, participants linked the development of adequate human services (such as childcare, respite and aged services) to the increased ability of community members to get involved. Additionally, the development of affordable, accessible, safe and available transport was frequently linked to increasing community involvement in Whittlesea.

“People need to be supported to access the community...for example providing more transport, and making it more affordable for volunteers” (Open)

...there should be a small place to have childcare, so they can bring kids...if the mother has small kids she can have kids, so facilities are there so it is available to all people (Volunteers)

We need a venue, a social group where we can have activities.... Like in Watsonia, there's a place, with free Orange Juice, games, there's kids hanging out there, they can study there and different ages go there....but kids could be too young, we want our own space, a multi-purpose place for different age groups.... They lack in this community, but they exist in other communities (Youth)

4.6c) Consultation & Decision making

Overwhelmingly, participants suggested that there needed to be more opportunities for meaningful participation in decision-making processes locally. This included for volunteers within organisations having a say in the way they were involved, and community members having a voice in how services were delivered by organisations, particularly Council.

Other suggestions made by participants in relation to increasing community participation in decision-making included engaging early on in process (prior to decisions being made), ensuring the parameters of influence on the decision are made clear from the outset, not relying on the same groups to get involved, ensuring opportunities for having a say are flexible and accessible, and providing feedback to communities about how their participation has influenced decisions made.

"Provide feedback to those who turned up, this could be via email" (Open)

"You never see the results...it falls on deaf ears...you don't know what happens with the information...we want information back to see the results" (Youth)

"Go to see every day people, need to talk to people, see what the issues are then make services directed as to what you find out" (Open)

"Councils don't seem to get it together with the community itself, they don't ask them before they bring them in new regulations and permits...Councils should involve people in a round table discussion (current process at council chambers is too formal) (Disability)

Informal appointments with Council (Disability)

...what about holding regular meetings with volunteers, so everyone can voice their opinion and discuss relevant topics about how the organisation's running...like a debriefing...to seek feedback about what people think...(Volunteers)

...so to have meetings like this, informal and friendly meetings...the ability to voice our opinions without judgement, to say the things we need to say...these organisations should adapt a slogan like we listen and we act (Volunteers)

They said it was going to be a green zone, but then what happened? ...you won't stop development but it's the information that might let people know what's happening so they can protest (Older residents)

I went to the Mayoral forum and this time got feedback...this makes a difference (Older residents)

Table 5 details findings from the random telephone survey, and highlights that Whittlesea residents believe many steps need to be taken to increase community engagement, agreeing that all suggested strategies were very or extremely important.

Table 5: Enhancing community participation

Increasing community participation in Whittlesea	Number (percentage)	
Provide more information about ways to get involved	43	81%
Create more opportunities for young people	39	74%
Create more opportunities for families	39	74%
Make sure opportunities are flexible to meet people's needs	38	71%
Create more opportunities for people with disabilities	38	71%
Promote the benefits of participation	38	71%
Provide training & support for people to get involved	37	70%
Make sure opportunities are available locally	36	68%
Make sure opportunities are affordable	35	66%
Provide opportunities for diverse groups to come together	33	62%
Create meaningful participation opportunities (makes a difference)	29	55%
Increase facilities/buildings where people can meet	29	55%
All of the above	22	41%
Other	1	2%
None	1	2%

4.6d) Enhancing engagement among organisations in Whittlesea

Numerous ideas and approaches for effectively engaging Whittlesea residents were discussed by organisations interviewed. Some of these include;

- Undertaking an informal approach. As one participant commented, 'they run a mile when I bring out the paper' and another identifying that the community may feel uncomfortable about coming to a meeting at Council. Going 'to the community' was suggested by one participant who commented 'when we want to know things, we go to the community...we also promote this place as somewhere to 'just drop in'.
- Gaining the trust of the community essential, and the importance of developing ongoing relationships is also essential; 'its not about just consulting and gaining information, but bringing people together'.
- Strategies need to be developed which seek to work across departments in large organisations, both so that learning and positive community engagement skills can be

shared, and also to benefit the community. A few workers pointed to the limitations of defining roles according to narrow target groups (such as children, or young people), suggesting the need to work collaboratively to meet a range of community needs and aspirations: 'I would think nothing about going to a children's services meeting, even though I work with older residents...its how things work in the indigenous community'.

- Adopting a flexible, inclusive approach was suggested as key by some organisations consulted. One agency spoke about the need to be open to the skills volunteers have to offer, while another worker stated 'we never say its not our job...we should be reflective of the community, so we shouldn't turn people away'.
- Ensuring that the structures of engagement enable communities to have an influence over the decision making process. One participant suggested that a committee had worked well when senior managers were involved as 'they have a lot of clout and can make decisions'
- Organisations need to broaden their focus beyond service delivery to enabling community control over resources
- A reciprocal relationship between organisations, other groups and individuals in the community...equal partnership between organisations that brings personal rewards for clients
- Encouraging community ownership was also cited by a few participants as essential to meaningful engagement, as one worker noted 'volunteers come if they feel valued...having a say, voicing their opinion...if you let them use their initiative they will....and if they muck up, well, you can just fix it, and if you explain why things the way they are or can't be done in such a way, people understand and walk away happy'. Recognition that many barriers may be perceived, rather than actual obstacles. For example one agency noted 'it doesn't have to cost to have community members involved...Insurance costs nothing, the staff roles are not usurped and there is partnership work with staff and volunteers'.

4.6e) Research Evidence for the Whittlesea Community Engagement Principles

The following principles of community engagement have been developed from the above-mentioned findings. Table 6 lists each principle, describes the research question asked of participants, as well as provides the percentage of respondents from the random telephone survey that felt they principles were either important or very important (on a 4 point Likert scale, see Appendix 5 for full survey). A full table detailing the principles, and presenting qualitative data, can be found in Appendix 6.

Table 6: Evidence for the Community Engagement Principles

Principle	Random Survey Question	Evidence (%) Important or Very Important
Information	Do you think that providing more information about ways to get involved would increase community involvement in Whittlesea	81% identified provision of more information as a strategy to enhance involvement
Integrity	Not asked ⁸	Not asked
Inclusion	It is important a diverse range of people in the community have a chance to be involved in the community and have their say	98%
Building relationships	It is important that people have the chance to meet other people and form relationships with others when they get involved or have a say in the community	94%
Influence	It is important the when people participate in the community or have a say, that it makes a difference or changes the way things are done	94%
Accessibility	It is important that governments and community organisations help people who have difficulty participating to get involved and have a say	96%
Local	It is important the opportunities to have a say and get involved in the community are available locally (within the City of Whittlesea)	100%
Sustainable	It is important that opportunities to get involved or have say are ongoing and not just once off	89%

⁸ The principle of integrity emerged later in the research analysis, therefore was not originally included in the random telephone survey.

Chapter 5: The Whittlesea Community Engagement Framework – the principles

The Whittlesea Community Engagement Framework provides guidance for organisations, governments and the private sector to implement community participation activities and increase local involvement in decision-making. Specifically, it details the following key components:

- Acknowledging the context for Community Engagement in Whittlesea
- Whittlesea Community Engagement Principles
- Strategies for undertaking effective community engagement in Whittlesea, and
- Implementing the Whittlesea Community Engagement Framework.

5.1 Acknowledging the context for Community Engagement in Whittlesea

Organisations, governments, private sector stakeholders, such as developers, institutions and local communities acknowledge the following are important considerations in effectively undertaking community engagement in Whittlesea:

1. Whittlesea communities have an interest in, and right to be involved in community engagement activities and believe it is important that they participate in decision-making processes that affect their lives.
2. Community engagement activities within Whittlesea should be founded in the inherent dignity of people and the values, rights and responsibilities of all people
3. Community engagement promotes and is critical to effective, transparent and accountable governance in the public, community and private sectors.
4. Community engagement empowers local communities by encouraging and supporting people to have a voice in the decisions that affect their lives and to be actively involved in developing their community
5. Effective engagement generates better decisions, delivering sustainable economic, environmental, social and cultural benefits.
6. Effective community engagement enables the free and full development of human potential and mobilises the strengths, capacities and assets of residents to build, strengthen & sustain local communities
7. Many people in Whittlesea face multiple barriers to participation, and effective engagement will actively seek to support all people to get involved
8. The causes of disadvantage need to be addressed if full participation in Whittlesea is to be encouraged
9. In Whittlesea, community engagement can only grow and develop with adequate infrastructure to support people's participation
10. People can be connected to their communities by 'helping out' in activities that do not fit within a traditional framework of institutional community engagement, and
11. The following principles of community engagement are endorsed as locally developed and representative of the views, needs and aspirations of Whittlesea community members.

5.2 Whittlesea Principles of Community Engagement

The following are principles of community engagement, developed from the input of Whittlesea residents and communities. They represent the foundations upon which good

community engagement in Whittlesea should occur, and should guide community participation activities across the municipality. While many of these principles concur with those developed in other areas (see Appendix 7 for summary), they are grounded in the needs, experiences and aspirations of the Whittlesea community (see Appendix 6 for a full description of the principles).

The Whittlesea Community Engagement Framework Principles are:

- **Information** - The provision of information empowers local communities to make decisions about how to be involved in their community and ensures people have access to appropriate services and resources. Organisations in Whittlesea will ensure that the community is informed about local services, opportunities and activities. Community participation and engagement opportunities will be promoted broadly, so the community is informed about how they can get involved.
- **Integrity** - It is important that there is openness and honesty about the scope and purpose of engagement, that there is a willingness to trust the community's views, experiences and aspirations
- **Inclusion** - It is important a diverse range of people in the community have a chance to be involved in the community and have their say, and that community engagement processes seek to include and support those who may otherwise not be involved
- **Building relationships** - It is important that people have the chance to meet other people and form relationships with others when they get involved or have a say in the community. Community engagement activities in Whittlesea will foster relationships, between organisations and communities and within communities, based on mutual understanding, trust and respect
- **Influence** - It is important that when people participate in the community or have a say, that it makes a difference or changes the way things are done. The policies, services or ways organisations work should reflect the input and involvement of local people
- **Accessibility** - It is important that governments and community organisations help people who have difficulty participating to get involved and have a say. Community engagement activities should consider and address issues such as affordability, transport, venues, language needs, childcare, literacy levels and physical accessibility
- **Local** - It is important the opportunities to have a say and get involved in the community are available locally (within the City of Whittlesea) and that resources available for community engagement in Whittlesea prioritise meeting the community participation needs, aspirations and interests of Whittlesea residents.
- **Sustainability** - It is important that opportunities to get involved or have say have lasting community benefits, and that activities that meet current needs will have positive influence on communities ability to meet future needs

5.3 Strategies for undertaking Community Engagement in Whittlesea

There is a range of strategies required for effective community engagement in Whittlesea. Table 7 provides a summary of the three major forms of community engagement, and details strategies for engaging Whittlesea communities

Table 7: Strategies for Community Engagement in Whittlesea

Type of engagement	Description	Strategies
Provision of information	The provision of information empowers local communities to make decisions about how to be involved in their community and ensures people have access to appropriate services and resources. Organisations in Whittlesea will ensure that the community is informed about local services, opportunities and activities. Community participation and engagement opportunities will be promoted broadly, so the community is informed about how they can get involved.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information provided in a range of ways to meet diverse needs of Whittlesea communities • Face to face/personal contact important in Whittlesea • Language/literacy needs supported • Provide translated information & use of interpreters • Provide information early on to new residents and newly arrived migrants/refugees • Use existing groups and networks to provide and update information • Provide information at locations where communities frequently attend • Provide training to staff within organisations that are frequently contacted by community members • Involve the community in effectively providing information among their own networks and groups
Community participation & volunteering	Community participation provides ongoing, mutual benefits to organisations, governments, groups and communities. Organisations and governments should provide meaningful opportunities for participation in Whittlesea, recognising that volunteering is one practical form of community engagement. Similarly informal forms of community participation, including community/support groups, should be adequately resourced and supported, in recognition of the important role they play in supporting Whittlesea communities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing forms of community participation are encouraged and supported • Opportunities for diverse groups to come together are strengthened • Meaningful volunteer roles, which provide mutual benefits are further developed and supported by organisations in Whittlesea • Training and support is provided to enable people to participate • Community groups and networks are provided with adequate resources and support • The important role that informal participation plays in Whittlesea is recognised and supported • Further opportunities for families, young people, and people with

		<p>disabilities are developed</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New residents and new migrants are supported to be involved as early as possible in their move to Whittlesea • Opportunities for participation are inclusive and welcoming of new people • A range of forms of participation are promoted and supported • Emerging refugee networks are supported and resourced, and opportunities for involvement in wider networks are strengthened
<p>Community Consultation & Decision making</p>	<p>Community members have the right to be involved in decisions that impact on their local communities. Organisations in Whittlesea should ensure that the community is consulted on issues that impact on them or are of concern to them. Efforts should be made to ensure a broad representation of communities are consulted, with particular care to ensure that marginalised communities have their say. Decision making mechanisms should be developed to ensure there are ongoing opportunities for Whittlesea residents to engage in the decision making process.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volunteers are encouraged to participate in decision making processes of organisations • Engagement occurs as early as possible in the decision making process • Community groups and networks are included in decision making activities • Support and training is provided to local committees to ensure they can effectively govern local groups • Local residents are consulted about issues which impact on their local communities • Consultations seek to engage a wide range of participants, and not only the 'usual suspects' • A variety of ways to input into decision making processes are provided • Those who are marginalised are supported to get involved • Information provided by communities is used to influence outcomes • Feedback about how information has been used is provided to communities • Organisations take responsibility for making decisions which are in the best interests of the community

5.4 Implementing the framework

The framework has been developed with the input of Whittlesea residents, and aims to provide guidance to organisations, governments and developers across the municipality. Adoption of the community engagement principles, as important foundations for involvement is encouraged as a first step for organisations to effectively engage Whittlesea communities.

In recognition that organisations and governments vary in their ability to engage Whittlesea residents, differ in their history of community involvement and mindful of the diverse range of organisational contexts, specific 'instructions' on how to implement the framework are not possible, and indeed would be dangerous. As Ife (2005) indicates every community is different (even within Whittlesea, there are important differences between for example, rural residents and migrant communities) and community engagement is certainly not a linear process. Isolating skills from values and knowledge can risk community engagement occurring for tokenistic reasons, and simplifies the processes that most organisations will need to adopt (eg; change of organisational culture).

Rather, a holistic, long term and comprehensive approach which involves, but is not limited to the following is recommended as important next steps to adopting the framework:

- Identifying Whittlesea's community engagement needs, barriers and aspirations
- Committing to engaging Whittlesea's diverse communities, in ways which are reflected in the Whittlesea Community Engagement Framework, by undertaking a formal process of endorsing the framework
- Engaging all staff to see the benefits of participation, including senior management
- Identifying organisational strengths, weaknesses and opportunities for improving community engagement activities in Whittlesea
- Developing the skills to undertake effective community engagement activities and processes
- Evaluate and improve on community engagement activities within the organisation.

Working in collaboration with the Whittlesea Community Engagement Reference group, Whittlesea Community Connections and community members is recommended as an important way to achieve these objectives. The WCEP reference group will be offering local organisations, governments and developers the opportunity to:

- Provide a presentations of findings from this research on Whittlesea's community participation needs and aspirations
- Conduct an audit of community engagement activities currently undertaken to identify the strengths, weaknesses and opportunities for community engagement
- Provide training and skill development to strengthen and expand the range of community engagement activities undertaken within the organisation
- Assist in developing coordinated strategies, policies and opportunities which engage Whittlesea residents across the organisation
- Jointly assess the worth of any newly developed community engagement activity or process, in terms of community and organisational impact.

Whittlesea Community Connections is excited about the opportunity to collaboratively implement the Whittlesea Community Engagement Framework with local organisations, and will be firstly looking internally, to strengthen its own processes and strategies, by implementing the framework across the organisation.

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APPENDIX 1:

Organisations participating in WCEP consultations

- Council (Youth Services, Family Services, Strategic Planning, Aged & Disability Services, HACC ATSI worker, Whittlesea Community Futures worker)
- Plenty Valley Community Health (Epping & Whittlesea)
- Whittlesea Community Connections
- CFA (South Morang)
- Northern Health (Community Liaison)
- Lalor Living & Learning Centre
- Kinglake Ranges Neighbourhood House
- Whittlesea Courthouse
- Whittlesea Helping Hand Association
- AMES
- Department of Planning & Community Development (North/West Team)
- Whittlesea Community Futures Executive (consisting of Anglicare, Melbourne City Mission, Salvation Army, Council, Kildonan, Plenty Valley Community Health, VicUrban, Department of Human Services, Whittlesea Community Connections)
- Local Developers (including VicUrban, AV Jennings & Delfin)

Appendix 2:

Whittlesea Community Engagement Project Reference Group

Community Members

Whittlesea Community Connections

City of Whittlesea

Plenty Valley Community Health

Lalor Living & Learning Centre

Department of Planning and Community Development

Vic Urban

APPENDIX 3: FREQUENCY TABLES FOR PARTICIPANTS⁹

Interview_type

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid focus group	54	23.5	23.5	23.5
group consultation	80	34.8	34.8	58.3
interview	43	18.7	18.7	77.0
telephone survey	53	23.0	23.0	100.0
Total	230	100.0	100.0	

Age

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid \	1	.4	.4	.4
0-16	8	3.5	3.5	3.9
16-18	2	.9	.9	4.8
17-18	3	1.3	1.3	6.1
19-25	20	8.7	8.7	14.8
26-40	66	28.7	28.7	43.5
41-55	53	23.0	23.0	66.5
55-65	34	14.8	14.8	81.3
65+	43	18.7	18.7	100.0
Total	230	100.0	100.0	

Gender

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	3	1.3	1.3	1.3
Female	173	75.2	75.2	76.5
Male	54	23.5	23.5	100.0
Total	230	100.0	100.0	

⁹ The frequency tables report on 230 participants. Seventy-five participants participated in the Emerging research study, and are listed separately. A further 52 participants did not provide demographic data.

Suburb

	Frequency	Percent
Bundoora/Blossom Park	29	12.6
Donnybrook	2	0.8
Doreen	24	10.4
Epping	28	12.2
Kinglake/Kinglake West	10	4.3
Lalor	28	12.2
Mill Park	29	12.6
South Morang	13	5.7
Thomastown	32	13.9
Wallan	1	0.4
Whittlesea & Eden Park	12	5.2
Wollert	1	0.4
Other	11	4.5
Total	230	100

Year of Arrival

	Frequency	Percent
0-2 years	5	2.2
2-5 years	16	7
5-10 years	15	6.5
Over 10 years	54	23.2
Missing	140	60.9
Total	230	100

Disability

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	31	13.5	13.5	13.5
Carer	1	.4	.4	13.9
No	143	62.2	62.2	76.1
Yes	55	23.9	23.9	100.0
Total	230	100.0	100.0	

Country_of_Birth

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	4	1.7	1.7	1.7
Afghanistan	1	.4	.4	2.2
Africa	1	.4	.4	2.6
Algeria	1	.4	.4	3.0
Armenia	1	.4	.4	3.5
Australia	133	57.8	57.8	61.3
Canada	2	.9	.9	62.2
China	2	.9	.9	63.0
Czec. Republic	2	.9	.9	63.9
England	8	3.5	3.5	67.4
Fiji	1	.4	.4	67.8
Greece	1	.4	.4	68.3
Guyana	1	.4	.4	68.7
India	6	2.6	2.6	71.3
Indonesia	1	.4	.4	71.7
Iraq	8	3.5	3.5	75.2
Ireland	2	.9	.9	76.1
Israel	1	.4	.4	76.5
Italy	6	2.6	2.6	79.1
Lebanon	1	.4	.4	79.6
Liberia	2	.9	.9	80.4
Macedonia	9	3.9	3.9	84.3
Malaysia	3	1.3	1.3	85.7
Malta	3	1.3	1.3	87.0
Mauritius	1	.4	.4	87.4
New Zealand	1	.4	.4	87.8
Northern Ireland	1	.4	.4	88.3
Philippines	5	2.2	2.2	90.4
Poland	1	.4	.4	90.9
Samoa	1	.4	.4	91.3
Serbia	1	.4	.4	91.7
SriLanka	4	1.7	1.7	93.5
Sudan	5	2.2	2.2	95.7
Switzerland	1	.4	.4	96.1
Thailand	2	.9	.9	97.0
Turkey	4	1.7	1.7	98.7
UK	1	.4	.4	99.1
Vietnam	2	.9	.9	100.0
Total	230	100.0	100.0	

Language

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	9	3.9	3.9	3.9
Arabic	11	4.8	4.8	8.7
Cantonese	1	.4	.4	9.1
Chaldean	2	.9	.9	10.0
Chinese	1	.4	.4	10.4
Czec	1	.4	.4	10.9
Dinka	2	.9	.9	11.7
English	161	70.0	70.0	81.7
Filipino	2	.9	.9	82.6
French	1	.4	.4	83.0
Gio	2	.9	.9	83.9
Greek	2	.9	.9	84.8
Hindi	1	.4	.4	85.2
Italian	4	1.7	1.7	87.0
Kurdish	1	.4	.4	87.4
Macedonian	6	2.6	2.6	90.0
Malayalam	1	.4	.4	90.4
Maltese	2	.9	.9	91.3
Mandarin	1	.4	.4	91.7
Mano	1	.4	.4	92.2
Persian	1	.4	.4	92.6
Polish	1	.4	.4	93.0
Punjabi	2	.9	.9	93.9
Samoan	1	.4	.4	94.3
Sinalese	1	.4	.4	94.8
Tamil	2	.9	.9	95.7
Thai	2	.9	.9	96.5
Turkish	5	2.2	2.2	98.7
Vietnamese	3	1.3	1.3	100.0
Total	230	100.0	100.0	

Emerging Communities Participants

Gender

Male	Female	Total
18	57	75

Country of Birth

Burundi	6
Iraq	9
Liberia	3
Rwanda	1
Sierra Leone	1
Sudan	55
Total	75

Appendix 4 Research Ethics

A range of ethical issues were identified and addressed through the research, including:

- **Language & literacy barriers** –identified as a potential barrier to participation, particularly for migrants and refugees. Support was provided to respond to research questions and participants were offered the use of interpreters.
- **Representation of social groups** - Care was taken throughout the research process, not to reinforce stereotypes of particularly vulnerable groups. Responses were framed within social, economic, historical and political context. Care was taken to avoid further marginalising these groups in the presentation and write-up of research findings.
- **Representation of organisations** - discussions about any one particular organisation were considered to be the point of view of the participants. Any information pertaining to a specific organisation was handled sensitively in analysis and representation in the research report, in order to protect the professional reputation of organisations.
- **Informed consent** - Informed consent was required from all participants as sensitive information was being collected, and participation was voluntary. A written and verbal explanation of the project was provided to all those who participated in a group consultation or focus group, and a verbal explanation was provided to those surveyed over the telephone. Within the focus group discussions, consent was sought and gained by the group to maintain the privacy of participants prior to the interview.
- **Privacy** - The collection of personal information was to meet the aims of the research, and not for any other purpose. Privacy statements, including the reason for collecting personal information, information about the storage of research information and contact details of the researchers, were provided to all participants prior to their participation in the research. Information collected did not identify participants, and where this may have been a concern, the researchers clarified the information with participants, prior to recording.
- **Confidentiality** - During the process of analysis, where several workers and community members accessed interview transcripts, confidentiality was ensured by participants agreeing not to discuss any details of the findings outside the workshops, and by handing back all raw data transcripts following the analysis process.
- **Meeting emerging needs** - A number of needs were identified and addressed in the process of undertaking the research. Information and support to access services was provided for volunteering services, transport services, Council services, settlement support and migration services, emergency relief, legal services, disability services and community groups.
- **De-briefing** - For several participants, an opportunity for de-briefing was provided following the interviews, as sensitive issues had been raised, and this had caused some participants a level of distress. Further opportunities for support were provided in these situations.

APPENDIX 5: RANDOM TELEPHONE SURVEY



Whittlesea Community Engagement Project – Telephone Questions

Hello, my name is (FIRST NAME)

I am calling from an organisation called Whittlesea Community Connections, a not-for-profit organisation based at Epping Plaza who provides a range of services to address disadvantage in the municipality of Whittlesea.

We are currently conducting a short 10-minute telephone survey, to help understand people's experiences and opinions about community involvement. By sharing your experiences and ideas, we are hoping to help governments and community organisations make better decisions and improve opportunities for you and other people to participate in community.

The information you provide in this survey/consultation will be kept private and confidential and information collected as part of the research will not identify you, and your personal details will not be used in the research findings. None of your information will be used for marketing or any other purposes.

Do you agree to take part in this survey?

- Yes
- No

Survey/ Consultation Questions

These questions are about your experiences in the community.

1. Have you ever been involved in the community in the following ways?

- Help other people in the neighbourhood/community (eg; driving neighbours, translating for people in your community, looking after other's children)
 - Involved in a Community or self help Group (seniors, cultural. Women, youth, sporting)
 - Volunteer (freely giving time to benefit self & others, without payment, either within a community organisation/group or in neighbourhood)
 - On a decision making committee/group/board (eg; committee of management)
 - Involved in activities through children or family (eg; helps at child's school)
 - Had a say on issues that are important to you (eg; attended local consultation or completed a survey about services run by Council)
 - Attended a local community event (eg; Community Festival, Whittlesea Show)
 - Other, please specify:
-

2. Have any of the following reasons stopped you from getting involved or participating in the community or in the work of community organisations?

- Do not know how to get involved (lack of information)
 - Transport (cost, availability, time, awareness of)
 - Caring responsibilities (for children, person with a disability, older person)
 - Perceptions about volunteering (eg; work for nothing, didn't think I could volunteers)
 - Not interested
 - Work commitments/don't have time
 - Not enough opportunities available locally
 - Not enough physical spaces to meet
 - Previous negative experiences have put me off participating
 - Formality "red tape" involved
 - Cost – couldn't afford to get involved
 - The activities did not continue
 - Other
-

3. Do you think any of the following would help to increase community participation in Whittlesea?

- Provide more information about ways to get involved
- Create meaningful participation opportunities (makes a difference)
- Increase facilities/buildings where people can meet
- Make sure opportunities are flexible to meet people's needs
- Provide opportunities for diverse groups to come together
- Create more opportunities for young people
- Create more opportunities for families
- Create more opportunities for people with disabilities

- Make sure opportunities are affordable
- Make sure opportunities are available locally
- Promote the benefits of participation
- Provide training & support for people to get involved
- Other

These questions are about your opinion; about what you think is important...

Whittlesea Community Connections is hoping to put together some important principles or things that governments and community organisations should consider to increase community involvement. Please rate how important you think the following principles are, from 1-4, with:

1 2 3 4
Not at all important Not important Important Very Important

4. It is important that people have the right to get involved in the community and have a say in decisions that affect their lives (right)

Prompt: People are entitled to participate in the community, opportunities to be involved should be provided to people, it is their right

1 2 3 4
 Not at all important Not important Important Very Important

5. It is important a diverse range of people in the community have a chance to be involved in the community and have their say (Inclusion)

Prompt: People from different cultures, ages, religions, abilities should all have an opportunity to be involved

1 2 3 4
 Not at all important Not important Important Very Important

6. It is important that people have the chance to meet other people and form relationships with others when they get involved or have a say in the community (Process/relationships)

Prompt: People get involved to get to know other people & make friendships

1 2 3 4
 Not at all important Not important Important Very Important

7. It is important the when people participate in the community or have a say, that it makes a difference or changes the way things are done (Influence)

Prompt: If people are invited to have a say, this should influence the decision made or if people volunteer, their volunteering should make a difference in the community

1 2 3 4
 Not at all important Not important Important Very Important

8. It is important that governments and community organisations help people who have difficulty participating to get involved and have a say (accessibility)

Prompt: Barriers that people face, such as language, transport, childcare, wheelchair access, should be addressed by organisations so all people can participate

1	2	3	4
Not at all important	Not important	Important	Very Important

9. It is important the opportunities to have a say and get involved in the community are available locally (within the City of Whittlesea) (local)

Prompt: People should be able to participate in their local community, such as volunteering in their suburb or attending a consultation that is close to where they live

1	2	3	4
Not at all important	Not important	Important	Very Important

10. It is important that opportunities to get involved or have say are ongoing and not just once off (sustainable)

Prompt: People should have ongoing opportunities to contribute to their community.

1	2	3	4
Not at all important	Not important	Important	Very Important

11. Do you have any further comments?

- _____

Personal/demographic information

The following questions will provide some background information on the people completing this survey they will be used for statistical purposes and not be used to identify you, your name is not being recorded on the survey.

1. In what year were you born? _____	
2. Are you? _____ Female or Male	
3. What is your suburb & postcode _____	
4. How long have you lived in the City of Whittlesea?	
3. In which country were you born? _____	
4. If not Australia, in what year did you arrive in Australia? _____	
5. What language is normally spoken in your home? _____	
6. Do you identify as having a disability, chronic illness or health barrier? _____ Yes No	
7. Which of the following best describes the type of residence (house/flat) that you live in? fully owned mortgaged rented public housing community housing Other _____	
8. Which of the following family types best describes your current household? Couple with Dependent Children Household of Related Adults Sole-parent with Dependent Children Household of Unrelated Adults Childless Couple Living Alone Other _____	
9. Which of the following best describes your employment status? Work full-time Unemployed Work part-time or casual Retired or pensioned Carer or home duties Other _____	
29. What is the highest level of education that you have completed? Primary school University degree Secondary school Post-graduate qualification Trade or apprenticeship or diploma Other _____	
30. What is your GROSS household income per week from all sources, that is, the total income including pensions and allowances for all the people in your household before tax? Nil or negative between \$501 and \$1000 between \$1 and \$200 between \$1001 and \$2000 between \$201 and \$500 more than \$2000	

Thank-you for contributing your time, opinions & experiences.

APPENDIX 7:

Principles of Community Engagement as identified in the literature

Principle	Description	Relevant literature
Integrity	Openness and honesty about the scope and purpose of engagement	Brisbane Declaration (2005) Involve (2005)
Inclusion &/or representation	Opportunity for diverse range of views to be expressed/heard, depending on purpose of engagement. Barriers to participation should be addressed, and traditionally excluded groups given special support & encouragement to be involved. Where representation needed, effort to engage a cross section of community & not only the 'usual suspects'	Brisbane Declaration (2005) Involve (2005) Brackertz (2006) City of Maribyrnong (2000) Hashagen (2002)
Accessibility	Services, resources & opportunities for engagement will be available to all members of the community on an equitable basis. No participant is excluded because lack of physical access to meeting places, times or appropriate support	Involve (2005) City of Maribyrnong (2000)
Power	Participatory processes should have sufficient power to achieve agreed objectives. This may require a change to the existing power-sharing arrangements, such as governments 'letting go' of control over processes, resources & outcomes	Involve (2005) MAV (2007)
Deliberation	when there is sufficient & credible information for dialogue, choice and decisions and when there is space to weigh options, develop common understandings and to appreciate respective roles and responsibilities	Brisbane Declaration (2005)
Influence/makes a difference	When people have input in designing how they participate & when policies and services reflect their involvement and when their impact is apparent . When it makes a difference to all those involved in terms of learning, confidence & active citizenship	Brisbane Declaration (2005) Involve (2005)
Commitment & Leadership	Leadership & strong commitment to information, consultation and active participation is needed at all levels from politicians, senior managers, and public officials. Provide a leadership role in discussion and debate on community issues, and make decisions in the best interests of the community	OECD (2001) City of Maribyrnong (2000)
Rights	All members of the community have the right to access information, provide feedback, be consulted and actively participate. These rights must be firmly grounded in law or policy. The relationship between Council/community organisations and the Community is one which involves political, civil and social rights and duties. It recognises that citizenship grows and develops with the participation of citizens in democratic processes.	OECD (2001) City of Maribyrnong (2000)
Clarity & transparency	Clarity about the purpose, the limits of what can and can't be changed, who can be involved and how, and what happens as a result.	OECD (2001) Involve (2005) City of Maribyrnong

	The respective roles and responsibilities of citizens (in providing input) and government (in making decisions for which they are accountable) must be clear to all	(2000)
Time	Public consultations should be undertaken as early as possible. Adequate time must be available for consultation, participation to be effective	OECD (2001)
Objectivity & Equality of access	Information provided must be objective, complete and accessible. All citizens should have equal treatment when exercising their right to access information & participation	OECD (2001) City of Maribyrnong (2000)
Resources	Adequate financial, human and technical resources are needed if public information, consultation and active participation in policy-making are to be effective. This includes government officials having adequate skills, guidance and training as well as an organisational culture that supports their efforts.	OECD (2001) Hashagen (2002)
Coordination/ Integration	Coordination across government and between community organisations to enhance knowledge management, ensure policy coherence, avoid duplication and reduce risk of consultation fatigue. Services and activities will be planned, developed and implemented with a minimum of bureaucracy and maximum co-ordination.	OECD (2001) City of Maribyrnong (2000)
Accountability	Obligation to account for use they make of citizens input, ensure that policy making process is open, transparent, and amenable to external scrutiny. Accountability extends to organisations, governments and the wider community. This requires good record keeping & reporting the processes & outcomes.	OECD (2001) Involve (2005) City of Maribyrnong (2000)
Evaluation	Need tools, information & capacity to evaluate performance in undertaking community engagement.	OECD (2001)
Active citizenship	Governments benefit from active citizens, and can take steps to facilitate access to information & participation, raise awareness, strengthen citizens; civic education & skills, as well as to support capacity building among civil society organisations	OECD (2001)
Learning & Development	Participatory processes should seek to support a climate of mutual learning & development among those involved	Involve (2005)
Partnerships	Governments & organisations should work in partnership with the community to shape its future. Partnerships with other groups or organisations should be formed where it will directly assist the community to do so.	City of Maribyrnong (2000)
Respect & encouragement of diversity	Governments & organisations will value and respect the diversity of the community, and as such will ensure that community consultation processes are utilised which take into account the Community's diversity, and support participation among diverse communities.	City of Maribyrnong (2000)
Sustainability	Actions to meet current needs will have positive influence on communities ability to meet future needs	City of Maribyrnong (2000)

APPENDIX 7

WHITTLESEA COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PRINCIPLES

Principle	Local Definition	Research evidence
Integrity	<p>It is important that there is openness and honesty about the scope and purpose of engagement, that there is a willingness to trust the community's views, experiences and aspirations</p> <p>Processes which seek to engage people should be transparent, including any limitations to the scope of engagement clearly articulated</p>	<p>"I was part of a reconciliation process in another area - that was equitable and open, there were no hidden agenda's. The process was publicly held, the outcomes had not been already decided and our voices were heard" (Indigenous)</p> <p>"Things were being done that were very unethical...there were hidden agenda's, you can get very hurt" (Disability)</p> <p>"They just think we are Mum's who rant and rave and that we don't know what we want...but we know our town and what we need" (Rural)</p> <p>"We are not unrealistic, we want the same basic services as everyone else, so we don't have to drive down Plenty Road" (Rural)</p> <p>...there needs to be integrity in the process, people need to be consulted at the beginning...the journey is as important, allowing people to feel part of it from the start (Organisation)</p> <p>Reasons for engaging need to be clear from the start...the purpose the engagement should not be the funding requirement...not having a consultation if its not necessary (Organisation)</p>
Inclusion	<p>It is important a diverse range of people in the community have a chance to be involved in the community and have their say</p> <p>Organisations will value and respect the diversity of the community, and as such will ensure that community engagement processes are utilised which promote the Community's diversity, and support participation among diverse communities.</p> <p>Community engagement processes will not further exclude those communities</p>	<p>To say this is a multicultural city in proper terms, there should be multicultural living, different groups should mix...organising social events would bring the community together (New Arrivals)</p> <p>Not just Australian educated people (should be involved), but others too, we are all citizens and so community involvement needs to be inclusive of all community members (Volunteers)</p> <p>Because we wear the hijab we experience discrimination...people don't understand us, communities need to mix so the community are educated about who we are and what it means; we are positive people (New Arrivals)</p> <p>When we see new people, we make them feel welcome, offer a coffee, explain what we do...we say 'we meet every Monday night, come down and have a chat with us' (Volunteers)</p>

	<p>already disadvantaged or marginalised, but seek to include those who may otherwise not be involved.</p> <p>Those who may be disadvantaged or marginalised are adequately resourced, supported & empowered to participate meaningfully</p> <p>Community engagement activities will actively seek to bring diverse groups together</p>	<p>Change the philosophy of the organisation to say to people if they want to come that they can come, community input is important...never limit the amount of people that want to come (Volunteers)</p> <p>Because you are busy with kids, you can't get more involved, my sister does things at home on her computer at night, I could do that, as long as I didn't have a deadline' (Rural)</p> <p>We need our own identity but its important to feel part of the wider community too (Indigenous)</p>
<p>Building relationships</p>	<p>It is important that people have the chance to meet other people and form relationships with others when they get involved or have a say in the community</p> <p>Community engagement activities in Whittlesea will foster relationships, between organisations and communities and within communities, based on mutual understanding, trust and respect</p> <p>Community engagement is about the process as much as the outcomes, in most situations, Whittlesea residents prefer face-to-face contact</p>	<p>We get a lot from the group; we get social contacts, make friends, otherwise we would feel isolated...other problems can develop if we are not involved (Single mothers)</p> <p>Its always good to mix with others – you don't have to be with your people all the time (Volunteers)</p> <p>Opportunity to meet other mothers, share experiences, knowledge to develop friendships and to feel connected (Individual Interview)</p> <p>Community work gives us opportunities to take pleasure from what we give others, because we live in such materialistic days, slowly this connection between people keeps us together (New Arrivals)</p> <p>Group activities are good, doing things together, like park events where everyone is there and I get a sense of community (Youth)</p>
<p>Influence</p>	<p>It is important the when people participate in the community or have a say, that it makes a difference or changes the way things are done</p> <p>The policies, services or ways organisations work should reflect the input and involvement of local people</p>	<p>We are in the residents group to have a say in how we live...as a new community we want to mould our community to how we want it (New residents)</p> <p>I turned up to volunteer, and there was nothing to do...trust me with something meaningful to do (Volunteers)</p> <p>I have been involved in consultations with COTA, they asked our opinions and this was used to make decisions that go to Parliament (Disability)</p> <p>You never see the results, it falls on deaf ears...you don't know what happens to information...we want information back to see the results (Youth)</p>

		<p>It's important to have a say and know you are being considered...its not a dictatorship, we must be able to freely have a say (New Arrivals)</p> <p>You can be involved as much as possible, but if it doesn't change anything, people will be reluctant to get involved again...I am still involved (in committees) as I don't want my kids to miss out on what I did (Rural)</p> <p>I was part of an advisory committee to Council...it was good because there were senior managers and Councilors on the committee...they have a lot of clout, they actually make a lot of decisions...(Indigenous)</p>
<p>Accessibility</p>	<p>It is important that governments and community organisations help people who have difficulty participating to get involved and have a say</p> <p>Community engagement activities should consider & address issues such as transport, venues, language needs, childcare, literacy levels and physical accessibility</p> <p>In Whittlesea, community engagement activities can only grow and develop with adequate infrastructure to support people's participation</p>	<p>I have no childcare, no family support around me, and I live in the rural area with not transport...I find it hard to participate in anything (Individual interview)</p> <p>Organisations need to provide more help to small groups – a facilitator, a venue and funding (Stroke group)</p> <p>It is important to have free services and activities, like music for children. Some parents are Doctors and Engineers and can afford to pay for lessons so rich kids get better opportunities...I can't afford these activities, the government should provide more of these (Volunteers)</p> <p>I volunteer in the City of Yarra, its easier to get to the city and volunteer than to get around the City of Whittlesea...also there is no reimbursement for travel in Whittlesea (Volunteers)</p>
<p>Local</p>	<p>It is important the opportunities to have a say and get involved in the community are available locally (within the City of Whittlesea)</p> <p>It is important that community engagement opportunities are available locally (within the City of Whittlesea), and that resources available for community engagement in Whittlesea prioritise meeting the community participation needs, aspirations and interests of Whittlesea residents.</p>	<p>I don't do anything in Whittlesea, I have to go outside the community as there are not the same opportunities here...I am more connected to Hume/Moreland, if Whittlesea can give more opportunities, people will give here (Youth group)</p> <p>Keeping it local is important, especially in our area because of transport (Whittlesea township)</p> <p>...its only by getting involved in the local community you get to know people. I know people from Kinglake down to Mahoneys Road, its only by getting involved in things that you meet people and become part of the community (Volunteers)</p>

	<p>Local community engagement opportunities should be sustainable locally and contribute to ongoing community capacity building of communities and organisations that support Whittlesea's participation needs.</p>	
Communication	<p>Whittlesea residents have the right to be kept informed about services, activities and opportunities available in their community.</p> <p>Organisations and governments have a responsibility to communicate appropriate information in a way that meets the diverse needs of the Whittlesea community.</p> <p>Communication should be ongoing and two way.</p>	<p>"If I knew more options for volunteering it would be easier...but we don't have time to find out how to get involved..." (Youth Group, 18-25 year olds)</p> <p>"Even if it were advertised, I'd only do it if I knew someone who had done it..." (Youth Group, 18-25 Year Olds)...not knowing about services or where to go to find out, not being supported with establishing or continuing groups (New Arrival)</p> <p>Tell people in their own language about organisations and what they are & what they do (New Arrival)</p> <p>If they don't know they wont come, last time I didn't know, this time I brought kids, brought sister (to community festival) (Parent)</p> <p>Promotion, publicity in local paper, internet, talks to groups, have info sessions at maternal and child centers and at council, provide training and support to groups (parent)</p>
Sustainability	<p>It is important that opportunities to get involved or have say have lasting community benefits.</p> <p>Community engagement activities that meet current needs will have positive influence on communities ability to meet future needs</p>	<p>We had an activity for young people started here, it was really good but then it just stopped...they need to continue as there is a need for things to do for 8-16 year olds (Residents group)</p> <p>"There are some good courses and groups run by Anglicare & Maternal Child and Health, but after these are finished where do you go? Women could help run support groups but they need support & resources" (Single Mothers Group)</p>