



Merri-bek
City Council



Merri-bek Community Panel

**Participant
information pack**

**Shaping
Merri-bek
*Together***

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From your facilitators

Welcome to the Merri-bek Community Panel.

The Community Panel is a unique opportunity to connect, collaborate, and make a meaningful impact alongside others from the Merri-bek community.

As independent facilitators, our goal is to ensure you feel supported every step of the way. We're here to provide you with the tools, information, and space you need to actively participate and contribute to the discussions that will focus on the future of Merri-bek. Through activities and shared conversations, we'll make this experience both enjoyable and impactful.

There will be two panels running over the same weekend:

- **The Youth Panel (ages 12–16)** will be guided by Bec Yandell and Hannah Bishop.
- **The Community Panel (ages 17 and older)** will be facilitated by Amy Hubbard and Emily Mellon.

It is going to be a fun and rewarding experience! See you on the 20th of February, 2025.

Amy, Bec, Emily and Hannah
Capire Consulting Group

About Capire

Capire Consulting Group is proud to be a leading voice in community engagement practice.

Capire Consulting Group is Australia's largest specialist community engagement consultancy with presence in Victoria, Queensland and South Australia. Our name comes from the Italian word 'capire' – meaning to listen, understand – which defines what Capire is about.

We design and deliver tailored engagement strategies for policies, projects, and places across Australia and beyond. Since 2007, our pioneering engagement strategies have led to positive outcomes on thousands of projects – strengthening relationships, informing decision-making, and building knowledge.

A certified B-Corporation, we strive to make a positive difference for our clients, our community, our practice, and our planet. We are proud to be a leading voice in engagement practice in Australia.





Introduction

Thank you for joining the Merri-bek Community Panel.

Reading this document you will learn:

- about why the Community Panel will meet,
- and how we will work together during the sessions.

Before we begin, we want to understand how much you know about Council, its role and its services. We will also ask what your expectations are about the panel process. On the last day, we will ask you to answer the same questions again. It will help us to see if the sessions helped you to learn more about Council.



Please complete a short online survey. If you need a printed survey, we can provide it on 20 February.

[Complete the survey here](#)

The survey closes at 5pm on Thursday, 20 February 2025.

*Capire Consulting Group will only use this information to deliver the sessions and related evaluation. Your responses are anonymous and will not be shared directly with Council.

Dates and venue

Session	When	Where
Session 1 Induction Session	Thursday 20th February 6pm - 8:30pm (adult panel) 6pm - 7:30pm (youth panel)	Coburg Town Hall 90 Bell Street, Coburg 3058
Session 2 Identity and Values	Saturday 22nd February 9:30am - 4:30pm	Coburg Town Hall 90 Bell Street, Coburg 3058
Session 3 Vision and Priorities	Sunday 23rd February 9:30am - 4:30pm	Coburg Town Hall 90 Bell Street, Coburg 3058

All sessions will be held at Kulin – bulok and Bagung – bulok rooms in the **Coburg Town Hall**, 90 Bell Street, Coburg. Please enter the building via the entrance at Urquhart Street, Coburg.

Travelling to the sessions

Coburg Townhall is close to public transport, including the Upfield train line, busses and 19 tram line and has a large car park with EV charges and bicycle racks.



Parking options

There is free, untimed parking along Urquhart Street, opposite the building. Roadside parking outside the Town Hall on Urquhart Street is timed, so please avoid parking there if possible, to avoid needing to move your car during the session.



Public transport

There are several public transport options nearby, including:

- Bus Routes 513, 514, 527, 534, 561 and 903 all stop at the Coburg Primary School/ Bell Street bus stop which is 200m from the venue.
- The number 19 tram along Sydney Rd. The nearest stop is Bell St/Sydney Rd stop number 34 which is within 500m of the venue.
- Coburg train station (Upfield Line) is a 10-minute walk from the venue.



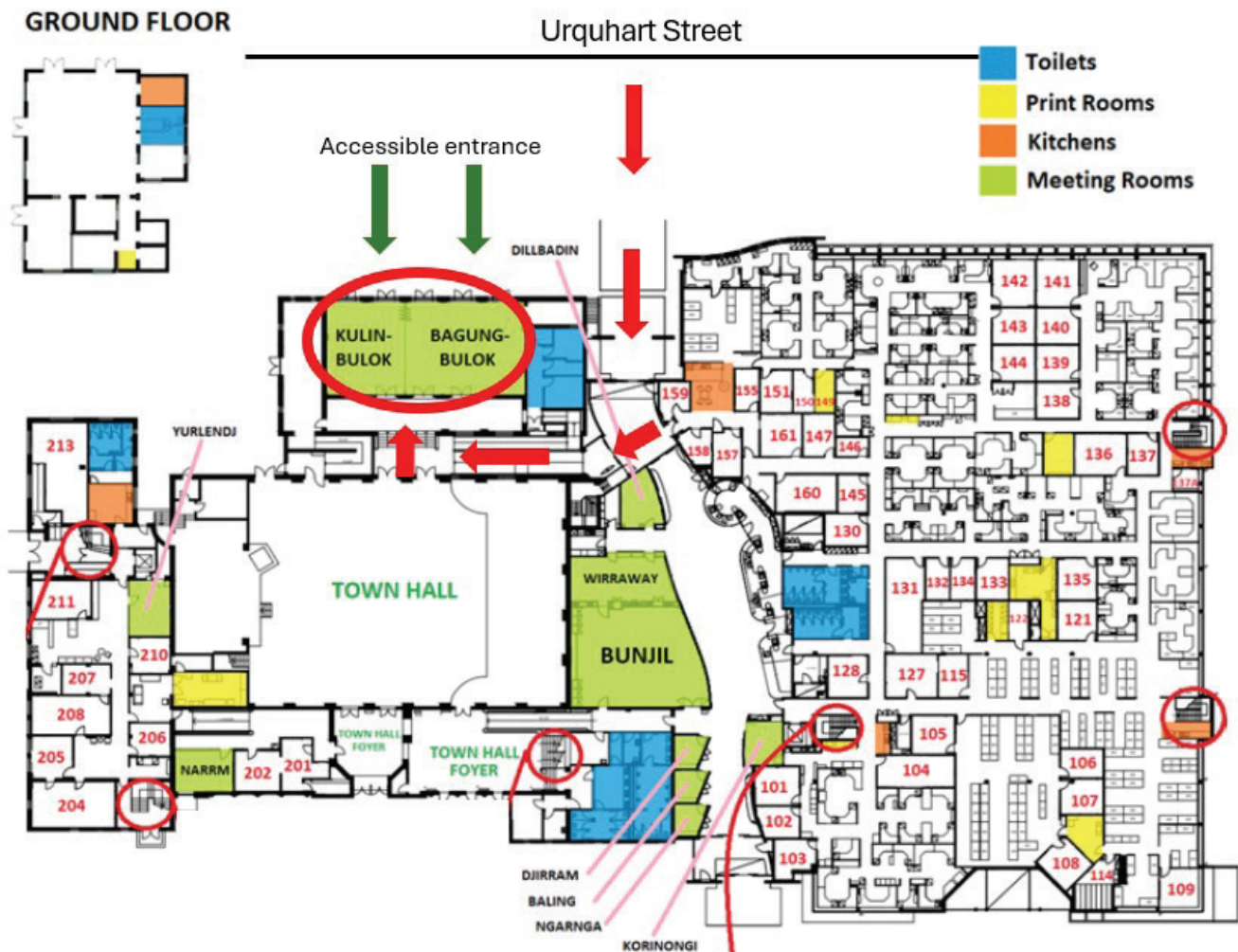
Cycling and active transport

If you are cycling, you can park your bicycle near the Urquhart Street entrance to Coburg Town Hall.

The Upfield bike path follows the rail line from the Capital City Trail in Brunswick to Box Forest Road, Hadfield. The bike path provides a less busy alternative to Sydney Road and is a great way to get to work.

A bridge at the end of Harding and Kendall Streets provides an alternative route to Bell Street for cyclists travelling from Preston side.





Accessibility

We understand that accessibility goes beyond the day of the event.

Your comfort and ability to contribute your ideas are very important to us.

We are designing the Panel sessions with accessibility in mind.

You might have any specific needs or adjustments that would help you participate that you haven't told us about yet. You can contact **Nivek Thompson** at **0412 544 672** or email nivek@deliberatelyengaging.com.au.

You might also want to make any accessibility adjustments during the sessions. You can talk to facilitators or any council staff in the room about it.

We will do our best to help with your needs.

Keeping children and young people safe

People under 18 years old will attend sessions in the same building as an adult panel. Children and young people have the right to feel safe. We all have an obligation to keep children and young people safe from harm and abuse.

Merri-bek City Council is committed to Child Safety and has zero tolerance for child abuse. We will treat all child safe incidents seriously and will respond quickly.

At the beginning of each session, we will explain to all the participants our expectations of Child Safe behaviour. We will also have two council officers on a day to help with child safe requirements and reports.

To learn more read Merri-bek [Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy](#).

About deliberative engagement

Why do we need a community panel?

The Local Government Act (2020) is a law that tells all Victorian Councils that they must go through a process called deliberative community engagement to inform their Community Vision, Council Plan, Financial Plan and Asset Plan. These plans are important documents that guide Council's decision-making over the next four years.

The Community Vision, which you will be asked to refresh as part of this panel, is a statement that outlines the community's values, goals, and aspirations for the future. Councils need to run a deliberative community engagement to create or review this vision.

Merri-bek Council defines deliberative engagement as giving the community enough time and information to think carefully, explore options, and be part of the decision-making process.

Bringing local people together to form a community panel is a common way to do this engagement. All levels of government often use it for their projects.

The panel's ideas or recommendations add to expert and technical information. Together, this knowledge helps governments to make decisions.

It is a similar idea to the use of juries in a legal court. Studies show that the public trusts the decisions made by randomly selected people. These people have access to all the evidence and time to debate their opinions.

Remit

Community Panels are brought together for different reasons. Often, they are asked to solve a problem or provide recommendations to help make decisions. To help a Community Panel focus on a shared goal, they are given a 'remit'. This 'remit' sets the task for the panel and what Council would like as the outcome.

For your Community Panel the remit is:

To engage with other members of the Merri-bek Community Panel to understand community values and aspirations, refresh the Community Vision, and establish clear priorities to guide Council's actions over the next four years.

This means that you will work together to;

- Understand what's important to the Merri-bek community, now and in the future,
- Develop a Community Vision statement that describes the future you want to see in 10 years time,
 - Identify Community Priorities that Council should focus on for the next 4 years to achieve the Community Vision.



What to expect from the Community Panel

This information will help you prepare for the Community Panel.

Two panels, working together on one set of recommendations

- You are very lucky to be a part of a process that will include two community panels, a Youth Panel and a Community Panel.
- The Youth Panel will run at the same time as the Community Panel and will be made up of 24 young people aged between 12 and 16 years old.
- The Community Panel will be made up of people 17 years and older.
- Each panel will have times when they work separately and other times when they will come together to share ideas, consider different views or options, ask questions and vote on decisions.

Diversity of backgrounds

- During the sessions you will have discussions with people of different ages, genders and backgrounds who live or work in Merri-bek.
- This diversity will help you make the best recommendations for all of Merri-bek community.
- You may meet people with similar views and others who have different views. This is important for the group discussions to capture the mix of perspectives and experiences.
- We expect everyone to behave respectfully with each other even though they might have different ideas, beliefs or opinions.

Everything is provided for

- You do not need to bring anything with you. We will provide you with the information and materials you need at each session.
- Meals and refreshments will be provided at all sessions. Your dietary needs will be catered for. If you have not yet shared your dietary requirements, please send them to Nivek Thompson (nivek@deliberatelyengaging.com.au) as soon as possible.
- If you require medications, please bring these with you.

Photography and filming

- The sessions will be photographed and filmed.
- The reason we photograph and film the sessions is to create summaries to share with the broader community. Not everyone who wanted to be in the Community Panel was able, so it is important to share the journey with everyone that's interested.
- If you do not wish to have your image captured, you will be given the opportunity to say so when you arrive.



Independent facilitators, Council staff and Councillors

- Independent facilitators from Capire Consulting Group will support the Community Panel. Capire's role is to facilitate the Community Panel and help you to work together to prepare your recommendations. They will make sure each Community Panel member has equal opportunity to participate and your feedback is captured. If you feel concerned about behaviour on the day, or you feel that you are not being included or listened to, please talk to your Capire facilitator.
- Council staff will also be present to share information and answer questions.
- Councillors may attend the sessions to observe only. They will be present for the final presentation of your recommendations to Council.

Panel process and group work

- The Panel process is exciting and challenging and brings together different ideas and viewpoints.
- We will use multiple tools to collect your input during the sessions. We will use a mix of whole-group, small-group, paired and individual activities.
- Sometimes, the discussion may seem scattered or frustrating, and reaching an agreement can be challenging. This is part of the collaborative nature of a community panel.
- Group work can be inspiring, with many ideas exchanged, but it can also be frustrating when discussions stray or lack focus. Experiencing a range of emotions is normal during collaborative efforts.
- Deliberative engagement is an immersive process that provides participants with time and access to information to consider, weigh up, and formulate recommendations. Figure 1 over the page demonstrates the collaborative process of deliberative engagement through a series of stages and highlights the kind of thoughts or feelings you may experience at each stage.

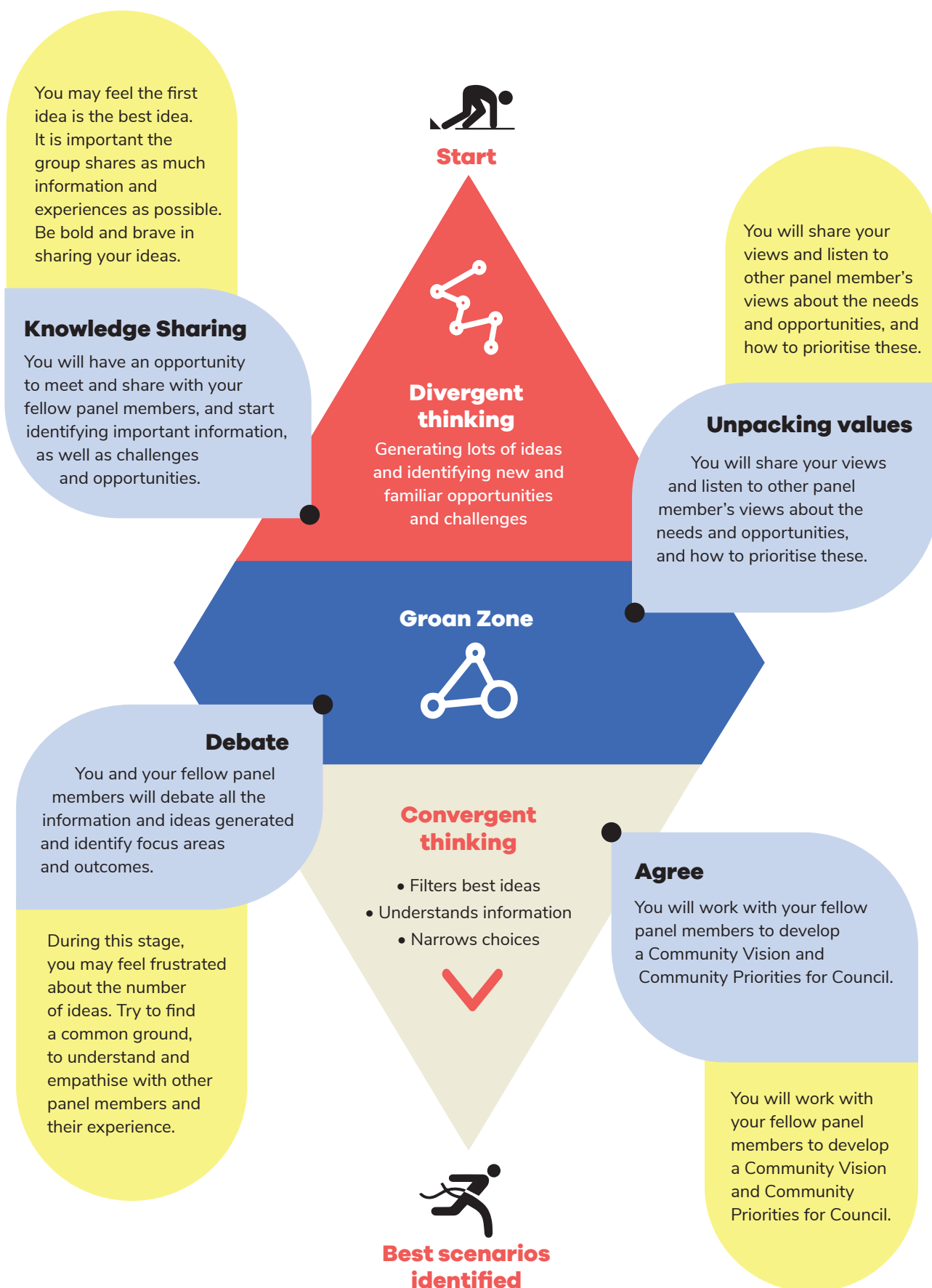


Figure 1: – Figure1. Diamond of participation and potential thoughts and feelings along the way in deliberative engagement (adapted from Sam Kaner et al)



Role and commitment

Your role and commitment

It is important that Panel members are available and committed to attending all three sessions, but we understand life events happen. If you are unable to attend a session, please contact:

Nivek Thompson of Deliberatively Engaging on **0412 544 672** or nivek@deliberatelyengaging.com.au.

During the sessions, we ask that you:

- Arrive on time and stay till the end.
- Pay attention to information and learn as much as you can about the community vision, community priorities, concerns and key council documents and strategic plans.
- Treat all other panel members, council staff and facilitators, respectfully and courteously.
- Participate constructively in all discussions and allow others to express their views.
- Think about the views of the broader community, rather than your personal views.

Starting on time

Please, arrive 10 minutes early to sign in, enjoy some food, and meet other participants.

We will start each session on time.

Compensation

To thank you for your time and effort, you will receive a total of up to **\$300 payment for attending all three sessions**. You will receive a digital voucher valued at \$100 after each attended session.

If you have any questions about the compensation, please email **Anna Romanova** at aromanova@merri-bek.vic.gov.au.



Session support

What to expect from Council Staff

Council staff will attend each session to share information and answer any questions.

They won't influence the result of the Panel's work.

What to expect from Capire facilitators

Capire has been hired by Merri-bek Council to facilitate the Community Panel process. Capire will be present at all sessions and support the Community Panel to have productive and respectful conversations, and complete the task that Council has set them.

Capire has been engaged by Council as experts in deliberative engagement and facilitation. Capire will be present at all sessions to facilitate constructive, productive and respectful discussion.

Key contact information

Capire has partnered with Nivek from Deliberatively Engaging to manage the recruitment and selection of the Community Panel's to make sure that it was done independently and with no bias. You will have already spoken with Nivek on the phone and she will still be your best contact for information or questions about:

- Accessibility needs (including translation)
- Attending on the day and what to expect,
- Food and dietary restrictions,
- Transport.

Her contact details are:

Key contact: **Nivek Thompson**

Phone: **0412 544 672**

Email: nivek@deliberatelyengaging.com.au

If you have a question specifically about Council's work, programs or services, please contact **Anna Romanova, Community Engagement Partner**

Key Contact: **Anna Romanova**

Phone: **0424 653 320**

Email: aromanova@merri-bek.vic.gov.au





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