



Community Engagement Framework



The Greater Metropolitan
Cemeteries Trust





Acknowledgment of Country

We respectfully acknowledge the Bunurong and Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung People as the Traditional Custodians of the lands and waterways on which we operate.

We recognise that First Nations peoples hold deep, ongoing connections to Country. Their voices and knowledge are vital in shaping inclusive services and spaces that are culturally safe, responsive, and respectful of this enduring connection.

Foreword

Community is at the heart of everything we do at the Greater Metropolitan Cemeteries Trust (GMCT). As a for purpose organisation accountable to the Department of Health, we are responsible to the people of Victoria. Through our provision of burial, cremation and memorialisation services and ongoing care for more than 600 hectares of parklands, we ensure end-of-life practices and traditions are respected now and into the future.

At the same time, the communities we serve are changing. Victoria's population is becoming increasingly diverse and continuing to age, shaping people's experiences of death, mourning and remembrance in cultural, spiritual, social and personal ways. As our focus on belonging and inclusion continues to grow, GMCT is committed to serving our communities with respect and care. In this context, genuinely listening, learning from lived experience and responding thoughtfully has never been more important.

Many of the cemeteries and memorial parks we care for today were established over a century ago. While their foundations reflect the needs of their time, our role today is broader. As caretakers of 21 sites across Melbourne's north, west and east, we have an opportunity to continue evolving alongside the cultural, spiritual and community needs of the people we serve.

New developments such as Harkness Memorial Park and Plenty Valley allow us to build new memorial parks from the ground up, shaped by contemporary and diverse community needs. From early planning onwards, these sites allow us to intentionally reflect inclusivity, cultural understanding and community connection, creating valued public places for families, neighbours and the wider community.

This Community Engagement Framework is our commitment to you, the people we serve.

It sets out how and why we engage, what you can influence, and how your voices help shape our work. It reflects what we heard when consulting community about the development of this Framework: the need for clarity, transparency, respectful engagement and meaningful involvement where it matters most.

We are proud to walk alongside our communities, not just in moments of loss, but across the many years that follow — caring for place, memory and connection together.

Warmly,

Tarang Chawla

Chair, Community
Advisory Committee

Andrew Eriksen

Chief Executive
Officer

GMCT Engagement at a Glance



Why we engage

We engage to ensure our memorial parks and services meet the needs of our communities, now and into the future.



How engagement helps

Engagement strengthens relationships, builds trust and leads to better, more informed decisions.



What community told us

People want clearer communication, earlier involvement and transparency about how their feedback is used.



Our guiding principles

- Inclusive • Timely • Authentic
- Collaborative • Respectful



Our commitment

We follow leading public participation frameworks (VAGO and IAP2) to ensure consistent, meaningful engagement.



Our promise

Community voices help shape how we plan, design and deliver projects, services and experiences across GMCT memorial parks and cemeteries.



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Why we engage

01

Photographer: Nicole Reed

The Greater Metropolitan Cemeteries Trust (GMCT) is a community-led, not-for-profit organisation that manages and cares for memorial parklands across Melbourne's north, west and east. We operate under the *Cemeteries and Crematoria Act 2003* (Vic) and are accountable to the Department of Health and to the people of Victoria.

Engaging with community is essential to ensuring our memorial parks and services continue to meet current and future needs. To do this well, we must genuinely listen to and work with communities – reflecting diverse traditions, backgrounds and perspectives in our decisions.

The reasons we engage are multifaceted:

- Inform decisions that impact community
- Respond to diverse community memorial, funeral practice and park-use needs
- Strengthen relationships with our neighbours
- Shift perceptions of memorial parks and cemeteries
- Increase awareness and understanding of what we do
- Foster inclusivity and reconciliation
- Meet regulatory and governance requirements

Engagement guides how we show up in the community and how community voices shape what we do. Together, we ensure local cemeteries and memorial parks are cared for with respect, now and forever, and that they are valued public places offering broader social, cultural and environmental benefits.

Our engagement approach

02

When developing this Framework, we spoke directly with communities to understand how they want us to engage, what matters to them, and how we can improve.

Cemeteries and memorial parks hold different meanings for different people. They are places for remembrance, history, culture, nature and quiet reflection. For some, they are also local green spaces with potential for connection, learning and community use. Our approach must honour this diversity and balance respect with opportunity.

One of the clearest messages from consultation was a desire for clarity about how and why we engage. People asked for transparency, earlier communications, and genuine influence where appropriate. This Framework responds to that feedback. It sets expectations and outlines GMCT's commitment to engagement that is meaningful, respectful and community-led.



Principles

When designing and delivering engagement activities, we are guided by the following principles:

Inclusive

We seek to hear and balance all voices, fostering belonging and cultural safety, and ensuring engagement is fair, accessible and responsive to different community needs.

Timely

We engage early, often and at key decision points so people have a genuine opportunity to influence.

Authentic

We build trust through transparency and realistic expectations. We clearly show where community can influence decisions and how feedback has been used.

Collaborative

We strengthen relationships and create opportunities to work together. We encourage shared ownership of ideas and outcomes.

Respectful

We recognise community knowledge, lived experience and cultural traditions. We meet people where they are, whether online, on-site or through trusted community networks.



Cultural safety

GMCT is committed to creating culturally safe spaces for all people. This means providing environments where individuals and communities feel respected, valued and able to express their cultural identity, beliefs and traditions without fear, judgement or misunderstanding.

We recognise that memorialisation, grief and end-of-life practices vary across cultures and faiths, and we honour these differences by listening deeply, engaging thoughtfully and ensuring our decisions reflect the diverse ways people connect to place, memory and care.

Process

Our engagement process follows leading practices, including the Victorian Auditor-General's Office (VAGO) Public Participation Guidelines and the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) Spectrum.

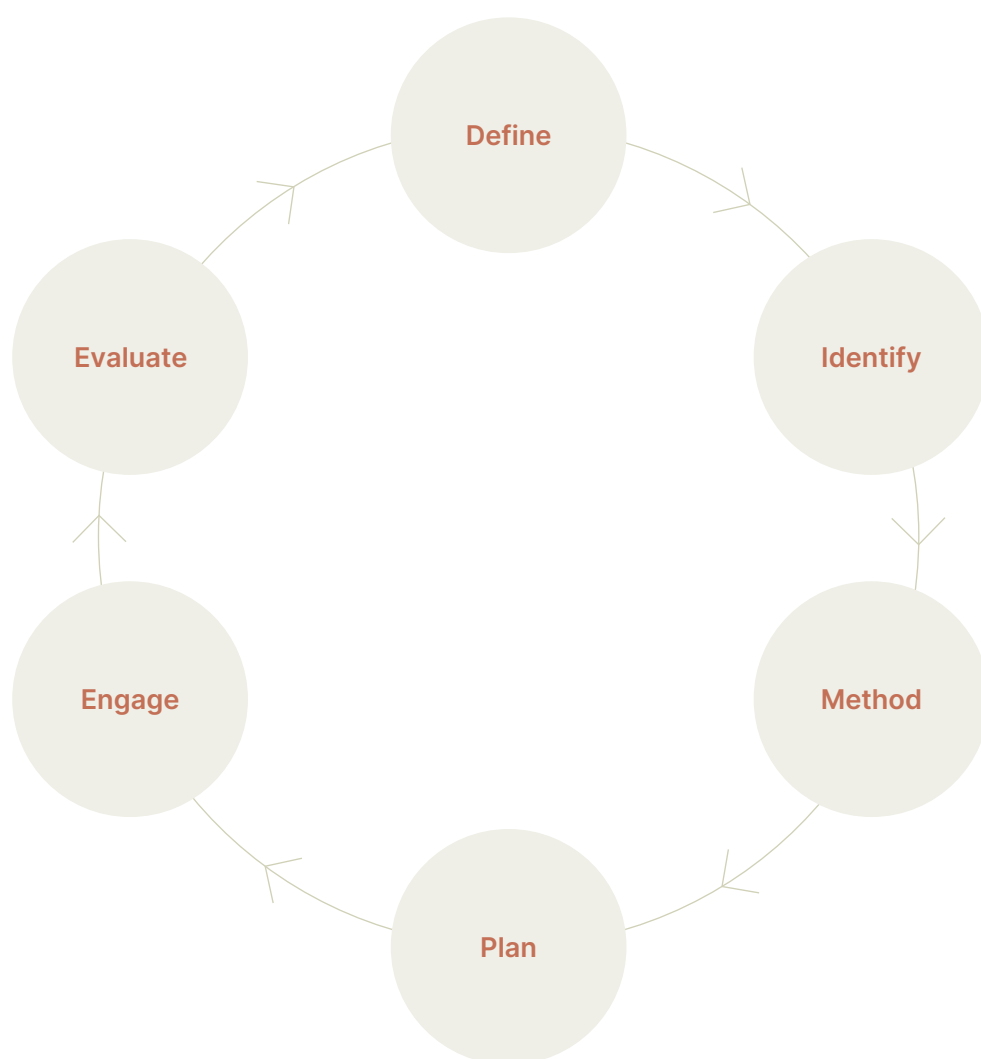
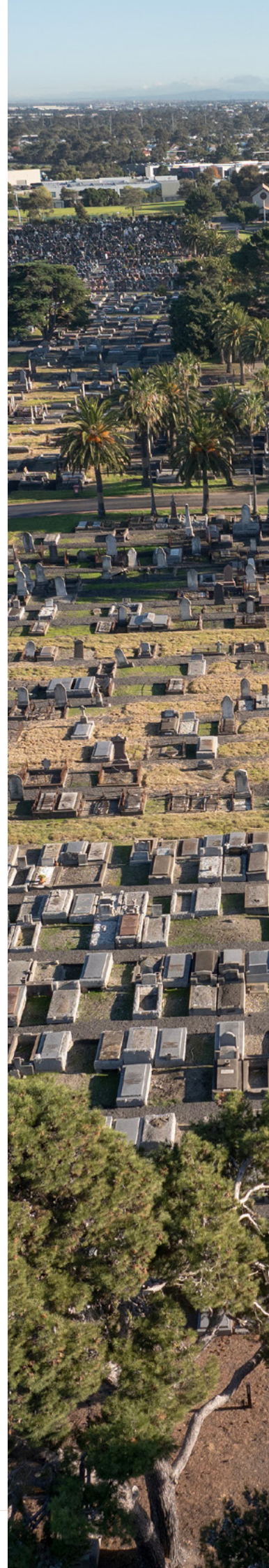


Figure 1 GMCT's engagement process steps





When an engagement project or community consultation need is identified, we follow these steps to ensure a consistent, scalable and fit-for-purpose approach.

1

Define

- Why we are engaging and what we aim to achieve
- The appropriate level of engagement using the IAP2 Spectrum (see figure 2)
- What the community can influence (negotiables) and what cannot change (non-negotiables)

2

Identify

- Who is directly and indirectly impacted
- Which communities, faith groups, cultural groups and stakeholders need to be involved
- Barriers to participation and how to reduce them

3

Method

- Select engagement tools that match the project and community needs
- Confirm resources, skills and time required

4

Plan

- Document the purpose, background, timeframes, roles, risks, engagement schedule and communications in a formal engagement plan
- Undertake a Gender Impact Assessment
- Include previous lessons learnt and current community sentiment

5

Engage

- Deliver the engagement plan and monitor progress
- Adapt as needed to improve inclusion, cultural safety, and accessibility

6

Evaluate

- Summarise what we heard and what outcomes were achieved
- Share results with participants (“closing the loop”)
- Share insights internally to support future work
- Identify improvements for future engagements

A close-up photograph of a person's hand pointing at a map. The person is wearing a blue jacket with a white cuff and a black wristband. They are also wearing a plaid shirt with shades of brown, grey, and white. A silver ring is visible on their finger. The map they are pointing at shows a landscape with green areas, a road, and a label that reads 'CAR PARK'.

How community can influence decisions

Different projects require different levels of community involvement. Some decisions are guided by legislation, while others give us more flexibility to work closely with community.

We have provided some examples of projects where engagement is required, recommended, or not needed. They reflect what we heard from community about when their time and input are most valuable.



We must engage for:

- Planning permit applications and amendments requiring public notification (for example, new crematoriums and cemeteries)
- Planning scheme amendments and zoning (for example, environmental or heritage)
- Naming or renaming cemeteries and memorial parks or significant features
- Fee changes above CPI
- Fee setting and gazettal (for example, introduction of new products or services)
- Gender Equity Action Plan obligations
- Expressions of Interest insights to support business cases for major inventory developments (for example, mausolea)

We choose to engage for:

- Master plans
- Construction projects with potential external community impact
- Projects requiring cultural, faith-based or lived experience insight
- Events and public programming
- New product development
- On-site construction works and safety-related updates
- Potential changes to a site's operating model that could impact neighbouring properties

We typically won't engage for:

- Routine maintenance already covered by GMCT service standards
- Minor repairs or upgrades with no community impact
- Routine tree management
- Asset renewal maintenance
- Compliance-related works required by legislation
- Internal policy updates that do not affect community use or access

You can also share general feedback with GMCT at any time about our facilities, services and products through everyday contact points, including online enquiries, phone calls, visiting reception or speaking with staff on site. We are committed to listening and responding in a timely way.

The IAP2 Spectrum outlines different ways community can influence decisions. GMCT adapts this model to reflect our regulatory environment and community expectations.

Increasing impact on the decision 					
	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Public participation goal	To provide the community with clear, balanced and factual information so they understand the issue, options, opportunities and decisions.	To obtain community feedback on issues, options, and decisions.	To work directly with the community throughout the process to ensure their concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with community in each part of the process, including identifying options and preferred solutions.	To place final decision making in the hands of the community.
Promise to the community	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to your feedback, acknowledge concerns and aspirations, show how your input influenced decisions.	We will work with you, so your feedback directly shapes project options and decisions.	We will seek your advice and innovation and incorporate your recommendations to the greatest extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.
Example techniques	Web updates Fact sheets Newsletters Letter drops Events	Surveys & polls Pop-ups or drop-in sessions Online consultation platform Community Advisory Committee Events	Workshops and focus groups Project working groups Community Advisory Committee	Targeted co-design processes Consensus conferences Citizens' panels Participatory budgeting	Community-led decision panels Delegated authority models
GMCT context	The community is comfortable with Inform/Consult for routine works, maintenance and localised impacts.		The community told us they want us to use Involve/Collaborate for major plans, new cemeteries, cultural initiatives or long-term high impact projects.		Due to legislative requirements, it is unlikely for cemetery trusts to enter this space.

Figure 2 Adaptation of the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation

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Who we engage

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Every year, thousands of people visit GMCT memorial parks and cemeteries. They honour loved ones, spend time in nature, connect with culture and community, or attend events and activities.

12,500+

families supported annually through our services

21

memorial parks and cemeteries

2 million+

visitors each year

600+

hectares of land cared for



Every family, every visitor, every neighbour, and every partner is connected to a community, whether cultural, religious, social, environmental or historical. Because of this, our engagement reaches diverse and interconnected communities across Melbourne.



Our community touchpoints

- Families with loved ones in our care
- Frequent cemetery visitors
- Local residents and neighbours
- Funeral directors and stonemasons
- Palliative and aged care
- Hospitals and healthcare facilities
- Cultural and faith communities
- Volunteers, Friends Groups and historical societies
- Local Government
- Schools and community organisations
- Traditional Owners



Photographer: Nicole Reed



Photographer: Nicole Reed

During consultation, many people told us they were unaware of what GMCT does or what is happening at their local cemetery. This Framework commits us to clearer, more localised and more accessible communication.

Our memorial park network

GMCT cares for memorial parks and cemeteries across Melbourne's north, west and east, supporting diverse communities and local connections.

- Key
- GMCT Cemeteries and Memorial Parks
- ▲ GMCT Memorial Parks
 - GMCT Cemeteries
- Other Trust Cemeteries
- Southern Metropolitan Cemeteries Trust
 - Remembrance Parks Central Victoria
 - Geelong Cemetery Trust
 - Class B Cemetery

* GMCT maintains this cemetery on behalf of a Class B Trust





How we engage

04

We use a range of engagement methods to help people connect with us in ways that suit their needs.

These include online tools, face-to-face conversations, partnerships with trusted community organisations, and deeper deliberative approaches.

There is no “one size fits all”.

Each engagement requires the right mix of tools based on community needs, cultural considerations, accessibility and scale. Some methods require more time and resources, so we can plan carefully to ensure value and impact.

From consultation, we learned that people want:

Early, local and clear information

More in-depth conversations, not just one-way updates

Online options to make participation easier

Translated materials and culturally safe processes

A stronger on-site presence, such as noticeboards and staff visibility



Photographer: Suzanne Phoenix

Our core engagement methods



Community Advisory Committee (CAC)

A GMCT sub-committee of at least 10 community members from diverse backgrounds. The CAC meets quarterly and provides advice on community expectations, emerging needs and opportunities to shape service planning, policy and operations.



YourSay GMCT

Our online engagement platform, which provides project information and consultation opportunities. It collects feedback through surveys, polls and ideas forums, supporting people who prefer digital engagement.



Pop-ups and drop-in sessions

Informal opportunities for people to speak with us in busy public locations or at community events. These help us reach people who may not attend structured workshops or events within our cemeteries.



Partnerships

Collaboration with community organisations, cultural groups, Friends Groups, historical societies, grief support organisations and others to deliver shared outcomes.



Information materials such as letter drops and brochures

Letters, brochures, posters and flyers used to keep locals informed about changes, works or upcoming opportunities to participate.



Focus groups and workshops

Small facilitated sessions that support deeper conversations and help explore projects or initiatives in detail.



Events

Seasonal and themed events, such as tree planting days, Mother's/Father's Day commemorations, mausoleum openings and history or nature-based activities, that connect people to place, culture and community.



Our inclusive practice

We tailor our methods to reflect the diversity of the people and communities we serve. This includes considering:

Gender

Flexible scheduling, carer-friendly formats.

Faith

Prayer times, cultural observances, involvement of faith leaders.

Age

Accessible locations, intergenerational options, targeted communications.

CALD communities

Translated materials, interpreters, culturally safe spaces.

Accessibility

Fully accessible venues, Auslan if required, plain English communication.

LGBTQIA+

Inclusive language, recognised safe spaces, partnership with trusted networks.

First Nations

Collaboration with Registered Aboriginal Parties (RAPs), culturally respectful processes, adequate lead-times.

Social-economic disadvantage

Remuneration for participation, online options to reduce travel or cost barriers.

Neurodiversity

Sensory-aware environments, flexible participation options.



Organisational and legislative requirements

05

This Framework is guided by GMCT's internal policies, strategic plans and statutory obligations under Victorian legislation. Together, these documents outline the standards and expectations for how we engage.

- *Cemeteries and Crematoria Act 2003*
- GMCT Community Engagement Policy
- GMCT Privacy Policy
- GMCT Confidentiality Policy
- GMCT Naming Policy
- GMCT Strategic Plan 2025-2027
- GMCT Customer Strategy FY25-28
- GMCT Framework for Master Plans and Staged Precinct Development Plans



Definitions

Community

People who are connected by place, culture, identity, experience or shared interests.

Community engagement

Working with people and groups to listen, share information, build understanding and help shape decisions.

CALD (Culturally and Linguistically Diverse)

Communities made up of people from different cultural backgrounds who may speak languages other than English.

Collaborate

Working together with community to develop ideas, solutions and or recommendations.

Diverse community

A group that includes people with a wide range of backgrounds, identities, cultures, ages and experiences.

Framework

A guiding document that sets out the principles, processes and expectations for how something is done.

IAP2 (International Association of Public Participation)

A global organisation that provides best-practise guidelines for community engagement.

Inclusive

Making sure everyone can participate comfortably and safely, regardless of their background or circumstances.

LGBTQIA+

An umbrella term for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual and other diverse sexualities and gender identities.

First Nations

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, the First Peoples of Australia.

Cultural safety

An environment where people feel respected, valued and able to express their cultural identity without fear or judgment.

Stakeholders

People or groups who have an interest in, or may be affected by, GMCT's work.

Closing the loop

Sharing back what we heard and how feedback influenced the outcome.

Accessibility

Ensuring people of all abilities can participate equally and without barriers.

Consultation

Seeking feedback from community to help inform decisions.

Co-design

A process where community and an organisation partners to design solutions together from the outset.

Ways to get involved



Visit YourSay GMCT

Share your feedback on current projects and subscribe for updates at yoursay.gmct.com.au



Look for on-site notices

Posters and signs at our memorial parks promote upcoming events, activities, and opportunities to have your say.



Email us

Contact the Community Engagement team at community@gmct.com.au



Connect with us

You can find us on Facebook and LinkedIn.



Call us

Phone 1300 022 298 for general enquiries or support.



The Greater Metropolitan
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