

# DELIBERATION AND DEMOCRATIC TRUST

Measuring participant change across  
10 Victorian councils

**November 2021**

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# INTRODUCTION

Over the past 18 months, Victorian councils have been elevating their community engagement practices to incorporate key democratic principles and offer higher levels of influence in their communities.

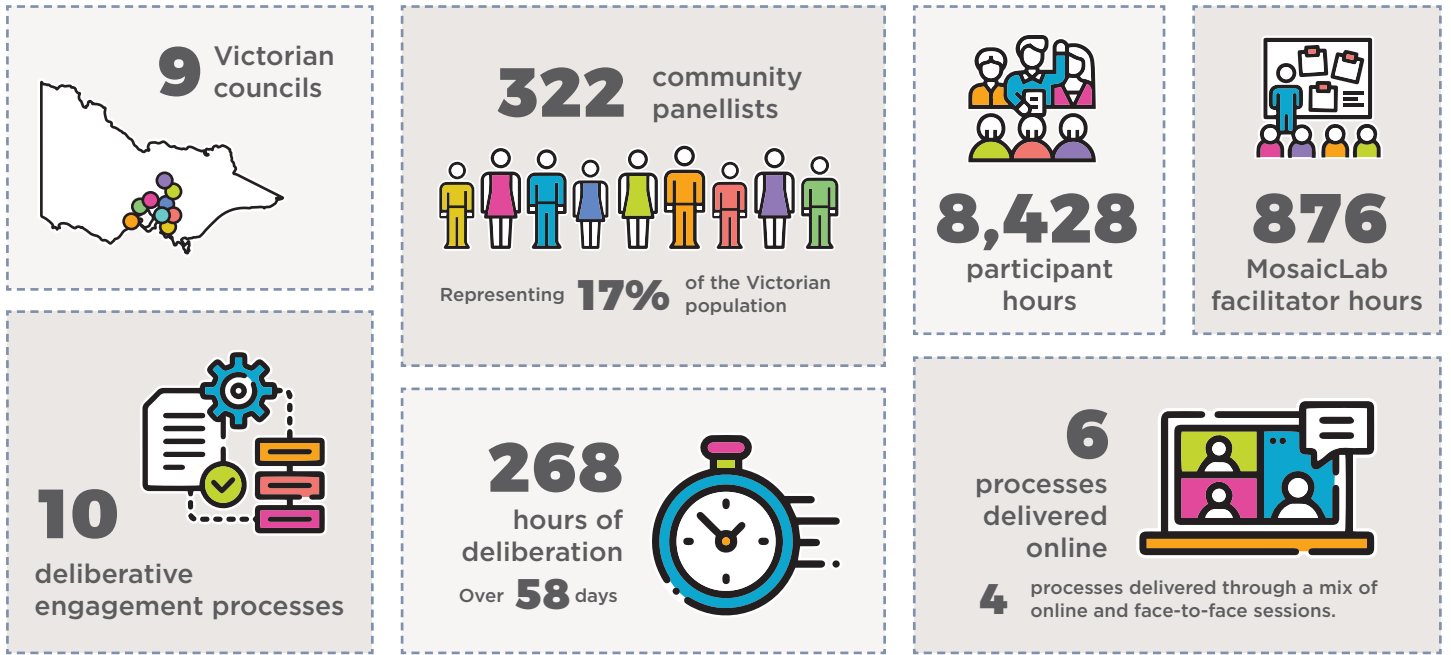
The new [Local Government Act](#), adopted in March 2020, requires councils to undertake quality community engagement based on a set of key democratic principles. [Deliberative engagement](#) practices are now required in the development of a number of key plans, including Community Visions, Council Plans, Finance Plans and Asset Plans.

MosaicLab specialises in designing and facilitating deliberative democracy processes. Over the last two years we have worked with nine Victorian councils, supporting them to plan and deliver 10 deliberative engagement processes. These organisations provide services to 17% of Victoria's population.

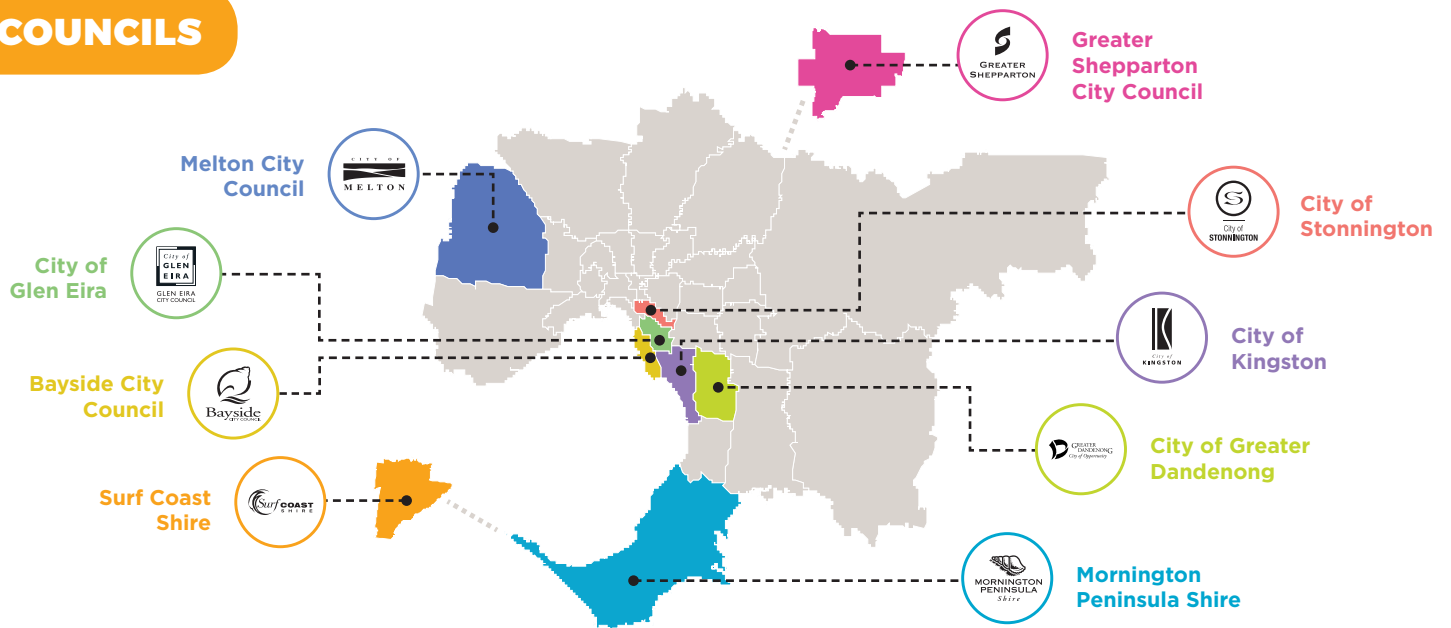
MosaicLab measured participant attitudes at the start and end of each process. This report details the findings of this research. These findings are consistent with widely-held beliefs around the positive impact of deliberative engagement. They show that these processes significantly increase trust in democratic institutions, build supported decisions, encourage involvement in civic affairs and offer everyday people real influence over the issues that affect them.



## FAST FACTS



## COUNCILS



The 10 deliberative processes occurred within nine Local Government Areas, representing organisations that provide services to 17% of Victoria's population.

## THE OUTPUTS



# SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

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## PARTICIPANT CHANGE

Pre-deliberation and post-deliberation survey response comparison.



### 68%

**INCREASE** in the number of participants who said they would be involved or highly involved in civic affairs.

(Compared to the number of participants in the pre-deliberation survey who said they had been 'involved' or 'highly involved' in civic affairs in the past.)



### 44%

**INCREASE** in the number of participants who said they felt confident or very confident that their recommendations would influence decision making.

(Compared to the number of participants in the pre-deliberation survey who said were 'confident' or 'very confident' that community input would influence their council in the past.)



### 22%

**INCREASE** in the number of participants who said they felt confident or very confident that their recommendations would be implemented.

(Compared to the number of participants in the pre-deliberation survey who said they had been 'confident' or 'very confident' that their recommendations on the current issue would be implemented.)



### 36%

**INCREASE** in the number of participants who said they believe their council is fairly or very trustworthy and accountable.

(Compared to the number of participants in the pre-deliberation survey who said they believed the council was 'fairly' or 'very trustworthy and accountable.)



### 61%

**INCREASE** in the number of participants who said they believed the process was fairly or very collaborative, genuine and worthwhile.

(Compared to the number of participants in the pre-deliberation survey who said they believed past engagement activities run by the council had been 'fairly' or 'very' collaborative, genuine and worthwhile.)

# ABOUT MOSAICLAB

*We bring conversation and democracy alive*

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MosaicLab is an industry-leading team of facilitators and engagement practitioners specialising in **high-influence and deliberative engagement**. We work with a broad range of organisations across Australia and beyond, including the government, community, not-for-profit and private sectors.

We deliver best practice, fit-for-purpose engagement processes of all sizes and work across **online, face-to-face and hybrid** formats. Our work enables people from all walks of life to have informed discussions, consider diverse perspectives, identify new solutions and contribute to **trusted decisions** that 'stick'.

*Since 2014, we've designed and facilitated 37 deliberative engagement processes covering a wide range of public policy issues.*



As **deliberative engagement specialists**, we are committed to:

- strengthening deliberative practice in Australia and internationally
- building innovation and evidence-based advancements into deliberative processes
- building the capacity of others to embed deliberative practice into decision-making.

We integrate **research** and **evidence-based innovations** into our practice and bring thousands of hours of collective experience into every process. This includes our award-winning research (conducted with Dr. Lyn Carson) into the application of critical thinking skills in deliberative contexts.

We're about **people, principles and process over profit**. We bring independence to every project, and work to standards and principles across the fields of facilitation, community engagement and deliberative democracy.

MosaicLab believes in **learning, sharing and continuous improvement**. We reinvest in the field we love through:

- research, advocacy and pro-bono work
- regularly exploring best practice by connecting with industry leaders across the world
- publishing a wide range of free resources that aim to help others to enhance their engagement practice.



# ABOUT DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY

## Deliberative engagement in practice

Deliberative engagement involves a group of randomly selected people that come together as representatives of the broader community generally chosen by age, gender and location to weigh up issues of a complex nature and come up with recommendations that go to decision makers.

## Deliberation means:

*'A long and careful consideration or discussion.'*

When used with the term 'democracy', deliberation is about placing people closer to the affairs of government - at the centre of the issue or decision that affects them.



Deliberation done right is **powerful**. It can lead to new solutions for the most challenging problems we face (sometimes known as 'wicked' problems), improve policy outcomes and engender trust between citizens and government.

These processes build **shared responsibility**, meaning that outcomes are more likely to 'stick'. They are less adversarial than many traditional engagement approaches, and can result in number of long-term, **transformative** benefits for both organisations and participants.

Deliberative processes are built around a number of key principles, including:



The group responds to a **clear remit** - a plain English question that goes to the heart of the dilemma being shared.



Participants are given the time they need to **deliberate**, which allows them to consider complex information, grapple with trade-offs and impacts and weigh up options and ideas.



Participants will have access to the **information** they need to have an in-depth conversation and information will be neutral, balanced and from a range of different sources.



The deliberative group is given a high level of **influence** over outcomes or decisions.



The process is **representative**. Participants are selected randomly via a stratified selection process.



The group starts with a **'blank page' report** - detailing their own thinking and developing their recommendations 'from scratch'.

Deliberative processes are varied in nature, and can come in a number of forms, including community panels and citizens' juries.

Read MosaicLab's full [guide to deliberative democracy](#).

# METHOD

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## PARTICIPANT SURVEYS

MosaicLab conducted participant surveys across 10 deliberative processes throughout 2020 and 2021. A total of 314 participants responded to the surveys. Each process involved community members identifying and prioritising issues in their municipality to guide council actions with a community vision, set of recommendations, or both. Participants were provided a range of information including input from subject-matter experts and in-depth background materials.

### Participants were asked to complete the surveys at two points throughout each process:

- When the project commenced, at the beginning of their first panel session
- When the process was completed, after participants had finalised their report and presented it to decision makers.

### Respondents were asked questions relating to four key areas:











- Participants' level of involvement in civic affairs
- Participants' level of confidence that their recommendations will influence or be implemented by their representative council
- Participants' views of the trustworthiness and accountability of their local council
- Participants' view of how collaborative and genuine the engagement process has been.



An additional deliberative process, the City of Whittlesea Participatory Budgeting Panel, also took place in this time period, but survey results were not recorded. Deliberative processes were conducted in person, online or a combination of these two approaches. The survey response rates for each of the 10 deliberative processes are as follows. Respondents were asked the same five questions across each of these processes.



## ENGAGEMENT PROCESSES INCLUDED

DELIBERATIVE PROCESS		PRE-DELIBERATION SURVEY RESPONDENTS	POST-DELIBERATION SURVEY RESPONDENTS
	<b>BAYSIDE CITY COUNCIL</b> Panel for the development of a Community Vision 2020	25	16
	<b>BAYSIDE CITY COUNCIL</b> Panel for the development of a Council Plan 2021	29	20
	<b>CITY OF GLEN EIRA</b> Panel for the development of a Community Vision 2020	30	25
	<b>CITY OF KINGSTON</b> Panel for the development of a Community Vision 2021	36	26
	<b>CITY OF STONNINGTON</b> Panel for the development of a Community Vision 2021	33	17
	<b>GREATER DANDENONG COUNCIL</b> Panel for the development of a Community Vision and Council Plan 2021	31	23
	<b>GREATER SHEPPARTON CITY COUNCIL</b> Panel for the development of a Community Vision and Council Plan 2021	27	20
	<b>MELTON CITY COUNCIL</b> Panel for the development of a Community Vision and Council Plan 2021	39	29
	<b>MORNINGTON PENINSULA SHIRE</b> Panel for the development of a Community Vision 2021	33	21
	<b>SURF COAST SHIRE</b> Panel for the development of a Community Vision 2021	31	10
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>314</b>	<b>207</b>

## RESPONSE RATES

MosaicLab recorded 511 total survey responses. This included 314 pre-deliberation survey responses and 207 post-deliberation responses. Survey response numbers were consistently higher in pre-deliberation surveys than in post-deliberation surveys.

Drop-off in response rates is a common issue with two-part surveys and is accounted for in our analysis. A drop in numbers can also be attributed to unavoidable and unforeseen issues such as health, work commitments and bereavements throughout the deliberative process. Ongoing complications with the COVID-19 pandemic also meant that some processes moved from a face-to-face format to an online forum mid-process with short notice, which may have contributed.



## ABOUT THE PARTICIPANTS

Panellists across all processes were selected by an independent recruitment specialist using a random, stratified selection process. Each recruitment process was designed to achieve a broad cross-section of participants from diverse backgrounds and a final panel that was descriptively representative of the wider community being represented.

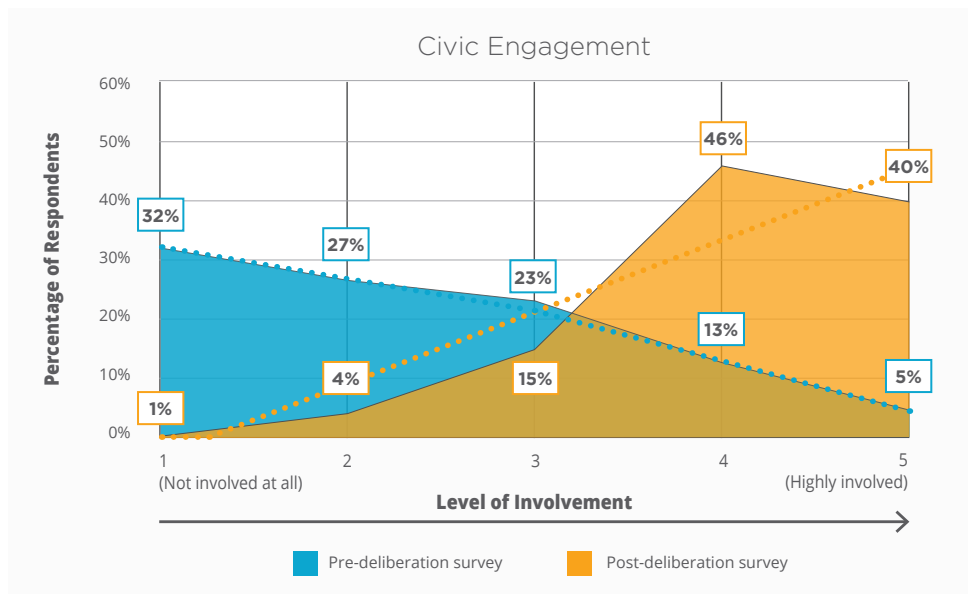
**See Appendix 1 (page 18) – Participant overview from all 10 processes.**



# FINDINGS

## 1 INVOLVEMENT IN CIVIC AFFAIRS

The number of participants likely to be 'Involved (4)' or 'Highly involved (5)' in civic affairs **increased by 68%**<sup>1</sup>



<b>PRE-DELIBERATION QUESTION</b>	How involved are you currently in government decisions that affect you?
<b>POST-DELIBERATION QUESTION</b>	Now you have had this experience, how involved will you be when it comes to government decisions that affect you?
<b>SCALE/MEASURE</b>	1 = Not involved at all 5 = Highly involved

Prior to taking part in the deliberative process, nearly 60% (59%) of participants had 'Never (1)' or 'Very rarely (2)' been involved in civic affairs, with nearly one-third of respondents (32%) noting that they were 'Not involved at all (1)' in civic engagement. Following their participation in the deliberative process, however, just 1% of respondents (1 survey response) noted that they did 'Not plan to engage (1)' in civic affairs in the future.

Post-deliberation survey results suggest that taking part in deliberative processes energises participants politically, making them far more likely to become engaged in future political processes. The number of respondents that noted they would become 'Involved (4)' or 'Highly involved (5)' in civic affairs grew from 18% to 86% - a nearly five-fold increase of 68%.

<sup>1</sup> Compared to the number of participants in the pre-deliberation survey who said they had been 'involved' or 'highly involved' in civic affairs in the past.

*"I've enjoyed getting to have input into what's to come... we have been charged with bringing the vision and the outcomes for the next 10 years, [and] it's exciting knowing that we're contributing to what Greater Shepparton will look like in the next 10 years and beyond."*

**Panellist, Greater Shepparton City Council Community Vision and Council Plan 2021**

### **Spotlight:** City of Glen Eira Community Vision Panel 2020

#### **PRE-DELIBERATION**

Involvement in civic activities was recorded as low amongst respondents of the Glen Eira Panel prior to deliberation, with 56% of respondents noting that they had 'Little (2)' or 'No (1)' involvement in government decisions. Just 21% of respondents were 'Involved (4)' or 'Highly involved (5)', with just one respondent recording a (5).

#### **POST-DELIBERATION**

Following the deliberation process, the number of respondents that felt they would be 'Involved (4)' or 'Highly involved (5)' in civic affairs jumped to 96%, with no respondents recording a (1) or (2).

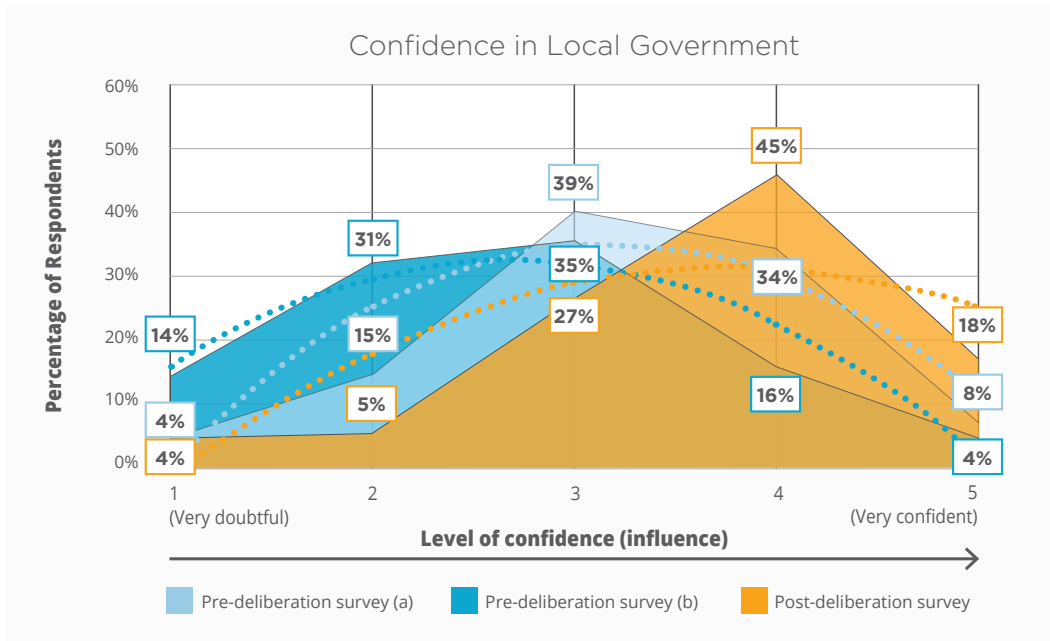


*"Today we took a great leap forward, I believe. I'm looking forward to seeing how the high-level work that we've done will be exemplified in concrete actions."*

**Panellist, City of Glen Eira Community Vision 2020**



The number of participants who said they felt 'Confident' (4) or 'Very confident (5) that their recommendations would influence decision making **increased by 44%**<sup>2</sup>



<b>PRE-DELIBERATION QUESTIONS</b>	a)	In the past, how confident have you been that community input will influence this organisation's decisions?
	b)	How confident are you that your recommendations on this current issue will be implemented?
<b>POST-DELIBERATION QUESTION</b>		How confident are you that your report/recommendations on this issue will be implemented?
<b>SCALE/MEASURE</b>		1 = Very doubtful 5 = Very confident

Responses to the pre-deliberation survey indicated that many participants hadn't felt confident about community influence in decision-making in the past. Only 20% of participants (responding to pre-deliberation question part a) had felt 'Confident (4)' or 'Very confident (5)' in the past that community input would influence their council's decisions.

Additionally, only 42% of participants (responding to pre-deliberation question part b) felt 'Confident (4)' or 'Very confident (5)' that their recommendations on the current issue would be implemented.

Confidence levels increased following participation in the deliberative process. In the post-deliberation survey, 64% of respondents indicated they were 'Confident (4)' or 'Very confident (5)' that their report or recommendations would be implemented.

<sup>2</sup> Compared to the number of participants in the pre-deliberation survey who said were 'confident' or 'very confident' that community input would influence their council in the past.



*"I think it's really good that the council have moved to solicit community opinion, and if today is any indication of how [the process] is going to work, I think it's going to work quite well. I think council will then have a voice to listen to – independent of community groups and developer voices they already hear."*

**Panellist, Surf Coast Shire Community Vision Panel 2021**



**Spotlight:** Mornington Peninsula Shire Community Vision Panel 2021

**PRE-DELIBERATION**

Before the deliberative process, only one respondent said they had felt 'Confident (4)' or 'Very confident (5)' in the past that community input would influence the Mornington Peninsula Shire's decisions. Just over a third of respondents said they were 'Confident (4)' or 'Very confident (5)' that their recommendations on the issue they were addressing would be implemented.

**POST-DELIBERATION**

Following engagement in the deliberative process, 80% of participants felt 'Confident (4)' or 'Very confident (5)' that their recommendations would be implemented.



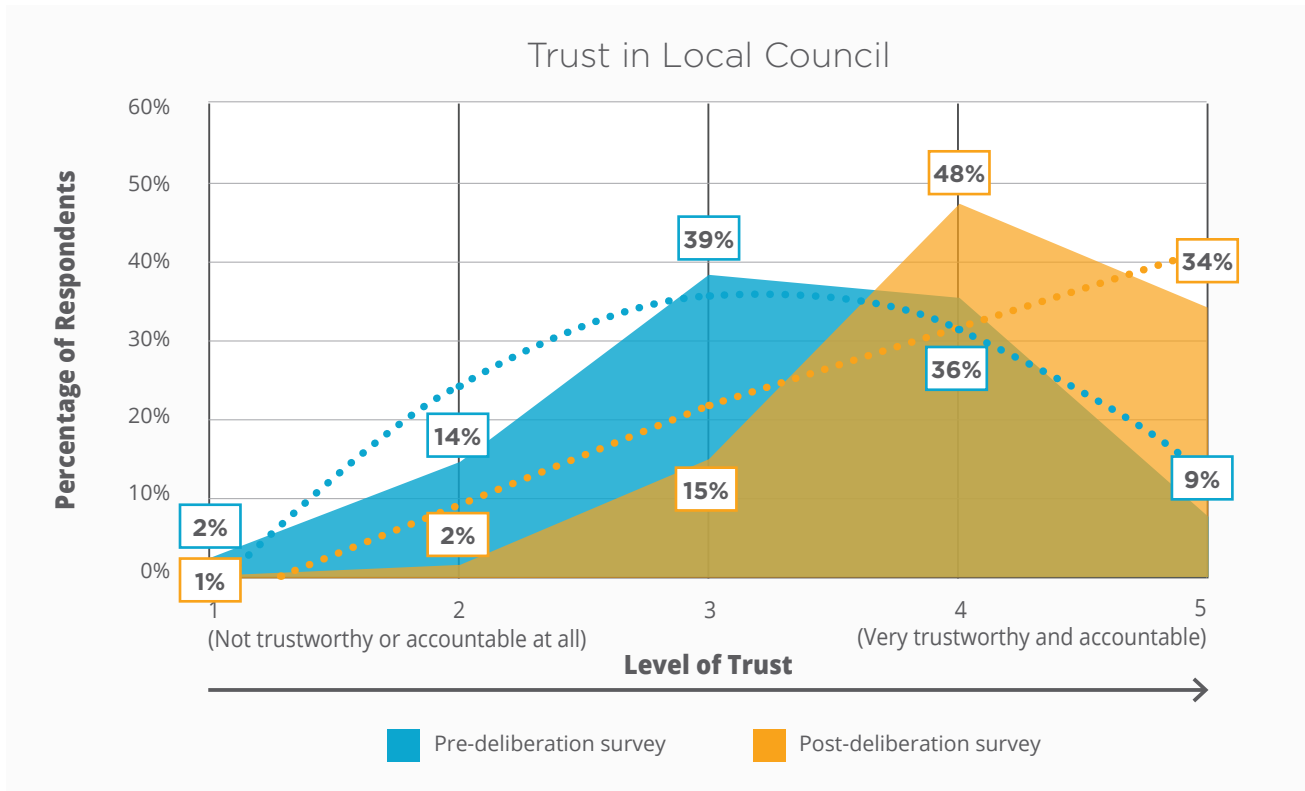
*"I genuinely believe that we've crafted a vision and set of principles that reflect the community's priorities and their values."*

**Panellist, Mornington Peninsula Shire Community Vision Panel 2021**

### 3

## TRUST IN LOCAL COUNCIL

The number of participants who said they believe their council was 'Fairly' (4) or 'Very' (5) trustworthy and accountable, **increased by 36%**<sup>3</sup>



<b>PRE-DELIBERATION QUESTION</b>	In your view, how accountable and trustworthy do you think the sponsoring organisation is?
<b>POST-DELIBERATION QUESTION</b>	How accountable or trustworthy do you think the sponsoring organisation is now you have been through this process?
<b>SCALE/MEASURE</b>	1 = Not trustworthy or accountable at all 5 = Very trustworthy and accountable

At the beginning of the deliberative process, 17% of respondents had 'Little (2)' or 'No (1)' confidence in the trustworthiness and accountability of their local council. Following engagement in the deliberative process, 80% of participants felt 'Confident (4)' or 'Very confident (5)' that their recommendations would be implemented.

Participants reported a significant increase in the trust in their local council at the end of the deliberative process. The number of respondents that had a 'High (4)' or 'Very high (5)' degree of trust in their local council almost doubled throughout the deliberation process, jumping from 46% to 82%.

<sup>3</sup> Compared to the number of participants in the pre-deliberation survey who said they believed the council was 'fairly' or 'very trustworthy and accountable'.



### Spotlight: Mornington Peninsula Shire Community Vision Panel 2021

The number of respondents who rated the Mornington Peninsula Shire as 'Trustworthy and accountable (4)' or 'Very trustworthy and accountable (5)' increased from 33% prior to deliberation to 100% post deliberation.



*"This [experience] has given me greater faith that we are going to come up with a good vision that will be applicable to the city of Glen Eira. I believe we're going to achieve it. I think it's going to be worthwhile to everybody in the community. I'm looking forward to seeing how the high-level work that we've done will be exemplified in concrete actions."*

**Panellist, City of Glen Eira Community Vision Panel 2021**

### Spotlight: City of Kingston Community Vision Panel 2021

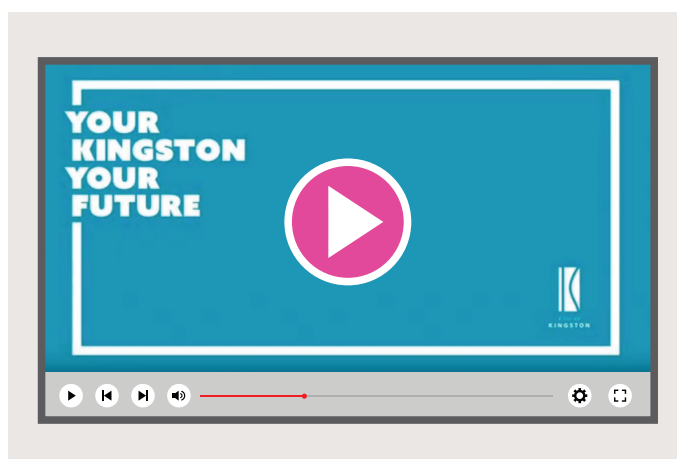
The City of Kingston Panel saw a 46% increase in the number of respondents rating their local Council as 'Trustworthy and accountable (4)' or 'Very trustworthy and accountable (5)'.

No post-deliberation respondents said the council was 'Not trustworthy or accountable at all (1)' or 'Rarely trustworthy and accountable (2)'.

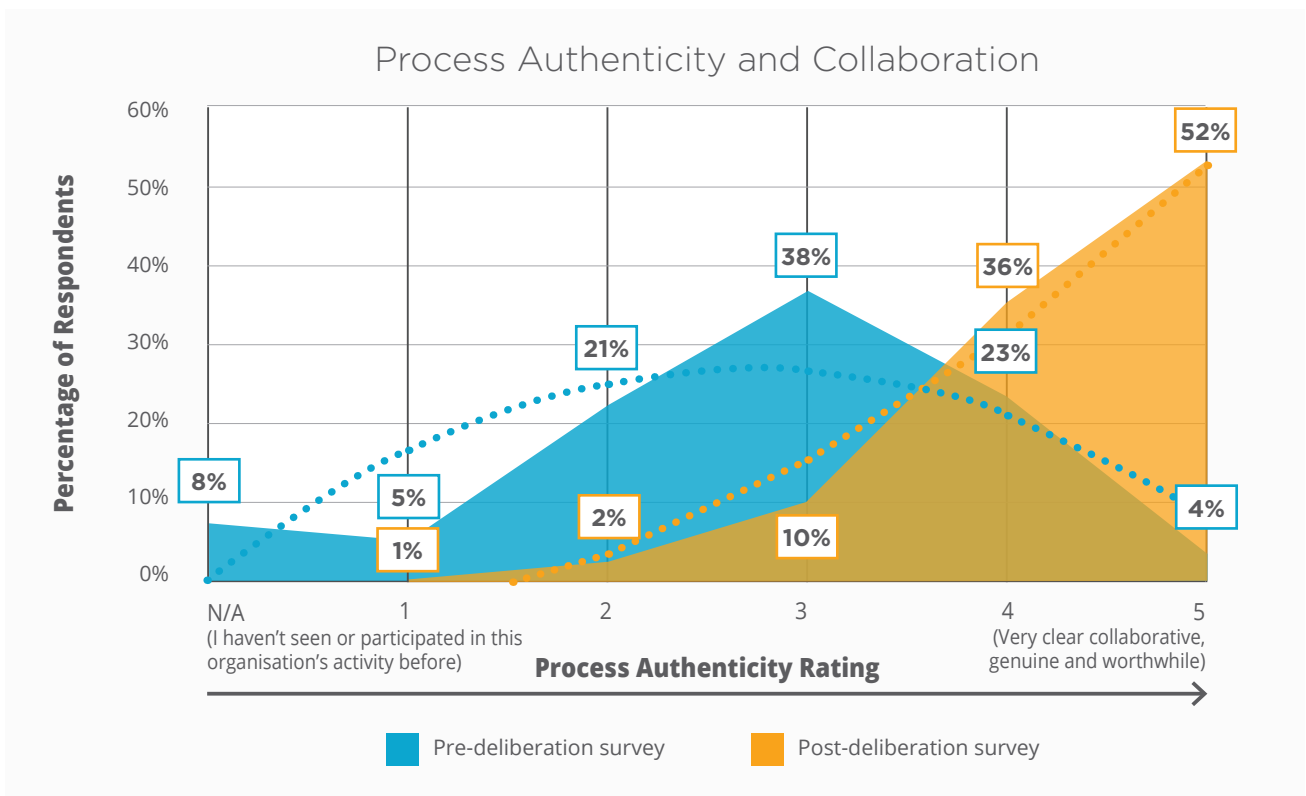


*"We're all thankful for what we can provide to the community, and we're all thankful for the opportunity to do this sort of thing."*

**Panellist, City of Kingston Community Vision Panel 2021**



The number of participants that felt the process was 'Fairly (4)' or 'Very (5)' collaborative, genuine and worthwhile (compared to past processes run by the sponsoring organisation) **increased by 61%**<sup>4</sup>



<b>PRE-DELIBERATION QUESTION</b>	In your view, how collaborative, genuine or worthwhile have the sponsoring organisations' past engagement activities been?
<b>POST-DELIBERATION QUESTION</b>	How collaborative, genuine and worthwhile do you feel this process has been?
<b>SCALE/MEASURE</b>	1 = Not collaborative, genuine and worthwhile at all 5 = Very collaborative, genuine and worthwhile

The majority (88%) of respondents indicated in the post-deliberation survey that they felt the deliberative engagement process they participated in was either 'Fairly (4)' or 'Very (5)' collaborative, genuine and worthwhile.

In the pre-deliberation survey, only 27% of participants said that they felt the organisation's past engagement processes had been 'Fairly (4)' or 'Very (5)' collaborative, genuine and worthwhile.

<sup>4</sup> Compared to the number of participants in the pre-deliberation survey who said they believed past engagement activities run by the council had been 'fairly' or 'very' collaborative, genuine and worthwhile.

*"This process is impressive in itself. We're actually participating in real democracy."*

**Panellist,  
Mornington  
Peninsula Shire  
Community Vision  
Panel 2021**



**Spotlight:** Greater Shepparton City Council  
Community Vision and Council Plan Panel 2021

**PRE-DELIBERATION**

Prior to deliberation, just over a quarter (26%) of participants in the Greater Shepparton City Council process believed that past processes run by the council were 'Fairly' (4) collaborative, genuine and worthwhile. None of the respondents selected 'Very' (5) collaborative, genuine and worthwhile.

**POST-DELIBERATION**

Following deliberation, 84% of respondents said the engagement process was either 'Fairly' (4) collaborative, genuine and worthwhile or 'Very' (5) collaborative, genuine and worthwhile.

*"There's a real diversity in the group we've got, and it's really nice hearing the different views and bringing it together into something that I hope is going to be really meaningful."*

**Panellist, Greater Shepparton City Council Community Vision  
and Council Plan Panel 2021**



# CONCLUSION

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The Local Government Act 2020 has had a significant impact on the planning processes of Victorian councils and this, in turn, has impacted on Victorian communities.

MosaicLab believes in the power of deliberative engagement done right. Civic engagement, confidence in local governments, trust in local councils and belief in democratic processes are all enhanced as a result of high-influence engagement that meets important deliberative principles.

As Australian's struggle with decreasing trust in democratic and political institutions, we need to advocate for democracy done differently. MosaicLab is privileged to work with organisations seeking to transform the way they make decisions; and equally honoured to work with a diverse range of participants who invest their time to contribute to these processes. Participants tell us firsthand that these experiences are transformative and impactful. This research is serving to strengthen and add to this body of anecdotal evidence and quantify the value of deliberative processes.

MosaicLab exists to bring conversation and democracy alive. We are dedicated to leading where deliberative engagement is going and inspiring transformative change in the way decisions are made. Our intention is to continue to work with others to build a body of evidence around the work we do and build our practice on our research and learnings. We are committed to sharing our knowledge and building the capacity of others to embed deliberative practice into decision making.



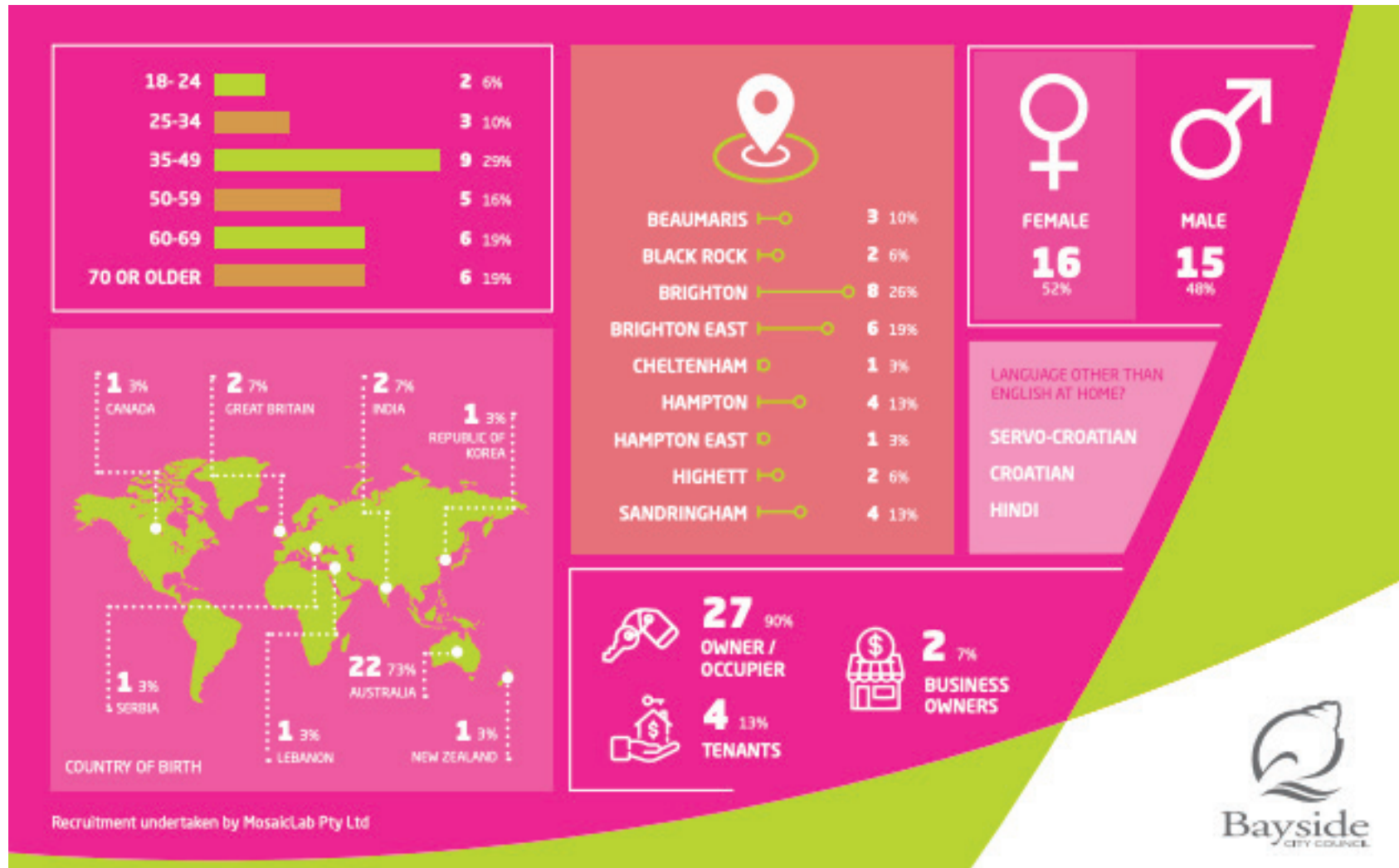


# APPENDIX 1



## BAYSIDE CITY COUNCIL

Panel for the development of a Community Vision 2020





# BAYSIDE CITY COUNCIL

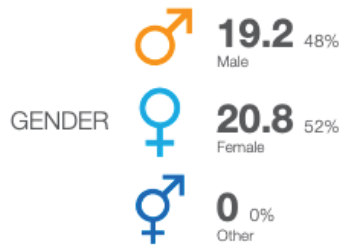
Panel for the development of a Council Plan 2021

TARGET

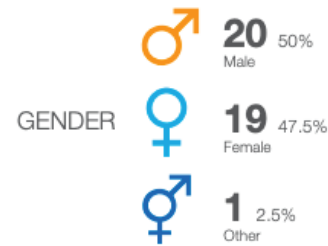
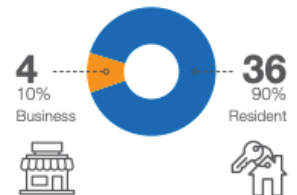
40 attendees

SELECTED / CONFIRMED

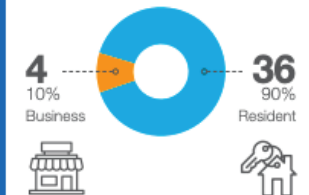
40 attendees



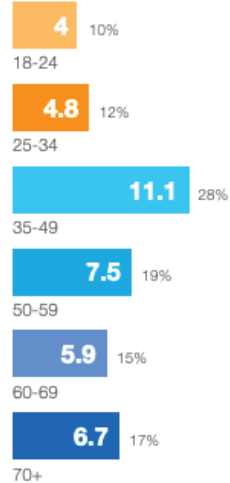
BUSINESS OR RESIDENT



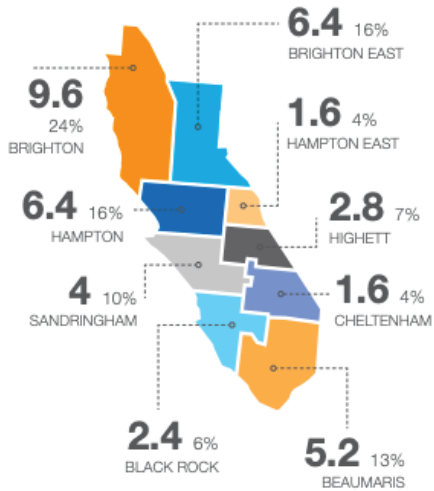
BUSINESS OR RESIDENT



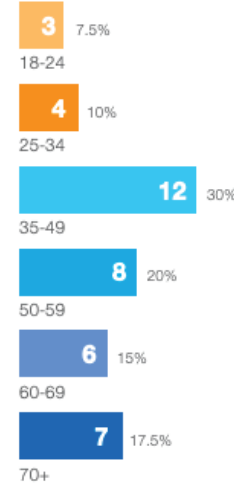
AGE



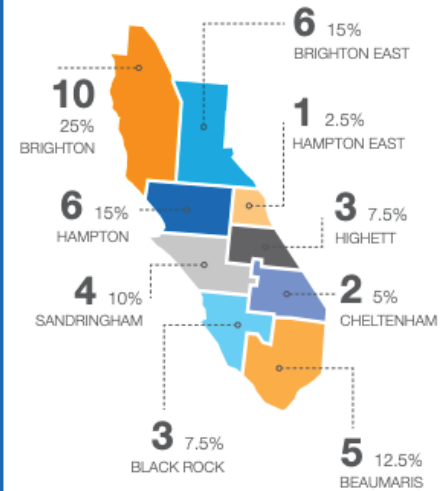
GEOGRAPHY



AGE



GEOGRAPHY





# CITY OF GLEN EIRA

Panel for the development of a Community Vision 2020

## What's your vision for Glen Eira?



The Glen Eira Community Vision Deliberative Citizens' Panel was selected to form a cross-section of the community.







# CITY OF KINGSTON

Panel for the development of a Community Vision 2021

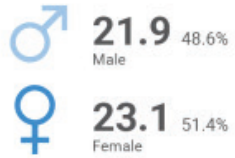
## TARGET

**45**  
attendees

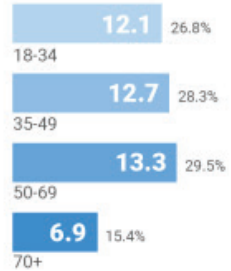
## SELECTED / CONFIRMED

**45**  
attendees

### GENDER



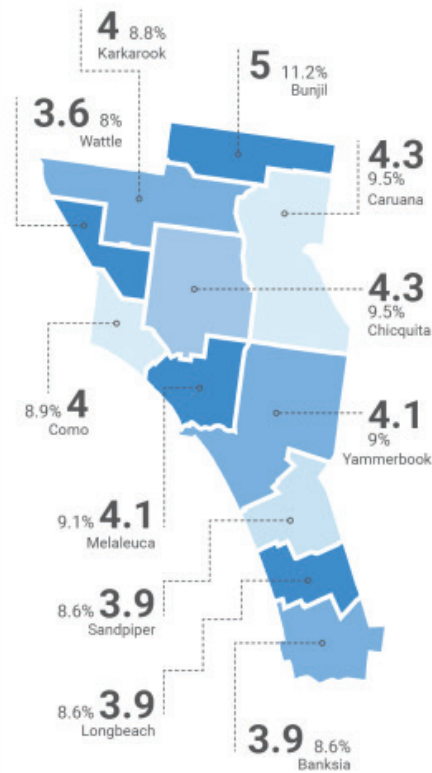
### AGE



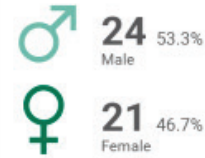
### BUSINESS / RESIDENTIAL



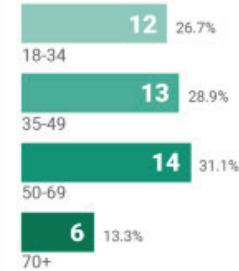
### LOCATION (by Ward)



### GENDER



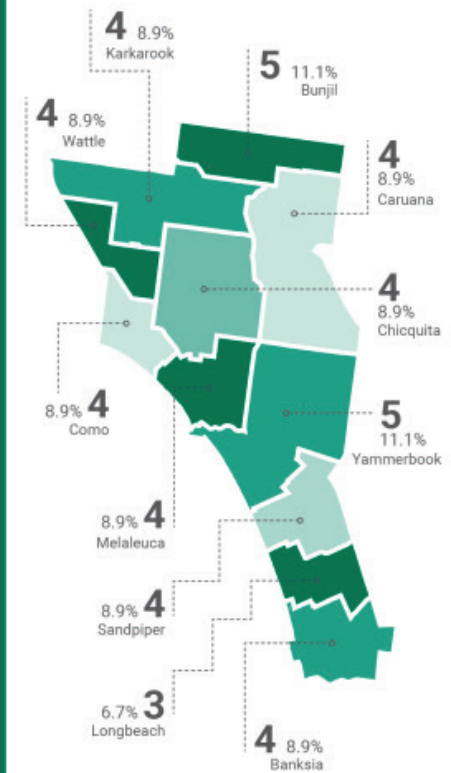
### AGE



### BUSINESS / RESIDENTIAL



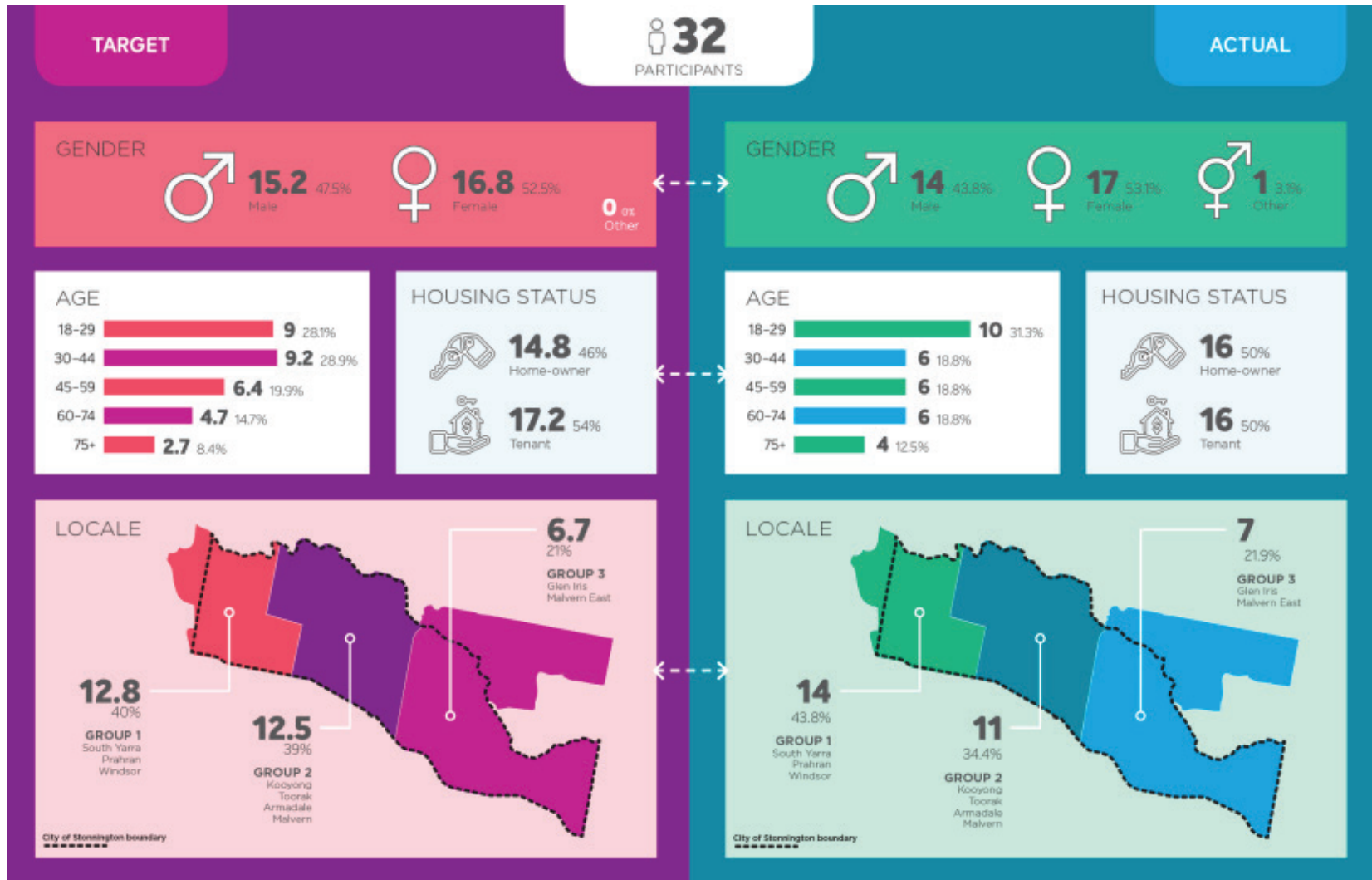
### LOCATION (by Ward)





# CITY OF STONNINGTON

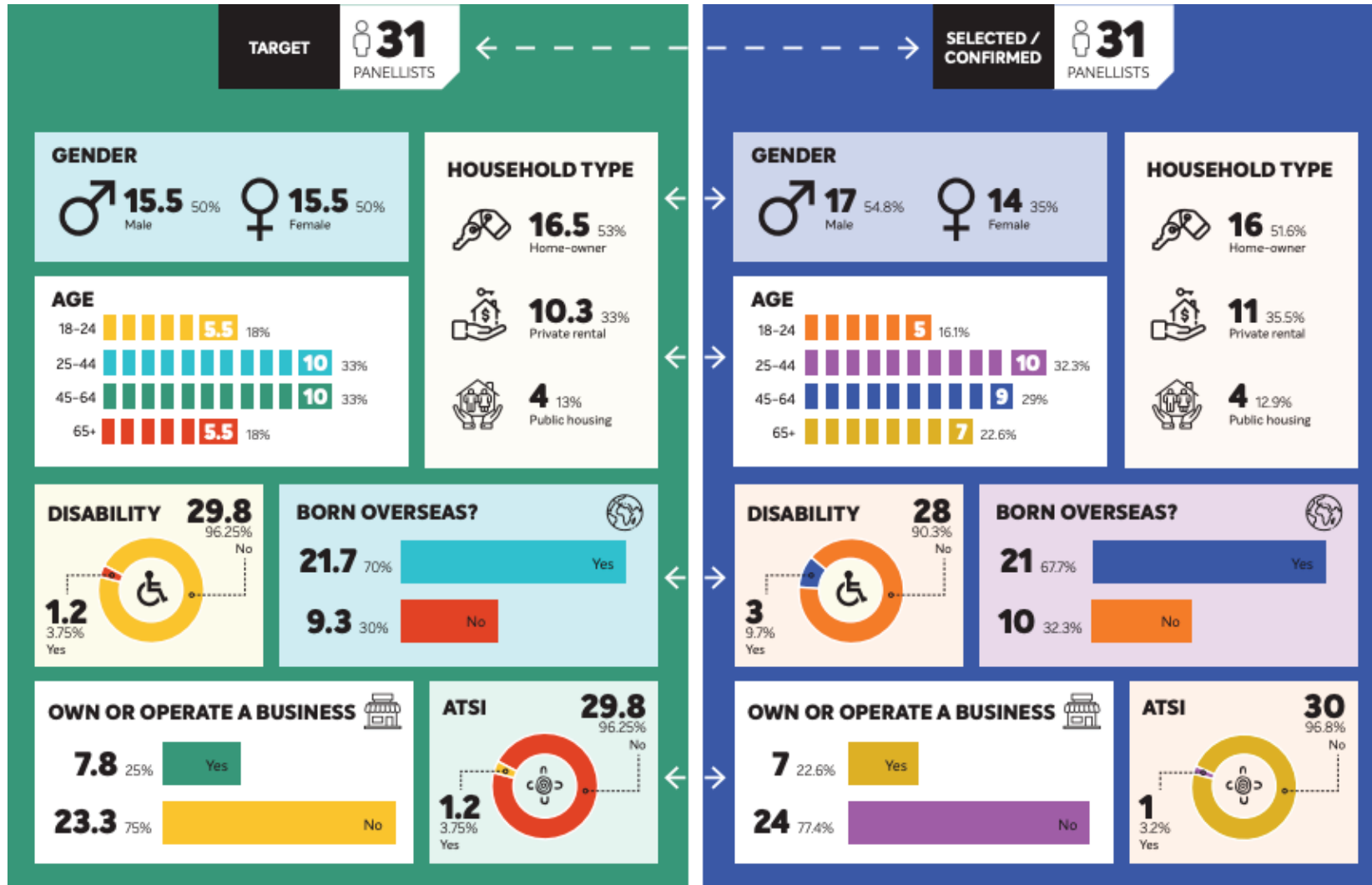
Panel for the development of a Community Vision 2021





# GREATER DANDENONG COUNCIL

Panel for the development of a Community Vision and Council Plan 2021





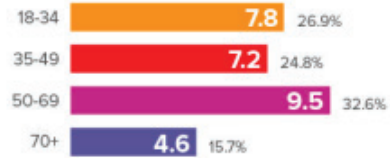
# GREATER SHEPPARTON CITY COUNCIL

Panel for the development of a Community Vision and Council Plan 2021

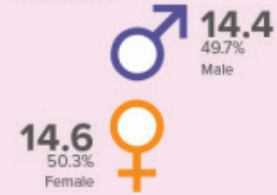
**29**  
ATTENDEES

## CENSUS

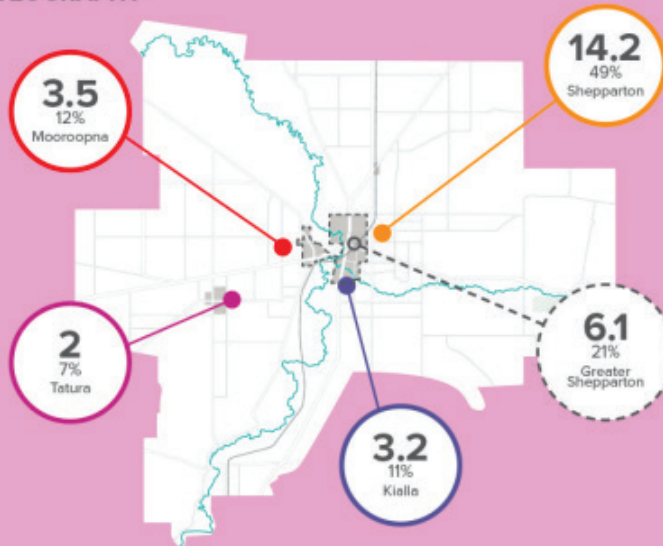
### AGE



### GENDER

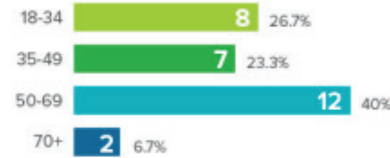


### GEOGRAPHY

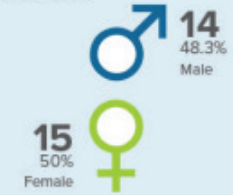


## SELECTED / CONFIRMED

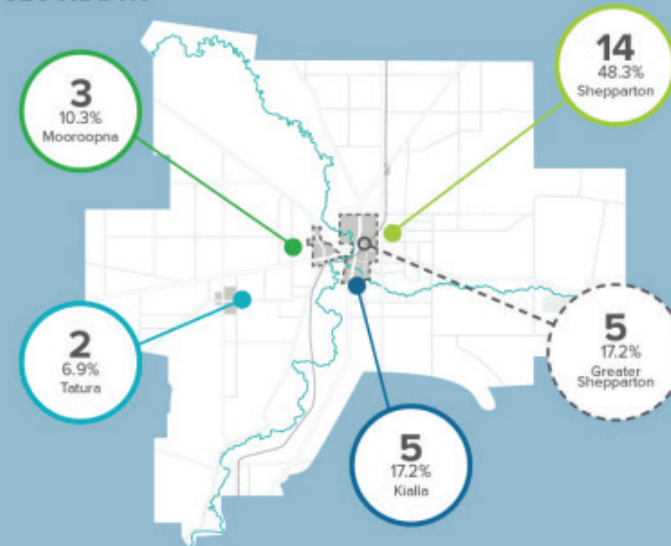
### AGE



### GENDER



### GEOGRAPHY





# MELTON CITY COUNCIL

Panel for the development of a Community Vision and Council Plan 2021

The Melton Community Panel was randomly selected to form a representative sample of the community



Recruitment and stratification undertaken by Deliberately Engaging





# MORNINGTON PENINSULA SHIRE

Panel for the development of a Community Vision 2021

TARGET

**36**  
ATTENDEES

SELECTED/  
CONFIRMED

**36**  
ATTENDEES

GENDER



**17.28** 48%  
Male



**18.72** 52%  
Female

GENDER

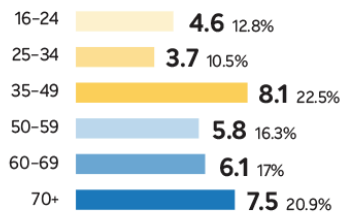


**17** 39.5%  
Male



**19** 52.8%  
Female

AGE



TENURE

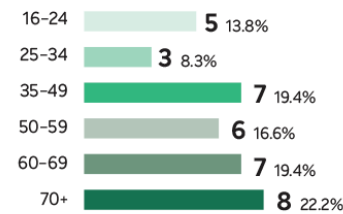


**27** 75%  
Home Owner



**9** 25%  
Renter or other tenure

AGE



TENURE

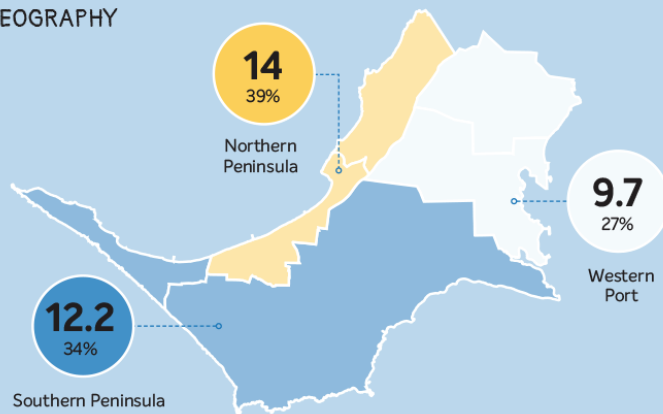


**26** 72.2%  
Home Owner

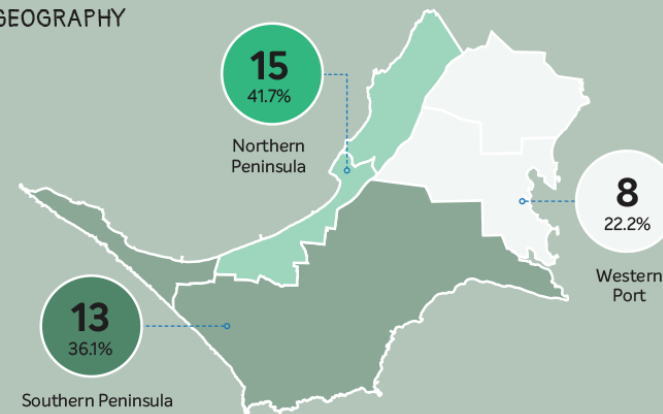


**10** 27.8%  
Renter or other tenure

GEOGRAPHY



GEOGRAPHY



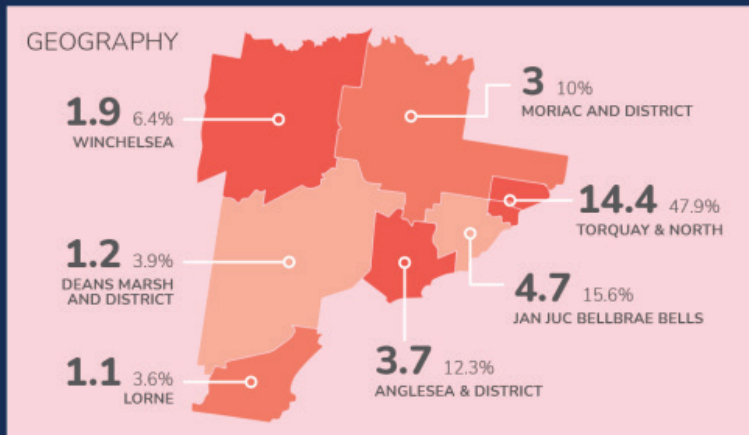
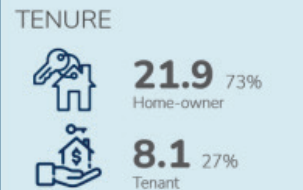
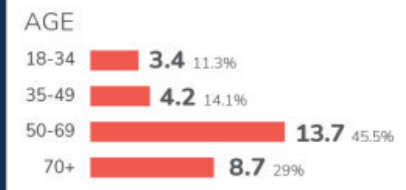
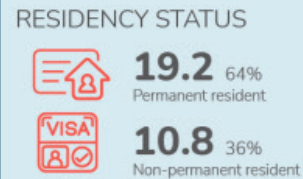
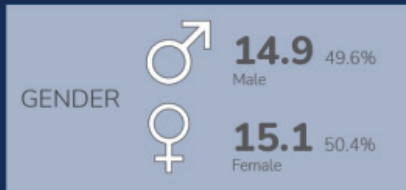


# SURF COAST SHIRE

Panel for the development of a Community Vision 2021

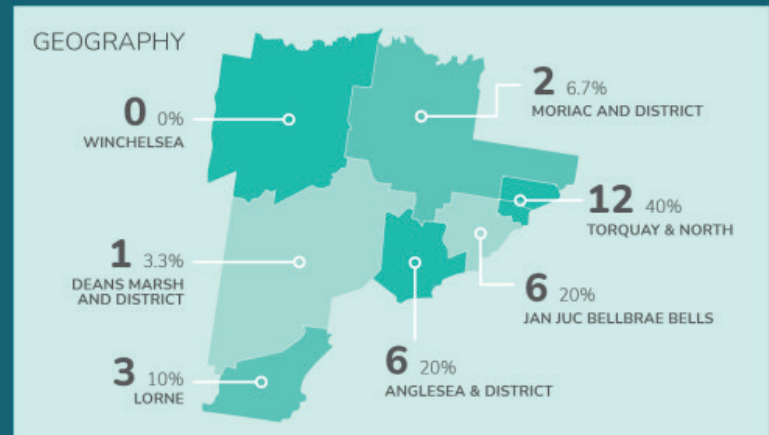
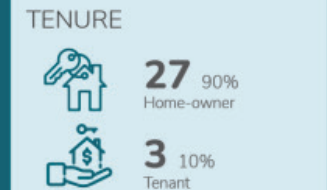
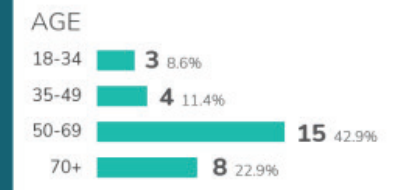
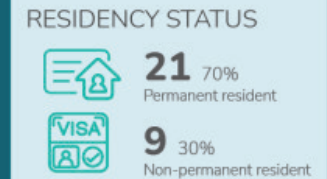
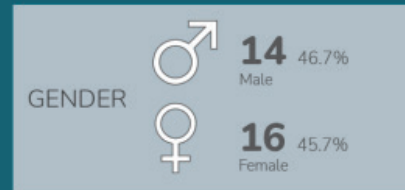
## CENSUS

**30**  
attendees



## CONFIRMED

**30**  
attendees







mosaicLAB

43 Panoramic Road,  
North Balwyn VIC 3104

[info@mosaiclab.com.au](mailto:info@mosaiclab.com.au)

[www.mosaiclab.com.au](http://www.mosaiclab.com.au)