



2028 Preparedness: Deliberative Engagement for Victorian Local Governments

SUMMARY REPORT

2 SEPTEMBER 2025

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About the forum

Part debrief and part planning, the 2028 Preparedness Forum brought together practitioners, councillors and experts in deliberative engagement to share what worked, what didn't, and what Victorian local governments can do differently next time.

CONTRIBUTORS INCLUDED:

- **Max Hardy** from Max Hardy Consulting
- **Dr Nivek Thompson** from Deliberately Engaging
- **Mollie Rashleigh** from Capire Consulting Group
- **Pauline Gordon** from Campaspe Shire Council
- **Shawn Neilsen** from Banyule City Council
- **Clare Murrell** from City of Melbourne
- **Ann Selby** from City of Casey
- **Alex Leamy** from Glen Eira City Council.



What worked – replicable success factors



Secure political ownership early.

Upfront briefings and co-authored remits built councillor confidence that deliberation complements representative decision-making.



Write a remit an everyday person can answer.

Clear, bounded questions improved confidence and quality. When topics proved too broad, mid-process 'knowledge sessions' restored traction.



Plan a long runway with milestones.

Early starts avoided election crunches; rapid induction of new councillors ensured continuity when sessions spanned election periods.



Layer engagement before, during and after.

Broader engagement framed context, strengthened legitimacy, and supported visible 'you said / we did / because' reporting.



Design inclusion in from the start.

Interpreters, translations, low-sensory spaces, stipends, travel and childcare widened participation and safety.



Embed the organisation at the table.

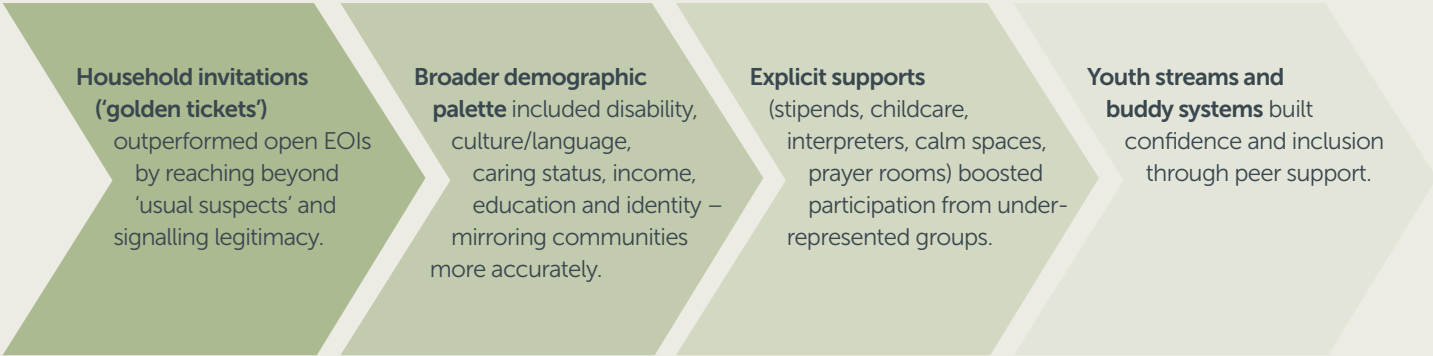
Cross-functional staff (including finance, assets, youth, communications, strategy) acted as subject-matter hosts, speeding translation of recommendations into plans and budgets.

Challenges and how teams resolved them



CHALLENGE		RESOLUTION
 Election timing and trust	→	Split sessions across election; document process rigour; induct new councillors quickly using briefings and video summaries.
 Remit overload	→	Added compact, participant-requested briefings to rebalance knowledge and restore momentum.
 Representativeness and conflicts	→	Clear recruitment and conflict rules protected legitimacy without disruption.
 Community fatigue and cynicism	→	Transparent trade-offs, consistent ‘closing the loop’, and reusing panel members in future projects signalled continuity.

Recruitment: building a true mini-public



Practice shifts that have become ‘standard’



Accessibility is default.

Councils normalised translation tools, low-sensory spaces, interpreters and accessible digital platforms.



Consensus processes are routine.

Structured facilitation helped diverse groups move from values > options > shared recommendations.



Evidence-informed engagement is expected.

Participants sought data packs and plain-English evidence spines, not just presentations.

Tactics you can adopt immediately



Co-design the remit with decision-makers and publish the scope and intended use.



Stand up a cross-organisational team early – assign SMEs to tables as explainers and note-takers, not just presenters.



Schedule short, on-demand 'knowledge sessions' to address panel questions on finance, assets, prioritisation and wellbeing.



Offer multiple safe entry points with targeted dialogues and visible supports.



Close the loop repeatedly and publicly through rolling 'you said / we did / because' updates.

Preparing for 2028 – readiness checklist

1

Map the tricky judgements.

Identify 3–5 key decisions where a mini-public adds most value (e.g. renewal vs new assets, rate design, climate resilience trade-offs).

2

Bank the runway.

Reserve calendar windows across 2027–28 for staged engagement with buffers for elections and approvals.

3

Invest in the recruitment playbook.

Budget for invitations, stipends and supports; pre-agree eligibility and conflict rules; update demographic targets.

4

Build the internal community of practice.

Train staff in accessibility, plain-language briefing and table roles; rehearse on smaller projects.

5

Measure what matters.

Capture trust and efficacy baselines, record participant stories on video, and use them to inspire next-round participation.

Acknowledgements

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This summary has been prepared using AI-assisted drafting with human editorial oversight to ensure accuracy.



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