



Panel Recommendations to Council for

the preparation of the Dog Off-Leash Guidelines

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# Introduction

This report shares the final advice from the Community Panel that was established to develop Principles that will underpin the Dog Off-Leash Guidelines.

## About the project

In 2021, during consultation on Council's *Places for People: Public Space Strategy 2022 - 2032*, the community expressed interest in more dog off-leash areas and considered that there is a lack of these across the City. Conversely, a portion of community respondents also noted that there are too many dog off-leash areas and wanted restrictions on use of public spaces.

There was strong community support to ensure there are adequate numbers of dog off-leash areas available to residents across the municipality. A portion of the community respondents requested that some spaces be kept free of dog off-leash areas, or allocate hours when dogs are required to be on-leash to ensure safe, uninhibited access to public spaces.

Additionally, the *Domestic Animal Management Plan 2022- 2025* included actions and recommendations regarding off-leash areas, proposed restrictions and provision of new fenced off-leash areas.

In response, Council committed to preparing the Dog Off-Leash Guidelines (DOLG), which will provide Council with clear direction on the provision, distribution, design and management of dog off-leash areas in public open spaces.



Council wanted to work collaboratively with the community to develop the DOLG that responded well to community need. A deliberative process involving a community panel was therefore used. The deliberative engagement process represents Phase 2 of the DOLG engagement program, which includes:

**PHASE 1**  
(completed)

Open community engagement on how parks and beaches can be shared with dogs

**PHASE 2**  
(this report)

Targeted engagement through a Deliberative Panel to develop the Principles for the DOLG

**PHASE 3**  
(future stage)

Open community engagement on the draft DOLG

# About the deliberative process

## What is deliberation?

Deliberative engagement is an engagement process that enables individuals to work through issues and explore potential solutions together to reach a shared recommendation. It is used to resolve a complex topic where there are diverse, and/or conflicting views and opinions about the best way to proceed.

Community members are appointed to sit on a Community Panel. Panel members are provided with information from various sources and supported by facilitators to build their knowledge through discussions, workshops and access to the experts in the field.

At the end of the process, through consensus the Community Panel is required to make decisions and formulate solutions to the defined project question 'task'. This differs from other engagement processes where Council typically considers the information and makes decisions on behalf of its community. The outcomes of the panel are then presented to Council for consideration.

Use of a deliberative engagement process was legislated under the *Local Government Act 2020* and must be used in the development of Council's Community Vision, Council Plan and Financial Plan. Use of this process outside of these core areas is guided by the *City of Port Phillip's Community Engagement Policy 2021*.

Use of a deliberative process means the Community Panel is:



Independently recruited to ensure there is a cross-section of the community represented.



Supported through the use of facilitators to discuss the issues, challenges, and opportunities in-depth.



Provided with input from the broader community to consider alongside expert advice and information.



Supported to formulate solutions and/or make decisions.



## Using deliberation to support development of the DOLG

Provision of dog off-leash areas is a topic with two clear and opposing views. For some, provision of these areas is considered to be lacking, while for others there are too many dog off-leash areas. For the majority, as expressed through Phase 1 engagement, their views are somewhere in between.

### DIVERSITY OF VIEWS



Dogs should be prohibited from key parks and gardens and areas along the foreshore.



Dogs have a role in our community and bring joy to their owners, however their behaviour should be managed to minimise disruption to the broader community.



Dogs should be permitted in all parks and gardens, and along all parts of the foreshore across all times and days of the year.

Use of a deliberative process was determined the best approach by Council to co-design the Principles and statements that would form the basis of the DOLG. **The task set for the Community Panel was to workshop and recommend Principles that will underpin the DOLG.**

Council's community engagement approach and Policy is based on the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) Public Participation Spectrum. The Spectrum outlines different levels of participation, each level provides a 'promise' to the community about how the outcomes of the engagement will shape Council's decision making. The public participation goal for this project was

**Collaborate, To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.**

To assist this deliberative process, Council made the following commitments to the Community Panel:



Share accurate, timely and plain language information.



Listen to what the panel says and record all feedback.



Consider all panel recommendations.



Report back to the panel on the outcome of the recommendations.



Acknowledge any changes to recommendations and why they were not taken onboard.

# Recruitment process

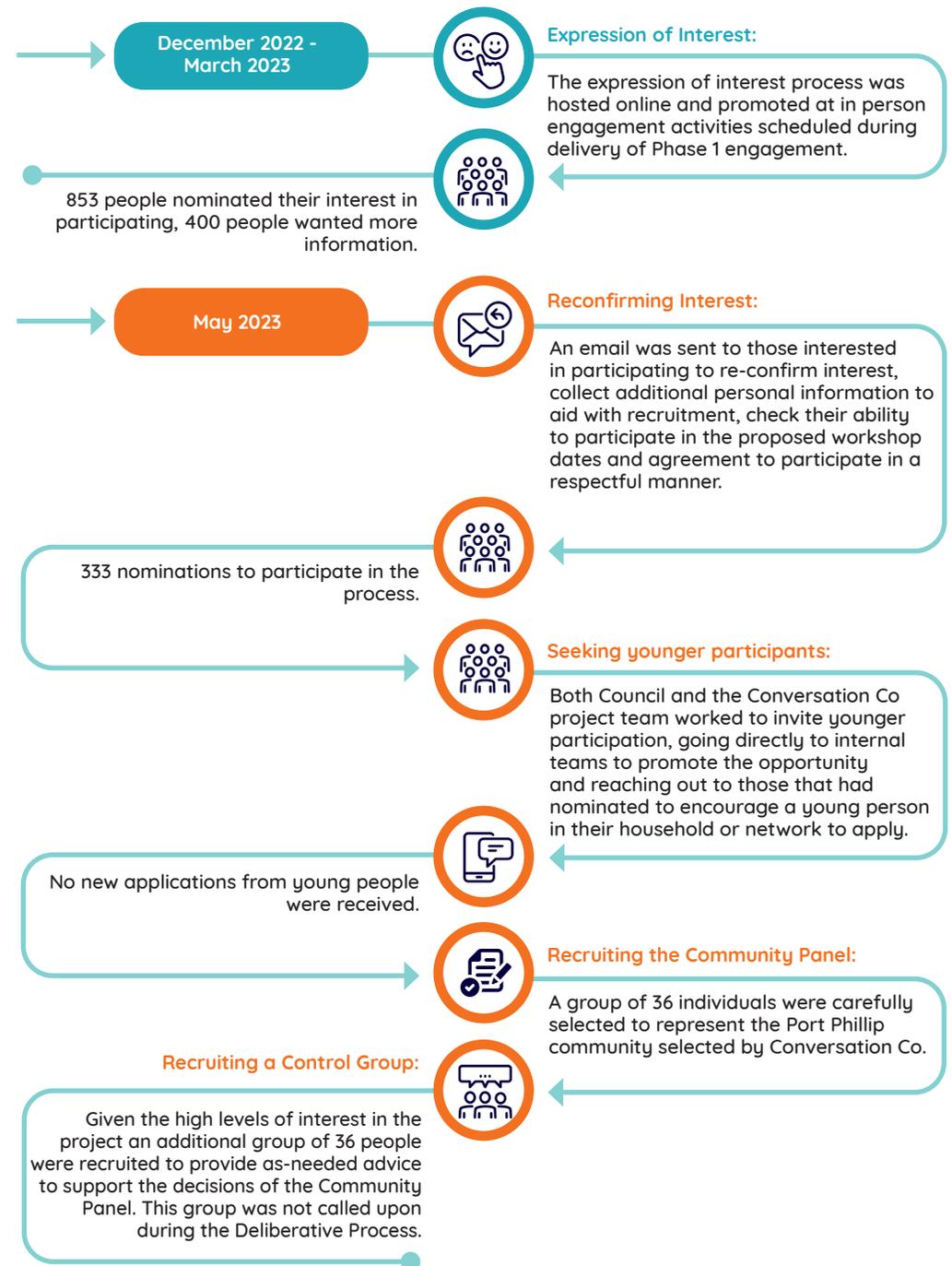
Participation in the Community Panel was open to all residents and ratepayers of the City of Port Phillip via an expression of interest process. Registration was promoted online and at in person events during Phase 1 engagement.

Members were selected to represent the demographic makeup of the municipality (gender, age, dog ownership status, interest, place of birth and suburb of residence). One non-resident/ratepayer was recruited to the Community Panel for their experience as a commercial dog walker and trainer, operating within the City of Port Phillip and using the parks, gardens and foreshore spaces. Appendix 1 shows the recruitment target and actuals recruited to the project.



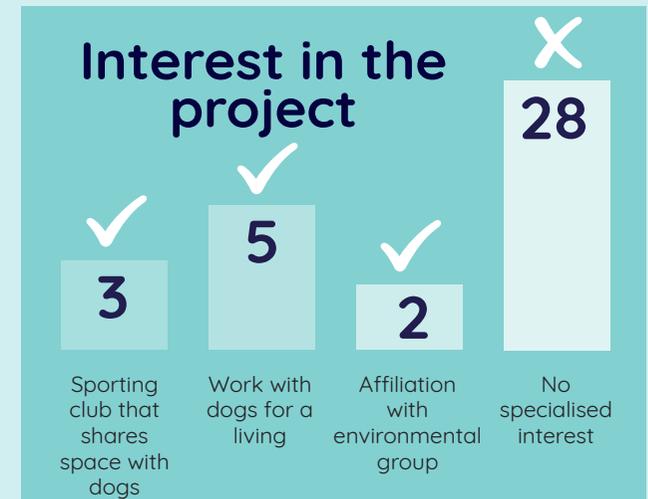
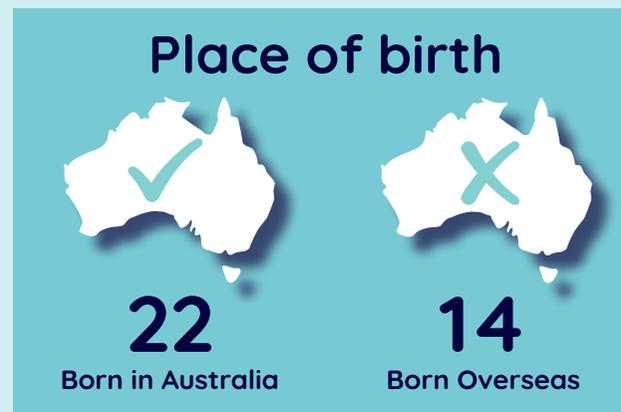
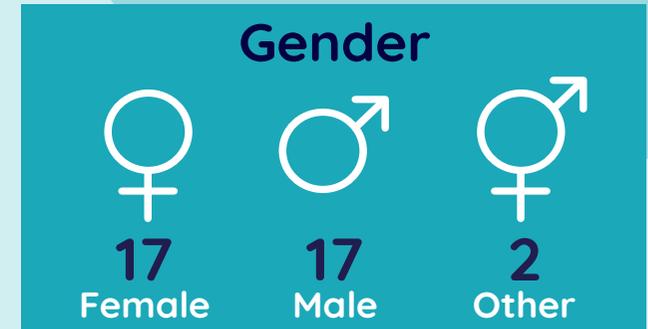
6. City of Port Phillip, Dog Off-Leash Guidelines Panel Recommendations

## TIMELINE OF RECRUITMENT



## Figure 1: Demographic profile of the Community Panel

The demographic makeup of the Community Panel. All recruitment targets were met apart from young people aged 18 to 25.

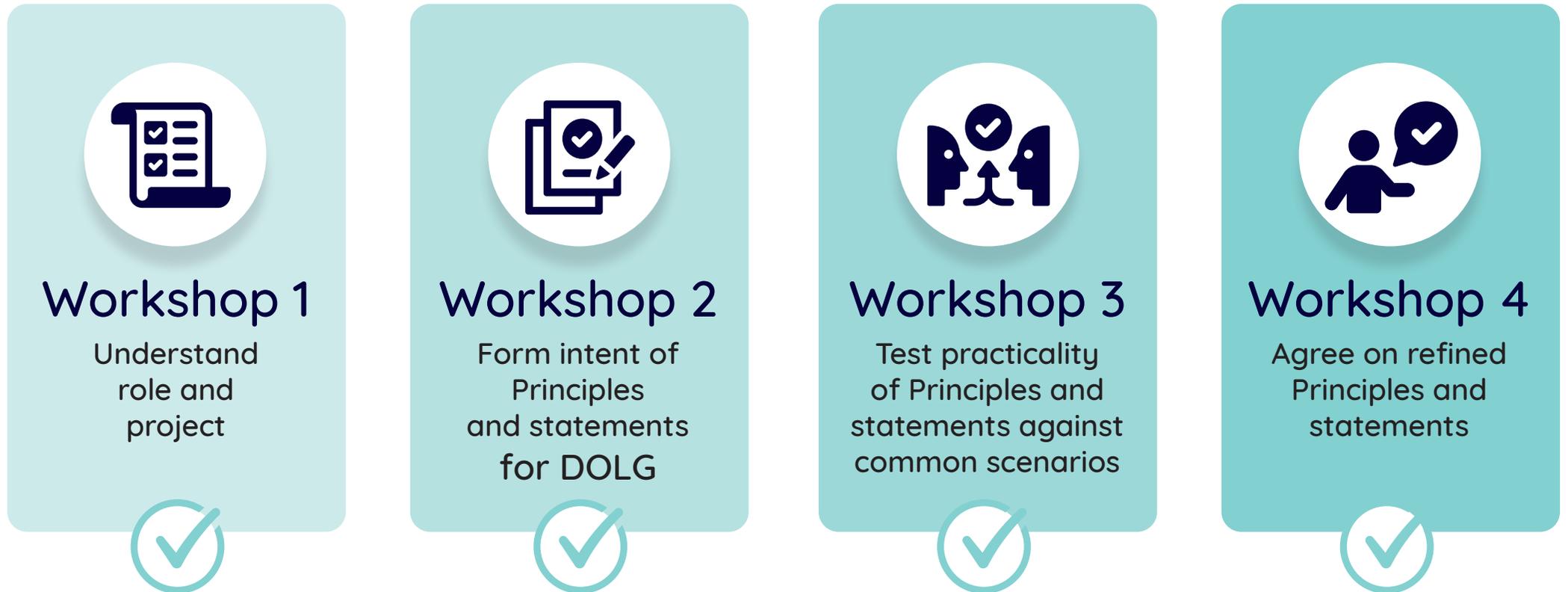


# Process of deliberating

The Community Panel met four times over June and July 2023 to discuss and share ideas based on a wide selection of information, including research, results of broader engagement program, as well as presentations from Council officers and a subject matter expert.

The panel process was iterative, meaning each session was built on the previous session's content and outcomes. In between sessions the panel was invited to review materials, provide feedback or vote on options.

Following is more detail about the workshop process.



When	Purpose	Information provided	Outcome
 <p><b>Workshop 1</b> Monday 19 June 2023, 6.30 pm to 8:30 pm Online - Mayoral welcome</p>	<p>Participants were introduced to the purpose and objectives of the deliberative process and their role as a Panel Member.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Panel handbook</li> <li>• Community engagement summary report detail and summary</li> <li>• Background report</li> </ul>	<p>This session set the groundwork for informed discussions in subsequent workshops.</p>
 <p><b>Workshop 2</b> Sunday 25 June 2023, 9.30 am to 12.30 pm In person</p>	<p>Detailed look at the themed data to help the panel to form draft Principles and statements in response to community needs and interests.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Draft Principles for reshaping.</li> <li>• Requested information from Workshop 1.</li> </ul>	<p>The panel drafted five draft Principles that reflected the community's values. Future speakers and additional information required was identified by the panel to help understand perspectives.</p>
 <p><b>Workshop 3</b> Saturday 15 July, 2023, 9.30 am to 12.30 pm In person, Councillors in attendance (morning tea)</p>	<p>Testing the Principles developed in Workshop 2 against requests that are commonly received by Council as scenarios. The aim of the scenarios was to demonstrate and evaluate the practicality and effectiveness of the Principles.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reworked draft Principles and statements in line with panel feedback.</li> <li>• Requested information from Workshop 2.</li> <li>• Scenarios and information to support understanding (maps, data and imagery).</li> <li>• Guest speaker Lesley Humphreys from Paws4Play, an expert on dog off-leash areas and dog parks within open spaces.</li> <li>• Personas of other park users, their needs and aspirations for open space use.</li> </ul>	<p>The panel provided feedback on each principle and statement, assessing the practicality and effectiveness of the Principles.</p>
 <p><b>Workshop 4</b> Tuesday 25 July, 2023, 6.30 pm to 8.30 pm Online</p>	<p>Finalise the Principles, statements and final advice to Council for consideration as part of development of the DOLG.</p>	<p>Prior to the final workshop, panel members were sent a survey to complete to review the draft Principles with the feedback from workshop 3 incorporated. The aim was to achieve over 60% consensus on each principle, resulting in the Principles being accepted by the panel.</p>	<p>The panel agreed on the Principles and statements. They also provided ideas for Council to consider as part of the development of the DOLG.</p>

# Community Panel support

Participation in the panel process was supported through:

- **Training on online tools:** Panel members were offered additional support using the online meeting tools Zoom and were invited to attend a training session.
- **Dedicated online webpage:** Panel members had access to a dedicated project page hosted through City of Port Phillip's engagement portal Have Your Say. This allowed panel members to ask questions in between meetings and the project team with an opportunity to provide additional information.
- **Dedicated information Folder:** Panel members had access to a folder that contained all of the necessary information to undertake their role and participate in panel discussions.
- **Member reminders:** Reminder messages were sent to panel members prior to each key event, such as meetings or surveys.
- **Materials sent out in advance:** Reading materials were provided to panel members in advance of meetings. Materials were printed and left at Council's Customer Service Centre for easy collection.

- **Meeting absence grace:** Participants were able to miss up to two workshops and still remain in the group, under the instruction that they needed to make up the homework and reading.
- **Support for parents:** Support to participate while nursing a child.

Appendix 2 lists the information provided to Community Panel Members.



# Community Panel attendance and withdrawal

Throughout the panel process, we noticed a small decline in attendance. Some decline is expected during any engagement process, hence the reason for over recruiting in the beginning. From the first meeting to the last, we saw three people withdraw. In other deliberative projects this number can be as high as 10 for a similarly sized commitment and sized group. Two participants withdrew from the process prior to Workshop 1, one citing work commitments and the other concerned with the validity of the process. One participant withdrew prior to Workshop 2 as they were concerned about meeting in person, as their partner had a recent health diagnosis which compromised her immune system.

Across the course of the program, other panel members cited illness or other priorities for not being able to attend a specific workshop. In such instances, apologies were submitted prior. Table 2 shows the number of attendees at each meeting.

**Table 2:**  
Number of Attendees at DOLG Community Panel Workshops

Date and Time	Time	Attendance
Monday 19 June 2023 6.30 pm to 8:30 pm	Online	30* (N34)
Sunday 25 June 9.30 am to 12.30 pm	In person	28^ (N33)
Saturday 15 July 9.30 am to 12.30 pm	In person	27 (N33)
Tuesday 25 July 6.30 pm to 8.30 pm	Online	30 (N31**)

- \* Two participants withdrew from the process a day prior to Workshop 1.
- ^ One participant withdrew prior to Workshop 2 due to his wife having an illness.
- \*\* 31 participants provided feedback online on the draft Principles and statements.
- N Size of group



# Recommendations

This section shares the final advice from the Community Panel.

## Principles and statements

The Community Panel together developed five Principles and supporting statements that they recommend form the basis of the Dog Off-Leash Guidelines.

PRINCIPLE 1 Quality	PRINCIPLE 2 Safe	PRINCIPLE 3 Environment and Heritage	PRINCIPLE 4 Diverse	PRINCIPLE 5 Shared Responsibility
Council will create sustainable dog off-leash areas that offer an enriching experience, that are well designed, well managed and fit for purpose.	Council will prioritise the safety of people and dogs when planning, designing, and managing dog off-leash areas.	Council will ensure areas of historical value and current and future areas of environmental significance are not impacted by dog off-leash areas.	Council will provide a range of experiences to enhance the wellbeing of our dog community through our network of diverse public spaces.	Council will develop and deliver education, communication and enforcement programs which will promote accountability and respect between all users of dog off-leash areas.
				

Each Principle, its title, and supporting statement has been carefully developed by panel members and refined as the meetings and the work of the Panel progressed.

Following Workshop 3, panel members were offered the opportunity to vote on their level of support for the Principles and statements to ensure there was consensus. Industry standards regularly measure consensus by at least 60% agreement on a recommendation by members of a panel.

Of the 33 panel members, 31 people participated in the vote to indicate their level of support. All Principles and statements were supported by at least 60% of the panel members. Additionally, four of the Principles and related statements were supported by at least 70% of panel members.

A break-down of the level of support is provided in Appendix 3.

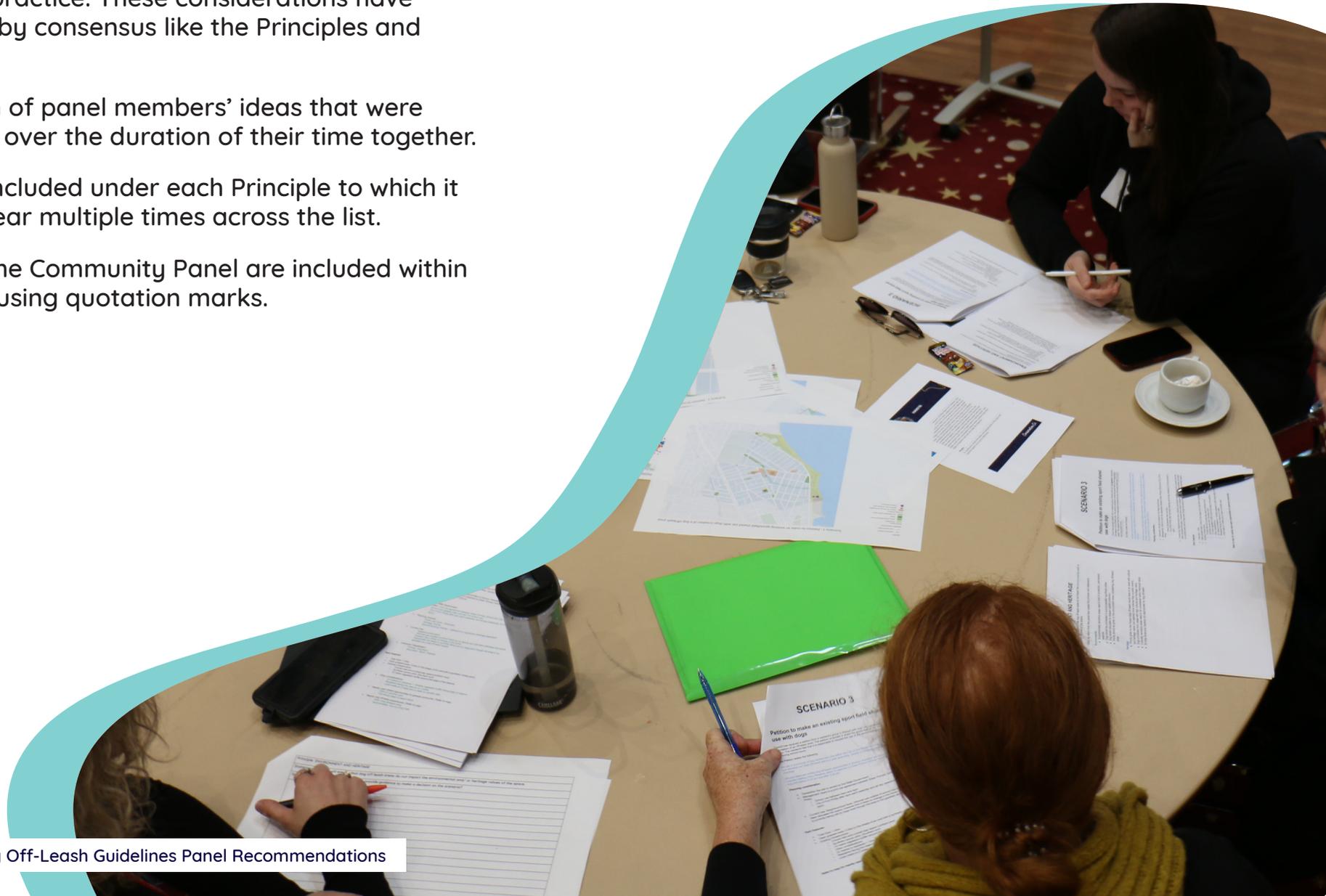
# Considerations to support the Principles

Through the process, the Community Panel identified a range of additional ideas to be considered alongside each of the Principles. These considerations have been outlined below and address a range of factors, including how the Principle might be applied in practice. These considerations have not been developed by consensus like the Principles and Statements.

They are a collection of panel members' ideas that were discussed and noted over the duration of their time together.

Considerations are included under each Principle to which it applies, so may appear multiple times across the list.

Direct quotes from the Community Panel are included within the relevant section using quotation marks.





## Principle 1: Quality

### Statement

Council will create sustainable dog off-leash areas that offer an enriching experience, that are well designed, well managed and fit for purpose.

### Considerations

The panel suggests that dog off-leash areas are **sustainable** when:

- they are designed to consider changing climate and environmental needs (e.g. Trees for nature shade and beauty)
- natural experiences are provided, such as sniffing plants and rocks, rather man-made equipment
- revenue raised from animal management activities are re-invested into dog-related infrastructure
- investment in these spaces is financially sustainable and responsible.

The panel suggests that dog off-leash areas are **well-designed** when:

- ease of maintenance is considered during the design phase
- there is ground treatment that can withstand high foot traffic

- pathways are designed effectively to encourage compliant behaviour and considerate of all users
- there are pre-defined standards set to create a quality experience for all users
- the layout aims to reduce the conflict between users and uses
- spaces are open, inviting, usable and have a range of experiences for dogs
- they create stimulation for dogs on or off-leash regardless of size (e.g. plants for sniffing, rocks to climb)
- there are experiences that add interest for other users and human companions
- there is provision of infrastructure to support demand (e.g. toilets, drinking fountains, shade, bins, path networks and signage)
- they are designed with clear sightlines, visibility and no entrapment areas
- lighting is provided, including the journey to and from the area
- the placement, style and level of information on signage is taken into consideration in order to educate users of dog off-leash areas
- ease of management and enforcement are considered in the design phase.



## Principle 1: Quality

The panel suggests that dog off-leash areas are **well-managed** when:

- there is minimal ongoing expenditure on grounds-keeping, maintenance, and refurbishment, because areas have been well designed with sustainable management in mind
- dog waste bags and bins are provided.

The panel suggest that dog off-leash areas are **fit for purpose** when:

- they are designed according to the needs of the priority user groups
- planning and design standards for dog off-leash experiences are developed and implemented that guide size of space, infrastructure and access
- there is sufficient buffer between various users and uses, including neighbouring properties
- spaces are large enough to cater for a range of activities, and decisions regarding the size are evidence-based
- spaces are planned and designed with the view to promote responsible dog ownership, such as encouraging sight lines to supervise dogs or providing larger areas to reduce conflict
- fences are used sparingly to not impact on amenity or accessibility.

“Design spaces that encourage and enable the desired usage e.g. very open spaces with minimal fencing.”

“Design an area and experience that is robust, long-life and requires minimal ongoing expenditure on grounds-keeping, maintenance, and refurbishment.”

“Low cost to maintain.”

“Maintain or add to the beauty/ aesthetic of the area/ place.”

“Plan experiences that are environmentally sustainable taking into consideration changing climate and environmental needs.”



## Principle 2: Safety

### Statement

Council will prioritise the safety of people and dogs when planning, designing, and managing dog off-leash areas.

### Considerations

Panel suggestions to support this principle:

- Non-compatible uses are kept entirely separate from each other through buffers or design (e.g. key cycling routes and dogs, children and dogs).
- Enough space or buffers are provided between dog off-leash areas and roads, with consideration for the amount of traffic on the adjacent road.
- They are designed with consideration to everyone's safety, including dogs.
- Appropriate buffers are provided to allow for various uses to coexist, considering part fencing to encourage effective dog control.
- Density limit ratios are applied to the size of the area.
- Environmental hazards are avoided or planned for when selecting locations or dog off-leash areas (e.g. sewage or drainage outlets)
- Dog off-leash areas are designed with clear sightlines, visibility and no entrapment areas.

- Lighting is provided, including the journey to and from the area.
- The safety of all dogs are considered and planned for, acknowledging dogs come in all shapes and sizes, and have different personality types.

“Safety of people in the park and thinking about the safety of everyone holistically...”

“Fence vs no-fence should just be about what suits that particular location/context.”

“It would be nice to have somewhere I can swim with my dog in summer months that isn't a sewage/rainwater drainage area.”

“Adequate lighting including consideration of the journey to and from the park.”



## Principle 3: Environment and Heritage

### Statement

Council will ensure areas of historical value and current and future areas of environmental significance are not impacted by dog off-leash areas.

### Considerations

Panel suggestions to support this principle:

- The historical value (including cultural sensitivity) of an area is understood and planned for.
- Migration and seasonal behaviours of animals are understood and planned for.
- Areas of environmental and conservation value are mapped.
- The impact dogs can have on flora and fauna are planned accordingly (e.g on-lead, off-lead or prohibited).
- Consider how the sustainability outcomes for a local area can be enhanced by the dog off-leash experience (e.g. increased planting of native local plants that are durable and lower maintenance but also safe/fun for dogs).
- Consider human impact in these areas compared to dog impact (e.g. impact of larger events in Catani Gardens, compared to dog access).

- Balance where dogs are and aren't allowed. If prohibiting dogs from an area, it is important to ensure there are opportunities for dogs nearby to ensure effective compliance.
- Provide education to the community on why dogs are not permitted in areas where there is environmental or cultural significance.

“Engage with traditional owners in the protection of land.”

“Prohibiting dogs from an area in order to protect certain species of animals and their offspring is completely justifiable. PROVIDED! Dogs have someplace else to go.”

“Council to conduct further research to determine the impact dog interaction has on wildlife and consider the best type of access - on lead, off lead or

“Consider removing dogs from sections of the foreshore to improve the environmental protection of the beach.”



## Principle 4: Diverse

### Statement

Council will provide a range of experiences to enhance the wellbeing of our dog community through our network of diverse public spaces.

### Considerations

Panel suggestions to support this principle:

- Provide for and manage a network of dog experiences across the municipality across different terrains and environments, along the foreshore, in parks and within ovals. .
- While equal access within a particular suburb is not always achievable, ease of access across the municipality needs to be considered (e.g. ability to drive to certain experiences or walk to others closer to home).
- When planning new spaces or changing the use of existing spaces consider the overall level of access to open spaces for dog owners and non dog owners.
- Design for spaces to be shared and use programming to provide priority or single use e.g. time of day or day of the week or seasonal use.
- Consider the planning and design standards for dog off-leash experiences and give consideration to size of space, infrastructure and access.

- Consider the journey to and from dog-off-leash experience and if there are opportunities for exercise and play to be included along the way.
- Provide opportunities for residents to enjoy spaces free from dogs.
- Consider the enjoyment of the owner and dog i.e., walk through a nature trail (on lead) to get to a dog off-leash experience.
- Consider different exercise needs for different dogs.

“If putting restrictions in place - have to provide another space without overcrowding those spaces.”

“Where can people go if they do not want to share a space with a dog on or off lead”

“Considering how dogs on lead and their owners use urban street areas for enjoyment i.e. walking along walls, varied terrain heights.”



## Principle 5: Shared Responsibility

### Statement

Council will develop and deliver education, communication and enforcement programs which will promote accountability and respect between all users of dog off-leash areas.

### Considerations

Panel suggestions to support this principle:

- Develop education material which is accessible and promoted to dog owners and non-dog owners, e.g.: What does responsible dog ownership look like? Why do we need to share public spaces?
- Ensure information on dog restrictions is easy to understand and provided via various platforms (such as clear signage and online). It can include such things as locations, times, and seasonal changes.
- Programs are introduced and sustained to achieve long term behaviour change around responsible dog ownership e.g.: school-based programs, signage on dog behaviour, online videos.
- Define and communicate what having a dog ‘under effective control’ is.
- Consider the placement, style and level of information on signage to educate users of dog off-leash areas.

- Monitor the use of dog off-leash areas to determine levels of compliance, especially when there are changes in use of an area.
- Increase the number of Animal Management Officers and number of patrols to increase enforcement and education of dog owners.
- Continue to incentivise dog registration to increase access to dog owners for education and communication purposes.
- Ensure spaces are planned and designed with the view to promote responsible dog ownership, such as encouraging sight lines to supervise dogs or providing larger areas to reduce conflict.

“Provide instructional videos about expected behaviour... - recall, rushing and general behaviour.”

“Make registration more appealing (to expand reach of messaging) ‘free registration’.

“Set expectations through signage + education about what is an appropriate use as per the available space: ‘this area is great for fetch and play’, ‘this area is perfect for sniffy walks.’”

## Additional advice from the panel

Through the process, members of the Community Panel identified the need for Council to provide fair and equitable access to open space in the City of Port Phillip. Whether that be at local beaches, sporting grounds, parks and reserves, gardens or even small pocket parks; everyone has the right to enjoy a safe experience, free from conflict, injury or personal harm. This applies to all members of the Port Phillip Community, regardless of their age, ability, background, interests or dog ownership status.

Panel members requested that the Animal Management team are involved in the implementation of the guidelines to ensure that any dog-off leash experiences can be appropriately managed, and the behaviours expected from users is communicated to the wider community, and enforced.

This would include creating a shared use framework to determine the users of different spaces and creating this in consultation with users.

The topic of education, enforcement and communication attracted high interest from the Community Panel, with the key sentiment being that if this is not done well, then even with the best designed dog experience will not reduce conflict among dog owners, nor between dogs and non-dog owners.

