

# GOOD NEIGHBOUR GUIDE

A short guide  
for principals on  
engaging the  
community in capital  
works projects at  
your school



## Capital works projects are an exciting time for both your school and local community.

Experience tells us that the school community and your school neighbours want to know when you are planning any physical changes to your school. Any capital works, large or small, may disrupt, shock or surprise students, parents, staff and neighbours. By informing and preparing relevant people in your school and local communities, you can achieve a more positive experience and outcome. To minimise misunderstandings or angst, the following guide (tried and tested) can help you deliver your message in a meaningful and successful manner.

## Identifying affected and interested parties

Many people may be affected by a capital works project at your school. It is important to identify relevant parties and decide whether they need to be contacted, how you will do so, and what you will tell them. Make an assessment as to who may be directly and indirectly affected by the project and accompanying works, particularly those with neighbouring properties.

There are the obvious groups – students, families and staff – who need to be informed. There are also other groups who may be affected and should be engaged as early as possible in order to make alternative arrangements. If consultation is left until the final stage of the project, you run the risk of not addressing the community's needs, being sidetracked by off-topic feedback or negative publicity.

The VSBA can support you with your engagement by providing best-practice advice, pre-approved lines and templates. The VSBA may need to manage the community engagement for your project if it is considered high-risk, or where asbestos is being removed, for example. To find out what support is available to you, contact the VSBA.

### Students and families

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Students and families are your most engaged stakeholders and will be interested in changes to the school. They need to be informed of changes to the school to manage any risks regarding health and safety, impact on the teaching and learning program, and access to the school. Clear and precise information is vital, as is a positive tone to the message. Consider which students and families could be “champions” for your project and encourage them to maintain an active interest in the project, even during difficult times. Be aware of special needs regarding inclusion and access and be ready to identify solutions to possible issues.

### Staff

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Staff are often the first point of contact for parents and students, so they should have a good understanding of the proposed works and feel comfortable discussing the project in general terms. Any queries beyond general information should be referred to you, as the Principal, you are the main point of contact regarding capital works.

Concerns from staff about health and safety, impact on the teaching and learning program, and access to the school need to be addressed and resolved at a staff level before the project begins.

## Neighbours

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Neighbours need special consideration at the planning stage. Once you are clear about the scope of the project, you should consider if the changes to your school site will directly or indirectly create inconvenience to your neighbours. If the answer is yes, contact the VSBA for advice. It's important to have the conversation early.

Consider which neighbours should be contacted, some works will only impact on your closest neighbours, while others may affect a whole street.

If the works at your school include the removal of asbestos, it is crucial to inform the VSBA so that we can inform your neighbours. Neighbours will be highly agitated if they see contractors wearing hazard protection clothing and they haven't been informed.

## Site hirers / community groups

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Groups using the school facilities for community activities should be informed of any works that may impact on their use (either temporarily during construction or permanently). Consider the effect of changes to; access, restrictions to parking, changes to facilities such as toilets and change rooms, and reduction in evening lighting. Community groups should be given ample time to find alternative facilities, if necessary, and to contact their own members in a timely manner.

## Emergency services / Cleaners / Deliveries / Post / Recycling and rubbish collection

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Be aware of how the project may affect access to your school and buildings. If major changes occur to street access, contact relevant services to ensure smooth transition for the duration of the project.

## Types of concerns

Community members can raise a range of concerns. They could include concerns about: interruption to the teaching & learning program, changes to school timetable, access to the school, health and safety, security, or even the impact of a new building on the liveability of the area.

The following is a possible, but not exhaustive, list of concerns.

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- Interruption to learning
- Interruption to teaching program
- Health & safety concerns (dust, noise, asbestos, stress)
- Workers on the school grounds
- Emergency vehicle access
- Parking
- Traffic
- Public transport
- Foot traffic
- Bicycle access
- Deliveries
- Pick up zones
- Start & end times of school & work
- Safety fencing
- Safety signs
- Impacting views from neighbouring properties or buildings that will overlook neighbour backyards/windows
- Overshadowing neighbour properties
- Tree removal & planting

## How and when to contact community members

Each project will have its own timeline and schedule of works. Setting up a clear timeline of contact dates will help you keep track of who to contact, the means of contact and timeliness of information sharing.

### Things to remember:

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- Contact the VSBA for advice
- Be open to feedback
- Be clear about the logistics
- Be the point of contact
- Use a range of methods of communication to ensure the message is received
- Ask for help early if you think your community is concerned.

You may need to use a range of methods of communication to ensure that the message is received.

### Consider:

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- School newsletter
- SMS
- School social media such as Facebook
- Email
- Letter drop (particularly to neighbours)
- Staff meetings
- Parent information sessions
- Small face to face meetings with neighbours to talk through the plans

### Helpful hints:

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- Eliminate surprises with your relevant stakeholders
- Provide bi-monthly or quarterly updates depending on interest and impact of the school project. Your staff, parent and local resident groups or enquiries are a good indicator of how often you need to provide updates.
- Keeping your stakeholders informed also helps build excitement and acceptance of the positive changes at the school.
- Refer to Q&As and suggested key messages and templates provided.
- Any concerns, contact VSBA directly on:
  - Email **vsba@education.vic.gov.au**
  - Phone **1800 896 950**

## Timeline for contacting groups

Timelines, scope of works and 'project phases' of a redevelopment can vary from project to project; this guide will help you know who to contact when.

PHASE OF PROJECT	COMMUNICATION
Funding announcement – once officially announced by the DET or Minister	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Parents, school council, reception, teaching and admin staff.</li> </ul>
Architect appointment – once official	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>As above</li> </ul>
Renders, sketches or masterplan created – get guidance from project team or see your provisional planner of what and when you can share images of school project designs/sketches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Until endorsed by VSBA/DET you may only share the early stages with the school council.</li> <li>Once officially endorsed by VSBA/DET you may share with the school and local communities as identified in your assessment.</li> <li>Depending on the design e.g. gym where noise or lighting factors may be a concern for neighbours, you may need to share design with local residents and businesses based in the periphery (direct perimeter of school fence line).</li> <li>Call your VSBA Project Manager or 1800 896 950 for guidance if you think residents may have design or construction concerns, such as lighting, overshadowing or noise factors.</li> </ul>
Sod turn event to begin construction  If signage is introduced on the fence line, you will hear from the VSBA directly.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>If you are asked to participate or support a ministerial/media event, DET/VSBA will provide detailed instructions.</li> <li>Post event, you may share approved photos/key messages - seek guidance from the relevant DET/VSBA team.</li> </ul>
Builder or contractor appointment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide 'heads up' communications, such as estimated timeframe of when construction begins and will be completed, and who can be contacted regarding any concerns. Use your list of interested and affected parties to decide who should be contacted.</li> <li>Projects of \$200,000 or more are promoted on the VSBA website and updates, photos or renders/images are usually displayed with a project timeline. This is also a good source of information for parents.</li> </ul>
Under construction or redevelopment phase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>See above</li> </ul>

<p><b>Construction impacts of redevelopment (e.g. dust, noise, traffic management impacts)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Common sense notification of school and community members – contact the VSBA for advice</li> <li>• Depending on the type of traffic management concerns during construction where e.g. staff carpark may be reduced or closed, student pedestrian traffic is redirected, eliminate surprises and prepare parents, students and staff of impacts.</li> <li>• If any permanent traffic / pedestrian access is changed permanently and you are not sure where to navigate enquiries, speak to your project manager or region for guidance.</li> </ul>
<p><b>If demolition of old building or asbestos removal required.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• VSBA will provide guidance if asbestos related works are required</li> <li>• Note: any asbestos removal is done after hours or during school holidays.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Practical completion of the project – opening of buildings</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Office of the Minister of Education or the local Minister of Parliament could be in contact with your school to deliver a media event.</li> <li>• Build excitement of completion in the newsletter</li> <li>• Share with the community who have been impacted during building works.</li> </ul>

## Links

### Helpful links

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#### School Communications Toolkit

The School Communications Toolkit includes advice for dealing with the media and managing issues, and cheat sheets for using social media.

#### Education State Key Messages

This page lists the Education State overarching messages that may help focus and link your news to the community to the larger picture of schooling in Victoria.

If your school construction issues aren't covered by the examples above and you have a real concern about communicating with your community, please talk to your Project Manager in the VSBA and send an email to the Manager, Community Engagement. We will give you a call and provide individual advice on how to proceed.

#### Victorian School Building Authority

Email **[vsba@education.vic.gov.au](mailto:vsba@education.vic.gov.au)**

Phone **1800 896 950**

## Good Neighbour Checklist

- Organise a team to support you during this process (spread the load and ensure someone can answer queries on your behalf)
- Inform the school council
- Inform staff
- Inform families
- Inform Emergency Services
- Inform site hirers
- Inform cleaners
- Inform Australia Post and delivery companies
- Inform rubbish collection
- Inform neighbours
- Follow up information
- Q&A document