

# Community Engagement Evaluation – ourballarat engagement 2023/24

## 1) Executive Summary

### Project Overview

The ourballarat magazine is produced by the City of Ballarat. The articles are designed to keep residents and ratepayers up to date with relevant City of Ballarat news, services, programs, initiatives, and events. It features local people and places, with a range of news, articles, and event information to keep residents connected to their community and to council.

The 2023 ourballarat community engagement followed requests from Councillors to undertake a review of the ourballarat magazine. For context, a previous edition of the magazine was delivered late, which sparked the interest of Councillors regarding the ongoing cost of the magazine versus its benefit. In short, the consultation sought to gauge community sentiment on whether the ourballarat magazine should continue in its current form, move online or some other iteration.

The consultation also sought community feedback on items such as the content of the magazine, the format of the content (i.e. feature-style articles vs short, bite sized content), the length of the magazine and the regularity of distribution (i.e. monthly, quarterly, annually etc).

A similar engagement process occurred in 2019, in which Council Officers conducted community consultation on the ourballarat magazine involving a postcard survey and an online MySay survey. The current engagement was modelled on the 2019 consultation, allowing Council Officers to compare and contrast how community sentiment towards the magazine has changed over time.

### Summary of scope of engagement and influence

The ourballarat community engagement was designed to understand the community's views on the following:

- Whether or not the magazine should continue in its current print form, or if it should take a different form into the future (i.e. a purely online magazine, or a combination of print and online), or whether it should continue at all.
- The community's overall satisfaction with the magazine, particularly amongst older demographics of the community that the ourballarat magazine is better at reaching than other online/digital channels.
- Understanding preferences around format – printed, online etc. – and what sort of content/articles audiences would like to read more about.

The engagement took the form of an online survey and a short postcard survey inserted into the spring 2023 edition of ourballarat. The online survey was longer and more comprehensive, while the postcard survey mainly focused on questions relating to the format of the magazine (print/online/combination of both) and questions relating to content.

## Timeline

- June – 28 July – Preparation**  
Designing the consultation framework and the surveys themselves, planning relevant communications etc.
- 28 July – 31 October – Distribution**  
Launching the ourballarat online MySay survey and distribution of postcard surveys in the spring edition of ourballarat magazine.
- October 31 – 22 February – Analysis**  
Closure of the online survey and compilation of the returned postcard surveys, report writing and Council Officer recommendations for future actions.
- February 22 onwards – Execution**  
Following Council Officer recommendation and feedback from Councillors at a briefing, Council officers will devise a plan going forward to execute the next steps and implement feedback.



## 2) Demographics and reach

### Overview

699

Total number of survey contributions

163

Total number of online MySay survey contributions

218

Online informed (people who opened the MySay page)

536

Total number of postcard contributions



### Demographic breakdown

#### Age

Online survey

20 or under: 1 (0.6%)

21-29: 5 (3.06%)

30-39: 22 (13.49%)

40-49: 35 (21.47%)

50-59: 46 (28.22%)

60 or over: 70 (42.94%)

#### Postcard survey

20 or under: 2 (0.39%)

21-29: 7 (1.39%)

30-39: 24 (4.77%)

40-49: 37 (7.35%)

50-59: 84 (16.69%)

60 or over: 350 (69.58%)

#### Gender

Online survey (postcard survey N/A)

Woman: 94 (57%)

Man: 63 (38.65%)

Non-binary: 2 (1.22%)

Other: 4 (2.45%)



## Demographic analysis

As the above demographic breakdown demonstrates, the paper-based postcard surveys did a really good job of reaching the older demographics aged 60+. Almost 70 percent of postcard survey respondents were aged 60+. Given the ourballarat magazine is one of the key City of Ballarat channels targeting that demographic, it's good to see such high levels of engagement from residents aged 60+. The over 60s demographic were also well-represented in the online survey, representing almost 43 percent of respondents.

However, the ourballarat magazine is not just for the older demographics – ideally, it would engage Ballarat residents of all ages. The online survey had higher engagements from younger demographics than the postcard survey. However, overall, it would have been good to see more input from the youngest demographics – 20 and under, and 21-29, sitting at 0.6 percent and 3.06 percent respectively for the online survey, and 0.39 percent and 1.39 percent for the postcard survey.

The mid-range demographics had relatively good engagement in the online survey – the 30-39 demographic had 22 respondents (13.49 percent) and the 40-49 demographic had 35 respondents (21.47 percent). However, they had relatively small representation in the postcard survey results – 4.77 percent for the 30-39 age bracket and 7.35 percent for the 40-49 age bracket.

## Media and social media overview

List of communications activities promoting ourballarat consultation opportunities:

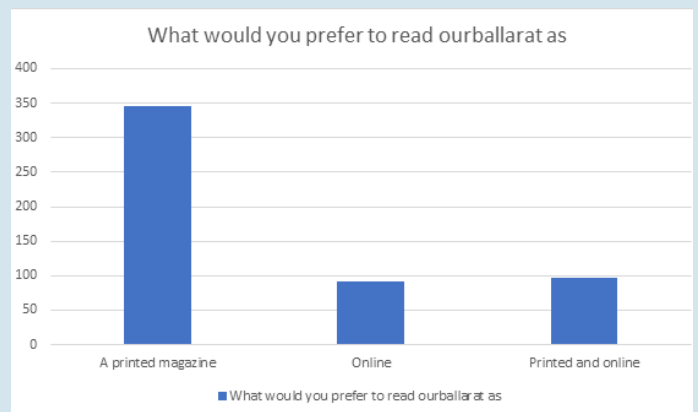
- Media release
- Back page of ourballarat magazine (spring edition)
- Mayor's Message in Ballarat Times
- Ballarat Time Noticeboard – several times
- Three social media posts

## 3) Results and stakeholder analysis

### Overview of key results

- 65% of postcard survey respondents and 43% of online MySay survey respondents would prefer to read ourballarat as a printed magazine.
- 17% of postcard survey respondents and 34% of online MySay respondents would prefer to read ourballarat online.
- 18% of postcard survey respondents and 13.5% of online MySay respondents would prefer to read ourballarat in both print and online formats.
- The surveys showed that the most engaged readers were aged 60+ representing 70% of postcard survey respondents and 43% of MySay respondents were aged 60+.

### Postcard survey – key results and analysis



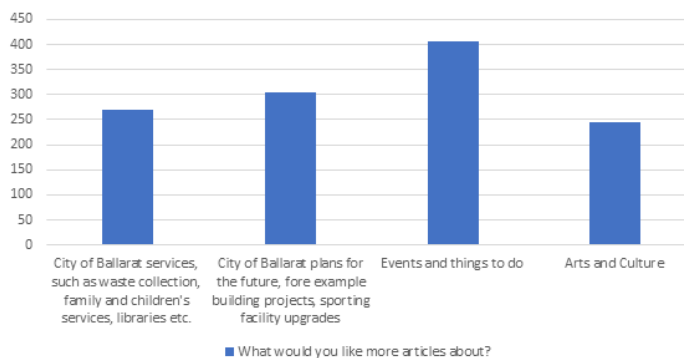
The postcard survey results indicate that respondents overwhelmingly would like ourballarat to continue as a printed magazine (346 respondents – or 65%). About 97 respondents (18%) would like to see the magazine in both printed and online formats, while 91 respondents (17%) would like the magazine to be a purely online publication.

In the context of such a high preference for the printed magazine in the postcard survey results, it is interesting to note that the vast majority of postcard respondents were aged in the 60+ bracket. This denotes the importance of printed material for older members of the community who are, perhaps, the biggest cohort of ourballarat readers, and who may be less likely to engage with other online-based communications.



Further analysis showed some (though not a super strong) connection between younger age demographics and a desire for either the magazine to move online completely, or for there to be both a print and an online presence. As such, there may be room to expand the readership of the ourballarat magazine amongst younger demographics if there is further investment/expansion in the online component of the magazine.

What would you like more articles about?



Please note, respondents could select multiple answers.

It is interesting to note the most popular section for this question was 'Events and things to do' (406). A few years ago, the Communications and Design team removed the events calendar from the ourballarat magazine. This was due to the significant amount of time between when the magazine is put together and when it is distributed – often, by the time the magazine was distributed, key details of the event (such as time, date or location) had been changed. However, given the popularity of the 'events and things to do' content, perhaps there is a way to revive the events calendar online or focus more heavily on events and things to do within the content of the print magazine going forward.

However, it's also worth noting that all the other sections performed well with respondents able to select more than one answer. As such, other content should not be sacrificed to focus purely on events and things to do. City of Ballarat plans for future, for example, came in second (304).

In addition to the above results, 128 people selected 'other' and provided responses in relation to the content they would like to see in the magazine. Common themes among these responses included:

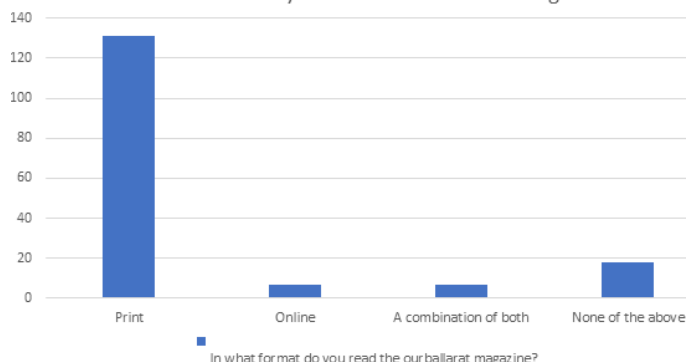
- Information about council meetings
- Interactive content (this would likely work best online)
- Road maintenance
- Ageing Well services, events for seniors.
- Features on 'famous' Ballarat people
- Sustainability and environment

- The animal shelter and pet-related content
- Community consultation, including outcomes of community consultation
- Volunteering, local businesses and hospitality
- Diversity and inclusion

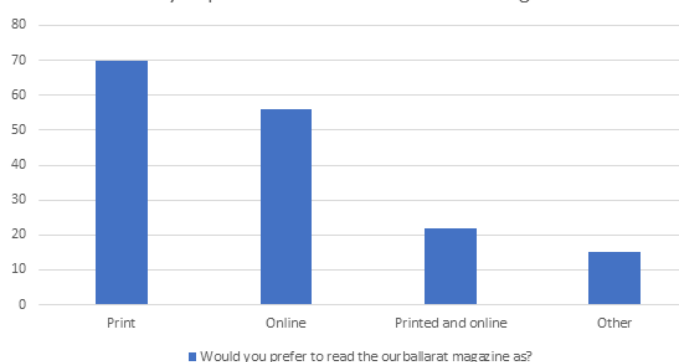
Please note: a small amount of the postcard surveys (about 10) indicated that they did not wish for the ourballarat magazine to continue in any format.

### Online MySay survey – key results and analysis

In what format do you read the ourballarat magazine?



Would you prefer to read the ourballarat magazine as?

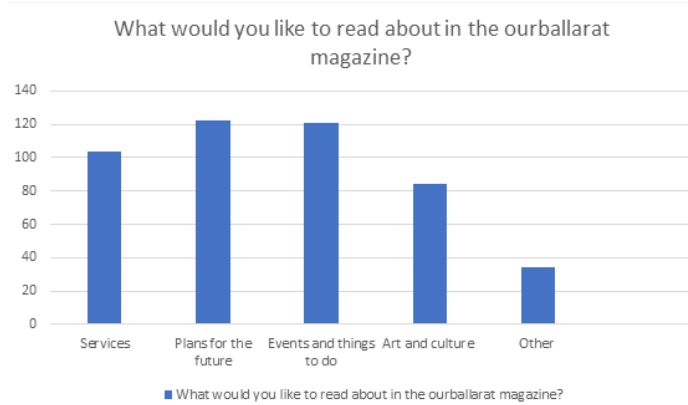


Similarly to the postcard survey, the above online MySay survey results indicate respondents would like ourballarat to continue as a printed magazine. However, the MySay survey results demonstrated a much stronger appetite for online content than the postcard survey results.

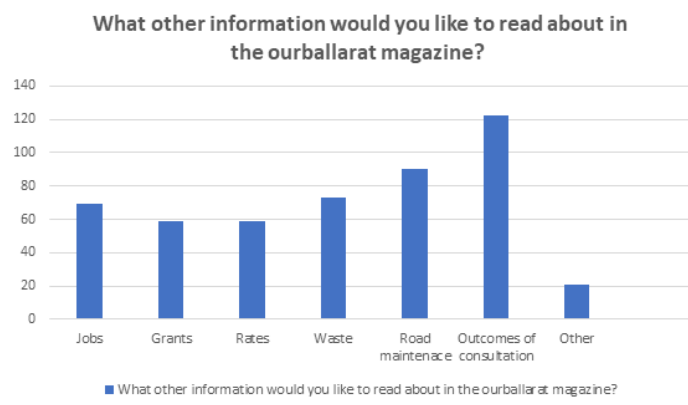
This could be due to the slightly younger age group represented in the MySay survey, or it could be that, given respondents filled out the survey in an online format, they are more likely to want to consume ourballarat content via an online format.

It is interesting to note, however, that there is a significant difference between how respondents actually consume ourballarat content and how they say they would like to consume ourballarat content. The top graph demonstrates that 131 people currently read the ourballarat magazine in a printed format, and only seven currently read the ourballarat magazine in an online format. However, in the second graph, 56 people say they

would like to read the ourballarat magazine in an online format. The ourballarat magazine currently publishes its stories online in addition to the print format. However, it is possible these readers are not aware that the content is online or alternatively, the current online format may not be appealing enough.



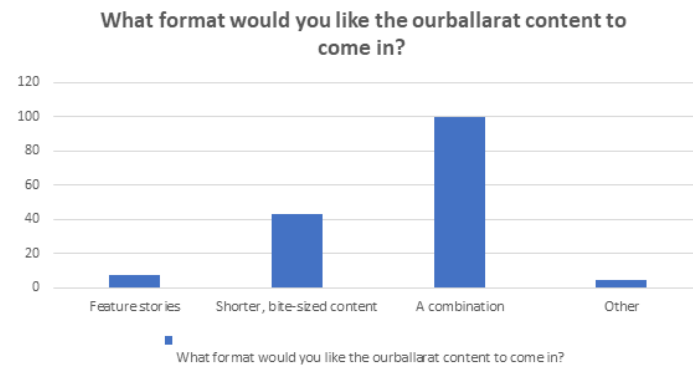
'Plans for the future' rated slightly higher for respondents of the online MySay survey than 'Events and things to do', which was the top option for respondents of the postcard survey. However, 'Events and things to do' wasn't rated far behind for respondents of the online survey. This could potentially indicate that postcard respondents are more casual readers looking for lighter content, whereas the online survey respondents are looking for slightly harder news and updates relating to council. Not to conflate the online respondents with online readers of the magazine (though the online respondents did reflect a higher rate of wanting to consume ourballarat content online), but there is room to do stories differently in online and print formats.



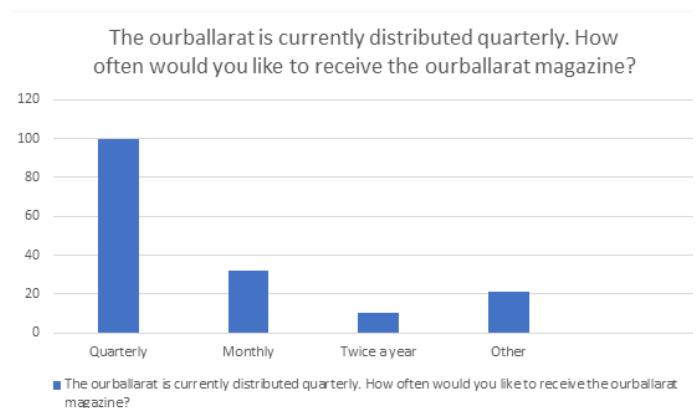
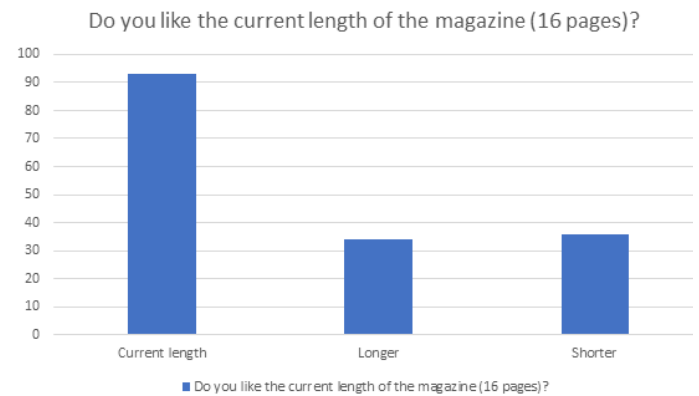
The Communications and Design team hasn't (at least in the memory of the current team) experimented with including much of the above content in the ourballarat magazine. Outcomes of consultation, for example, appears to be highly valued by the community. While

Road Maintenance and Waste have been covered by ourballarat before, there is perhaps room to explore how we could cover these topics in new ways into the future.

Given ourballarat magazine's historical tendency towards feature stories, it is interesting to note that most respondents are interested in a combination of longer, feature-style stories and shorter, bite-sized content.



There is overwhelming consensus, as demonstrated in the above two graphs, that respondents are happy with the current length and distribution frequency of the ourballarat magazine.





## Recommended next steps

Based on the analysis of community feedback, the Communications and Design team recommends:

- The ourballarat magazine to continue as a quarterly, 16-page print magazine.
- Ourballarat content to continue to focus on key areas of interest with an increased focus on content featuring events and things to do, City of Ballarat plans for the future, outcomes of consultation, content for seniors, sustainability etc. Council officers have already begun implementing these themes in the autumn 2024 edition of ourballarat, which will begin delivery to homes across Ballarat at the end of February 2024.
- Magazine to include more bite-sized content pieces – instead of mostly focusing on feature-style stories – to get a better balance of bite-sized content versus feature-style stories.
- Council officers to explore ways to improve the delivery of online ourballarat content e.g. explore more dynamic options like e-readers or what website infrastructure would be required to deliver interactive content etc. This would include exploring whether stories can be presented differently in online and print formats. An example of a more interactive online story is available at the ABC Story Lab – example here. Officers are currently trialling the use of video to highlight key stories that are accessible via a QR code.
- Increase awareness of online ourballarat content being available to the community by increased communication around this option. Council officers have already begun changing the focus of some ourballarat content to be more future-looking. For example, the autumn edition heavily features the Ballarat airport and future plans relating to it.