

VLGA

Victorian
Local Governance
Association

2023 | 2024

Annual Report

celebrating

30
years

The VLGA Story

Who we are

The Victorian Local Governance Association (VLGA) supports councils and elected representatives (councillors) to deliver positive outcomes for their local communities through high performance leadership and effective governance. We are member-run and non-partisan.

We offer direct support, training, professional development, events, networks and resources to members and carry out research, policy analysis and advocacy on behalf of local councils.

We are the leading voice for local councils and offer our members the opportunity to realise their true leadership potential and increase their impact.

The VLGA provides councillor networking and information exchange opportunities and actively engages with key policymakers and broader stakeholders to inform, influence and lead the conversations that determine the priorities for the local government sector and support good governance at the local level.

The VLGA works alongside elected representatives from candidacy to end-of-term and inspires and enables good governance, which empowers participatory and ethical decision-making. The VLGA's overriding value is to strengthen and support good governance in local government that will enable, promote and facilitate trust and confidence in the sector.

The VLGA Value Proposition

The VLGA creates value in the following ways.

- We marshal thought leadership for the sector across a wide variety of topics;
- We present high calibre panels of professionals, agency leaders and senior bureaucrats and Ministers in areas relevant to the sector;
- We facilitate highly relevant discussions on complex issues which are readily accessible to all;
- We are agile and adapt our service offering to meet the needs of our member organisations;
- We advocate and represent the position of local government to other levels of government;
- We are engaged (and sought after) as a peak body - the independent local government governance organisation - to participate in forums, think tanks, advisory committees convened by government, academic institutions and other lead agencies;
- We provide resources, information, professional development and education and undertake projects and events that support good governance and leadership;
- We deliver funded programs which meet the strategic priorities of the government of the day;
- We advocate for participation in local democracy that is inclusive and represents the diversity of the community and deliver programs that build the capacity of candidates and councillors.



VLGA Members

VLGA members are high-performance councillors and councils

we empower them

VLGA members demonstrate best-practice governance

we train and support them

VLGA members deliver great outcomes for their local communities

we enable them

VLGA is a champion for local government

we advocate for and represent them

VLGA is an expert in good governance and local government

we listen to and inform them

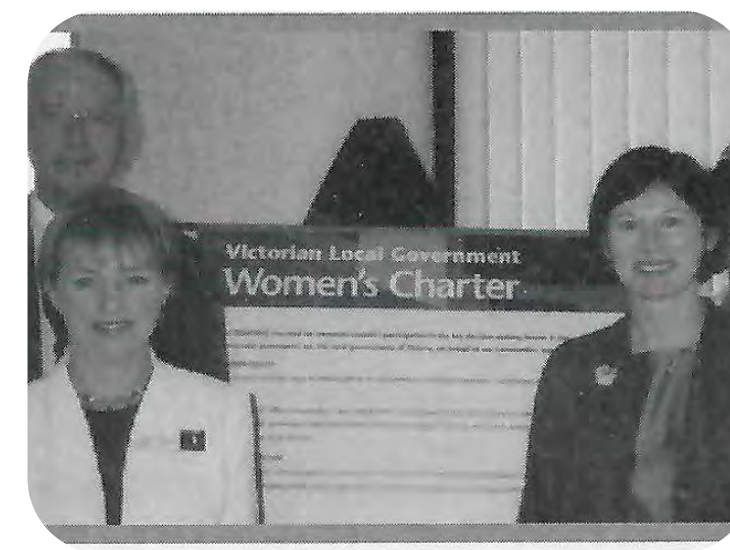
The Victorian Local Governance Association

Thirty years on



Hayden Raysmith
Patron

Artwork by Rhonda Stockman, 1967



Remembering

The Victorian Local Governance Association (VLGA) was established in August 1994 as a community and local government response to the silencing of community voices through the forced amalgamations by the former Kennett state government. The formation of the VLGA aimed to restore democracy at a local level. The founding members of the VLGA included Glenyys Romanes, Liana Thompson, Lyn Allison, Mike Hill, and Tim Costello.

The VLGA was incorporated as an association in 1995 and has been advocating for democracy and democratic governance since it was formed.

It has transformed from primarily being an advocacy and advice body to one that promotes democratic governance through its numerous programs, projects, training and presence in the sector.

It's primary aim to respond to local democracy, campaign to protect the role and independence of local governments and involve local communities is just as relevant thirty years later.

Why remembering is important

Celebrating an organisation's origins, achievements and culture energises what comes next.

Every organisation has its history, heroes and achievements that define what the organisation stands for and what unites its members in a common cause. For the VLGA it has fundamentally been about preserving and strengthening representative and participatory local democracy. It has helped shape the communities in which we live.

How best to focus an organisation's efforts and allocate its resources is a constant challenge but remembering past achievements, failures and struggles is important in informing the journey ahead.

Reflections

There are three reflections from the past that capture the VLGA's rich history and the strengths that will help shape its future. The first from a planning day at the City of Darebin in 2000.

"Every organisation has its history, its stories, its myths and its defining moments.

Mostly born out of adversity, advocacy organisations provide a means for collective reaction with the wider world. They are a means for converting passive victims into active participants, helping



to shape destiny and influence the course of events. They are a tool for responding to external circumstances, changing power relationships and asserting fundamental principles that underpin a good and decent society.

Little by little in asserting these principles and in the interactions with the external world, each organisation, almost imperceptibly, shapes its own distinctive organisational culture.

The language, the decision-making processes, the openness or secrecy, the inclusiveness, the diversity, the defining of what is acceptable and not acceptable, the priority setting, strategic decisions and the level of trust both internally and externally together with the strategic alliances and position in the matrix of similar organisations.

The flowering of an organisation is not a linear process. Whilst there may be anchor points and common bonds the development path is essentially opportunistic. It comes from understanding issues, reflecting the views of its members, having clear and guiding principles and stunningly good analysis of what matters and what will make a difference.

An effective organisation will be rooted in its past, committed to its principles, constantly adapting and highly strategic in how it will use its limited resources and skills.

The VLGA is no exception. It emerged when democratic rights were abolished by decree and when secrecy, managerialism and corporatisation threatened the very fabric of local democracy.

The VLGA believes in citizenship and democracy and it stands for what those simple terms mean.”

Further...

“It is a membership-based organisation where people contribute and work in partnership to achieve success. It is a movement of people with similar values, who are committed to the principles of citizenship and local democracy. It is a support network for those who believe in the importance of citizenship, local communities and good governance.

The VLGA believes in the value of collaboration and strategic alliances. It is the peak body for local democracy, a media commentator and an advocate. It combines community and local government in the one structure. It values intellectual and strategic excellence and public policy and it believes in an ongoing commitment to raising the standard of governance.”

Finally...

It would not be possible to reflect on VLGA’s rich history without acknowledging the foundational role played by the creative, talented and inspirational late Mike Hill. This is a short extract from his farewell address in 2003 that remains in full on the VLGA website.

“This is indeed a wonderful privilege to enjoy the role of being the catalyst for a celebration; to cause a gathering of such dedicated people to come together.

I wanted to speak because I wanted to have another turn at contributing to the local government history of the past decade or so and I wanted to make good use of this event as it might be one of my last opportunities to input into the local government history of this state. I am sure to try your patience and your appetites but I want to acknowledge the journey we have all shared and the success we have had in building the new local governments in Victoria.”

Indeed, the VLGA has and will continue to build a vibrant Local Government sector and active communities. It will continue to strengthen and advocate for local democracy.

The VLGA remains focused on leadership development, skills training and the good governance requirements of local representatives.

The VLGA works alongside elected representatives from candidacy to end-of-term.

We inspire and enable good governance, empowering participatory, inclusive and ethical decision-making when it comes to leading diverse communities.

President's Report



As we reflect on the close of this council term, it is an honour to share with you the 2023-24 Victorian Local Governance Association Annual Report.

As the peak body for Victoria's councillors, the VLGA has worked tirelessly to support councillors to change culture, improve conduct and demonstrate good local governance for 30 years. As we celebrate this significant milestone later in 2024, we reflect on the core values of the VLGA and what it has stood for since its inception in 1994 – to promote democratic governance through programs, projects, training and advocacy in the sector.

While the sector has experienced periods of significant change during this time, local government remains the closest level of government to community and is best-placed to continue to represent community needs through effective leadership and best practice. For this reason there is an identified need for the diverse and growing network of community leaders elected to local government to be more connected, informed and capable of providing good governance for the communities they serve.

While there have been challenges that we, as councillors, have all faced throughout our term, we can also feel honoured that this term has seen significant progress and positive change to the sector over the last four years.

Through ongoing professional development, the opportunity to share learned experiences through our networking events, and updates around seemingly endless new developments across the sector, the VLGA has ensured that we councillors have every opportunity to lead our communities effectively.

It was a credit to this work that the Minister for Local Government, The Hon Melissa Horne MP chose the VLGA's *FastTrack* event last November to announce further changes to the *Local Government Act 2020* that introduced mandatory training for elected representatives and strengthened councillor code of conduct guidelines to address councillor misconduct.

Throughout the course of the year, we have consulted widely with our members on the proposed reforms, and we thank you all for your valuable and insightful input. Advocating on behalf of local democracy remains a core part of the VLGA's work, and our close working relationships across all levels of government ensures the needs of our members are heard.

We have continued to build on our Strategic Plan objectives. Launching the candidacy leadership program in May, we worked with 20 councils delivering more than 45 sessions to help develop future leaders for our sector. We look forward to seeing them reach their full potential as councillors in the next term and beyond.

Assisting women to become community leaders was also a core part of this program. The *Local Women Leading Change* program worked with councils to help give women the skills and confidence to lead in good governance. Updating the *Local Women Leading Change* handbook created a must have resource for those who chose to stand.

Not only have we worked to encourage a new generation of elected leaders, but our candidacy leadership programs also work to develop community leaders as advocates, understanding the channels and processes which allow them to work with council to achieve change. Most importantly, they work to develop educated and engaged voters.

Over the next four years, we will continue to ensure councillors have the tools and resources they need to lead effectively. While ongoing professional development is a feature of the new legislation, for the VLGA this formalises something we have always known. When armed with training to develop core skills, councillors are best placed to perform at their best.

This is confirmed through our industry-first research. Through our partnership with the Australian Research Council, University of Melbourne and LaTrobe University, we heard firsthand that ongoing training and skills development has been vital to good governance and effective leadership.

The research also demonstrates we have a long way to go to create an environment where all councillors are encouraged to excel. Issues around culture and respect are rife and there is much to be done to create a welcoming environment for all, particularly women.

While much will be done to celebrate and reflect on the last 30 years of the VLGA, there is much optimism and celebration of what is to come. Local Government continues to demonstrate the value of bringing people together of different ages, backgrounds and cultures and what can be achieved when they work together.

Most importantly, I would like to thank you for the ongoing support of our valued members, supporters and partnership organisations, not only for the last 12 months, but over the last 30 years. As a leading member-based organisation, our work is driven by you, our members, and we look forward to continuing to work with you and support you into the future.

Thank you also to the VLGA team who have continued to work tirelessly to deliver services that support the local government sector, councils and councillors, ensuring they are well placed to deliver good governance on behalf of their communities.

Finally, I would like to thank my fellow VLGA board members for their work and guiding leadership of the VLGA. Here's to the next 30 years.

Cr Denise Massoud
President



The Victorian Local Governance Association celebrates 30 years of championing local democracy in 2024.

Founded in 1994 amidst local council reforms, the VLGA emerged as a movement dedicated to preserving local governance and advocacy.

Over the past three decades, we have held fast to these core values, establishing ourselves as the leading voice for local democracy. As the level of government closest to community, the opportunity for participatory democracy is at its highest.

The sustainability of local democracy is integral to ensure the views of communities are best represented to decision makers within other levels of government.

We know that councils face increasing challenges to good governance and delivering their vision. The VLGA remains committed to strengthening and supporting councils to ensure effective governance and positive community outcomes.

Throughout the year, we have continued to develop and deliver programs and services to best support our members during ongoing periods of change.

We were honoured to host The Hon Melissa Horne, Minister for Local Government, at our signature *FastTrack* event in November to announce the latest in a series of reforms for the sector. Linking closely with the event theme,

Civility in Local Government, these reforms looked to improve governance and integrity standards across the sector through new measures such as ongoing professional development for councillors and model codes of conduct. The VLGA looks forward to supporting our members through the implementation of these new reforms, and we await to see their impact in the next council term.

This announcement was part of a range of reforms announced by the Victorian Government in relation to governance and integrity provisions of the *Local Government Act 2020*. As a leading voice in the sector, the VLGA joined the government's steering committee for the development of the proposed Regulations, using our position to voice the feedback and concerns of our members.

Working towards the ambitious goal of gender parity across elected local representatives by 2025 set by the Victorian Government, the VLGA once again delivered training and resources encouraging more women to stand in the October elections.

As part of this commitment to gender equality, we tailored training modules in recognition of the unique challenges faced by women councillors, from sexual harassment to gender-based backlash on the campaign trail. Our *Local Women Leading Change* modules formed a key component of our renowned Candidate Development Program which delivered more than 45 in-person and online sessions to councils across Victoria.

In addition to training, we partnered with Gender Lens Australia to update our innovative toolkit, the *Local Women Leading Change Handbook*. This Handbook – a resource developed to assist women to build the knowledge and skills necessary to succeed as elected representatives – guides women through the process of local government elections, featuring case studies and insights from current and former women councillors with lived experience of campaigns and councils.

We were delighted to have so many join us to celebrate the launch in July this year, including our esteemed panellists, family violence, violence against women and gender equality specialist Emily Maguire, Gender Equality Commissioner Niki Vincent, and Councillors Tina Samardzija, Sahana Ramesh and Li Zhang who shared their lived experiences.

Our industry partnership with La Trobe and Melbourne Universities has continued, as part of a multi-year Australian Research Council (ARC) partnership agreement. This year, Professors Andrea Carson and Leah Ruppner released their third report *Breaking Barriers*, looking at the unique experiences of women councillors, including family demands, role strain and experiences with trolling and harassment.

The ARC partnership will conclude in 2024, having followed women and men councillors across their 2020-2024 term, assessing their trajectories, their representation and barriers to success and longevity in local government.

CEO's Report

In this final year of what has been a momentous council term, it has been a privilege to lead the VLGA as we continue to support councils in good governance and navigate our rapidly changing sector.

The VLGA remains incredibly proud to have participated in this Australian first research using the experiences of women councillors to improve the working lives of women across the local government sector.

Training remains a core function of the VLGA. Throughout the year, we delivered many professional development opportunities for councillors which ensured they were equipped with the skills and knowledge required to deliver best outcomes for their communities. Our March *FastTrack* event, "Leading Under Pressure" held at Melbourne Town Hall, focussed on the challenges of leadership, and the changing nature of community leadership in the context of governance challenges in an election year.

Ensuring ongoing professional development opportunities for our member councillors, the VLGA delivered a series of *Lunch and Learn* sessions, with topics based on key issues impacting councillors such as meeting procedures and navigating difficult conversations. These sessions provide councillors with an invaluable opportunity to build their critical thinking skills, share reflections within a confidential forum and work together to develop experience-led solutions. We look forward to continuing our program of training and professional development programs in 2025. All will have a strong alignment with the new mandatory training requirements set out in the *Local Government Act 2020* and will inspire and support councillors and councils in good governance and

set them up for success. Our *VLGA Connect* series continues to be a leader in the sector, keeping councillors and those working in the sector up to date with the latest news and developments.

The Governance Update (TGU) continues to be a weekly information source for the local government community. In May the panel, hosted by Chris Eddy, was joined by the VLGA's own Rhys Thomas, who brought an insiders perspective to governance issues and their effects on the sector.

Our *Local Leaders* series continued to bring insights from member CEOs, mayors and deputy mayors across the sector. This coupled with our *In Conversation* and live panel series provided an in-depth analysis by decision makers and industry leaders about the current and emerging issues affecting local government. 2024 marked a great year for the VLGA's *Global Live Executive Panel* series, featuring some incredible speakers from the UK and Canada. The panels covered some of the more pressing issues impacting local government around the globe, including sustainable and affordable housing, government relationships and the impact of AI and online misinformation on the sector. We continue our close working partnership with the Local Government Information Unit (LGIU) in the UK to deliver thought leadership on topics which are directly relevant to elected officials around the world.

As always, I would like to thank and acknowledge the esteemed Chris Eddy

for his work hosting these programs on behalf of the VLGA. Chris' insights and experience across the sector ensures these programs continue to meet the high expectations of our members. I would also like to thank John Lloyd Fillingham (JLF) for his work producing and editing these programs.

As we prepare to embark on a new council term, I would like to thank those councillors who are completing their local government careers at these elections. The changing nature of local government posed many challenges, but each of you have worked tirelessly to ensure your community is stronger because of you. We thank you for your dedication and efforts and we wish you the very best in your post councillor journey.

I would also like to thank and acknowledge the VLGA President, Cr Denise Massoud and the VLGA Board for their guidance, input, and support across the year.

To the VLGA staff, thank you for your passion and commitment to the sector. Working in local government requires agility and adaptability as the needs of the sector and our members change.

Throughout the year you have worked to support the sector and deliver on our Strategic Plan objectives.

Most of all, I would like to thank our members and supporters. As a membership-based organisation, you are the reason we do what we do and have done so for the last 30 years. We look forward to continuing to engage and partner with you next year, as we navigate a new council term together.

Kathryn Arndt
Chief Executive Officer

Submissions & External Committees

As one of the three peak bodies party to the Victorian State Local Government Agreement, throughout the year the VLGA continued to give councils a voice through regular meetings with key state and federal government departments, Ministers for Local Government, portfolio ministers and advisors, and represented our members on several external committees.

External Committees

- Local Government CEO Foun
- Local Government Performance Reporting Steering Committee
- Gender Equality Advisory Committee (GEAC)
- Environmental Sustainability Commissioners Reference Group
- Library Board of Victoria Advisory Committee on Public Libraries
- EPA Waste and Recycling Industry Reference Group
- Welcoming Cities Advisory Committee
- Local Government Advisory Committee - Recycling Victoria
- Child-Friendly Cities and Communities (CFCC) Network

The VLGA also made numerous submissions to government, including but not limited to:

Submissions

- Response to Culture Review
- Response to Responsible Gambling Foundation Functions
- Open Government Partnership
- Response to Guidelines on Payments of Rates and Charges
- Response to Victorian Short Stay Levy
- ARC Linkage Grant Research
- Local Government Reforms
- Gaming Machine Discussion
- Parliamentary Inquiry into Local Government Sustainability
- Multicultural Framework Review
- Gender Impact Assessment Education and Engagement Tools in Health and Local Government

VLGA Member Network Groups

Local Government Working Group on Gambling (LGWGOG)

The VLGA's LGWGOG continued to convene bimonthly throughout the year, with participation from more than 50 representatives from across 26 councils. The network is a recognised sector leader for thought leadership – presenting guest speakers, updates, resources and information on strategies to reduce harm from gambling and support effective policy, service delivery and advocacy in the Victorian local government setting.

LGWGOG provides councils with a support network, as well as the tools, to enable work in the prevention of gambling harm. Speakers have included Scott May, (VGCCC), Peta Murphy MP and Russell Hooper, (DoJCS).

The LGWGOG continues to be a foundational network to promote the reduction of gambling harm across communities, as well as working directly with councils.

Governance Advisory Network (GAN)

The VLGA's Governance Advisory Network (GAN) met regularly during the year. As a members' only network it provides a forum for councillors and senior governance officers to provide input into policy development and implementation, sector advocacy, and support and networking opportunities for councillors and staff.

With the release of significant reforms to the *Local Government Act 2020* this year, the GAN has helped councils to navigate and unpack the impact of these changes, through advice from leading sector experts. It has also been a forum for our member councils to provide input and feedback to help guide the VLGA's advice and recommendations in our submissions, as well as our continued advocacy work on behalf of members.

Child Friendly Cities and Communities (CFCC)

The Child Friendly Cities and Communities movement works to bring individuals, organisations and communities together to collectively uphold and individually practice the principles of the Victorian Child Friendly Cities and Communities Charter and is underpinned by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The CFCC meets bi-monthly, bringing together representatives from 20 council signatories and 16 other organisational signatories across Victoria.

The VLGA works closely with signatory councils to guide the CFCC in its work, facilitating forums and network meetings to allow for exchange of ideas and building a like-minded community of practice.

Funded Programs

Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth)

Working in partnership with the Victorian Government over the course of the last two years, the VLGA has worked with Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth) to deliver a communities of practice and supported councils to address broader health promotion at a local level, as well as municipal health and wellbeing planning.

The Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth) Local Government Partnership has assisted councils to plan and deliver health promotion action through Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plans. Actions are primarily drawn from VicHealth's health promotion modules for local government. Representatives from 36-member councils participated in a Community of Practice for capacity building and networking.

VLGA staff played a key role in delivering a range of critical outputs to ensure the effective development and delivery of huddles, forums, workshops, and the year-end celebration, which brought together participating councils, as well as industry leaders. These activities included creating and managing a transparent project plan, which was organised and delivered in a way that allows both Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth) and VLGA staff to monitor the project's progress.

As the closest level of Government to the community, councils provide the best understanding of its local systems and the ability to best support any application of health focused programs. The VLGA continues to be positioned as an expert partner that is working continually with Local Government and elected representatives in Victoria, with an intricate understanding of council operations, policy, needs and capability.



Professional Development



lunch AND learn
Councillor Professional Development Program
members only

Lunch & Learn - Councillor Professional Development Program

Throughout the year, the VLGA offered a range of professional development opportunities to assist councillors in understanding the roles and responsibilities of being an elected representative, and the complexities and governance procedures of council.

Held for member councillors only, these interactive online sessions partnered with industry stakeholders to present in depth sessions on issues which directly affect councillors in performing their roles. These confidential sessions allowed councillors to ask questions and use lived experiences to further develop their leadership skills.

Council Training Programs

Working closely with individual member councils, the VLGA developed and delivered bespoke training programs throughout the year on topics which councillors identified they needed additional support.

These sessions were held virtually and in person, with subject matter tailored specifically for each councils' needs and unique situation, both for councillors, and officers and executive teams leading into the election year.

Our Next Generation of Leaders: Developing Councillors and Candidates

Community Leadership Programs

The VLGA worked closely with councils to develop and facilitate programs designed to empower community leaders. The focus was on giving them the skills and knowledge to work with council and advocate on behalf of their community, influence decision making and provide them with the tools they need to represent their community efficiently and effectively.

The VLGA's Community Leadership Programs work to foster the interest of community members in contesting an elected position on council, supporting them to be both educated leaders if they choose to stand for council, but also to be educated voters, armed with the knowledge to select a candidate that will best represent the broader community interest.

Candidate Training Programs

For over 30 years, the VLGA has supported councils and communities to strengthen good governance across election cycles. By providing information, resources and education about the business of local government to prospective councillors, the VLGA has assisted councils in attracting and supporting high calibre, ethical candidates who are ready to represent and serve their communities.

The VLGA worked closely with councils on developing programs which best suited their community needs. These programs gave prospective councillors a head start on understanding local government and what it means to best represent community and the importance of inclusive, ethical decision making.

A core objective of the VLGA's 2023-2027 Strategic Plan – the Candidate Training Program – ensured prospective candidates were educated about all things good governance, learning from sector leaders and the learned experience of former councillors and staff.



FastTrack



The VLGA's signature event, *FastTrack* ran twice throughout the year, bringing together councillors for a day of learning, networking and sharing of experiences from peers and sector leaders.

In November 2023, *FastTrack* addressed the issue of "Civility in Local Government". We were joined by Minister for Local Government, the Hon Melissa Horne, who announced further reforms to the *Local Government Act* designed to improve civility and good governance within the sector.

Other panellists on the day included Monash City Council CEO Dr Andi Diamond, and Associate Professor Josh Roose from Deakin University who discussed effective strategies to improve discourse in public meetings. We were also joined by Melissa Scadden from Justitia Lawyers and Lydia Kahlil from the Lowly Institute looking at how best to manage difficult conversations with constituents and colleagues.

Rounding out the day was Monique Toohey, renowned psychologist and Cultural Intelligence Advisor, who delivered a workshop on Cultural Intelligence in Leadership.

The VLGA's second *FastTrack* event, held at Melbourne Town Hall in March, featured notable speakers and engaging discussions on leadership under pressure and current and emerging governance challenges facing the sector.

The Lord Mayor of Melbourne, Sally Capp AO generously welcomed all to the city and spoke of the important work undertaken by local government across the state.



FastTrack: Civility in Local Government - November 2023

Keynote speakers and panel sessions facilitated insightful discussions on decision-making and future trends in local politics.

Joining the panels were Mindship & Leadership Coach and former councillor, Darrin Ray, Cr Amanda Stone from Yarra City Council and Gayle Hardie, co-founder of the Global Leadership Foundation who provided insights into decision making under pressure. Cr Trent Sullivan, Mayor of Greater Geelong City Council, Cr Mia Shaw from Wyndham City Council and Tony Raunic, Managing Principal of Hunt & Hunt Lawyers highlighted the skills and tools currently available to mitigate uncertainty in decision making.

Dr Sam Wilson from Swinburne Business School and Kos Samaras who is the Director of Strategy and Analytics at Redbridge Group, both delivered keynote addresses to the group, bringing their analysis and insights to leadership and good governance, particularly during an election year.

Both events concluded with an overview into VLGA's upcoming initiatives, and networking.



FastTrack: Leading Under Pressure - March 2024

Towards 2025: Encouraging Gender Equity in Local Government

The VLGA fully supports the Victorian Government target of 50:50 gender parity across elected government by 2025.

Throughout the year, we have continued to deliver programs which empower and encourage women across all levels of local government, giving them the knowledge and confidence to lead with purpose.

Australian Research Council (ARC) Linkages Grant

The VLGA is a proud partner of the ARC Linkage Project looking at Women in Local Government: Understanding their political trajectories.

Partnering on this research, highlights the important role the VLGA has in delivering programs that provide support and resources to councils and councillors that encourage civil discourse amongst elected representatives. It also highlights the need for robust and effective remedies when discourse breaks down.

International Women's Day

International Women's Day 2024 saw the release of the latest piece of research from the ARC Linkage Project, *Breaking Barriers* looking at the unique experience of women councillors including issues around harassment, trolling, role expectations and the impact on family and supports.

More than 50 people attended the launch, hearing from researchers Professor Andrea Carson of La Trobe University and Professor Leah Ruppner from Melbourne University. They spoke about their findings on the political trajectories of women in council, barriers they have identified to women standing for election and their suggestions for how we can reach 50:50 gender parity in councils.





Local Women Leading Change

In the lead up to the local government election period, the VLGA continued to deliver our *Local Women Leading Change* program, working closely with councils to engage with women in their community to give them the skills and knowledge to stand for council.

Partnering with Gender Lens Australia, the VLGA delivered more than 20 candidate development sessions around issues which directly impact women on the campaign trail. Topics included campaign tips, effective community engagement, as well as a focus on mental health and personal safety.

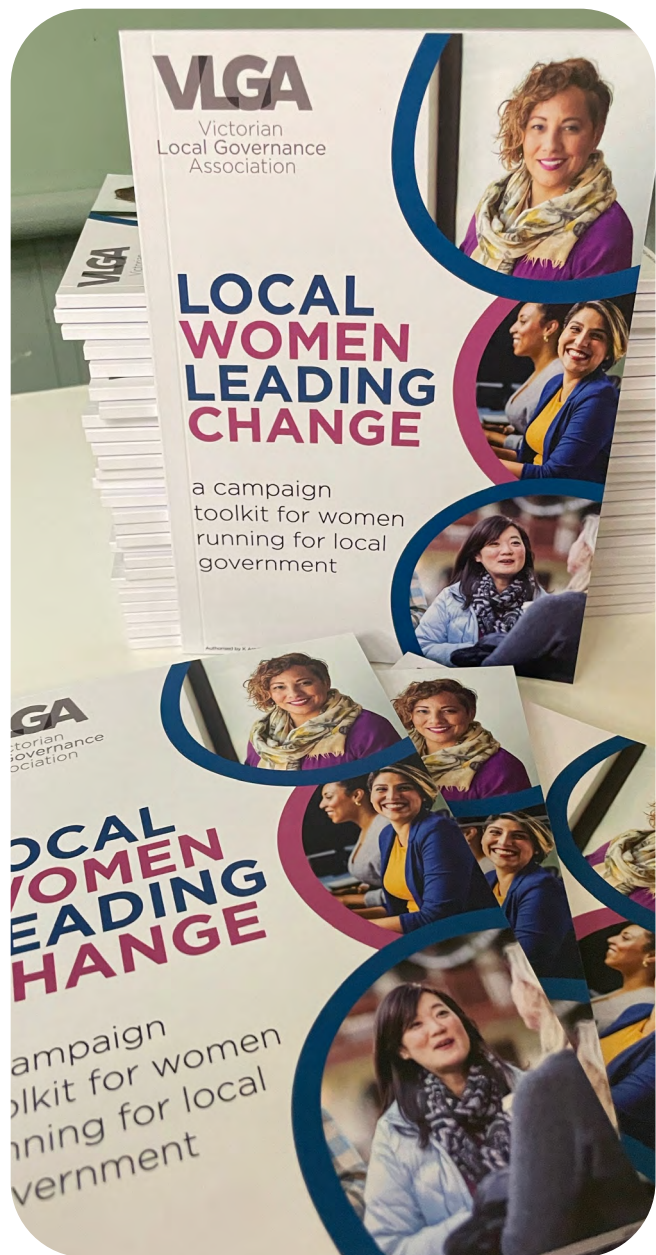
An updated edition of the *Local Women Leading Change* handbook – an essential resource for women candidates for the more than 25 years - was a critical component of this program. Drawing on real life experiences from current and former councillors, as well as key updates around the use of technology, engagement and changes to the *Local Government Act 2020*, the guide continued to be a highly regarded resource, downloaded more than 1000 times.

The VLGA will continue to champion women in the sector, with ongoing professional development, seminars and events to not only encourage more women to participate in local government, but also the retention of experienced and respected women councillors throughout the next term.

Our vision, and it's one shared by the Victorian Government, is to see 50% of women elected as councillors and mayors. The VLGA remains committed to achieving gender equality amongst councillors, starting with an increase to the number of women councillors elected at the 2024 elections.



LOCAL WOMEN LEADING CHANGE





VLGA Connect

The Victorian Local Governance Association provides key information to the local government sector and the Victorian community through our online and podcast interview series VLGA Connect.

VLGA Connect brings together subject matter experts from across the sector, providing updates and advice on key issues which affect all branches of the local government sector.

The VLGA Connect programs are broadcast across the VLGA YouTube channel and available for subscription via all major podcast providers.

In 2023/2024, our programs reached more than 21,400 people.

Headlining our programming is the weekly *TGU: The Governance Update* which provides a weekly recap of the latest in local government news. With a panel hosted by Chris Eddy joined by Tony Raunic and Julie Reid, TGU covers council news, legislative changes, and other key industry updates across 35 episodes. This year, a weekly segment covering governance issues affecting councils led by the VLGA's Rhys Thomas was added.

The *Global Executive Live Panel* series returned, bringing a global perspective to issues common to local government around the world. In addition to our long standing partnership with LGiU in the UK, we were also joined by panellists from Canada offering a unique perspective to these important topics. Across the year, panels included discussions on how harmonious decision making could set councils up for success, the importance of doing community engagement well, increasing gender equity and the effects of AI and technology on elections.

Our *In Conversation* series sat down with industry leaders and helped to introduce some key figures who were new in their roles to the sector. Interviews included Victorian Electoral Commissioner Sven Bluemmel, CEO of Recycling Victoria Tony Circelli and CEO of LGiU, Jonathan Carr-West.

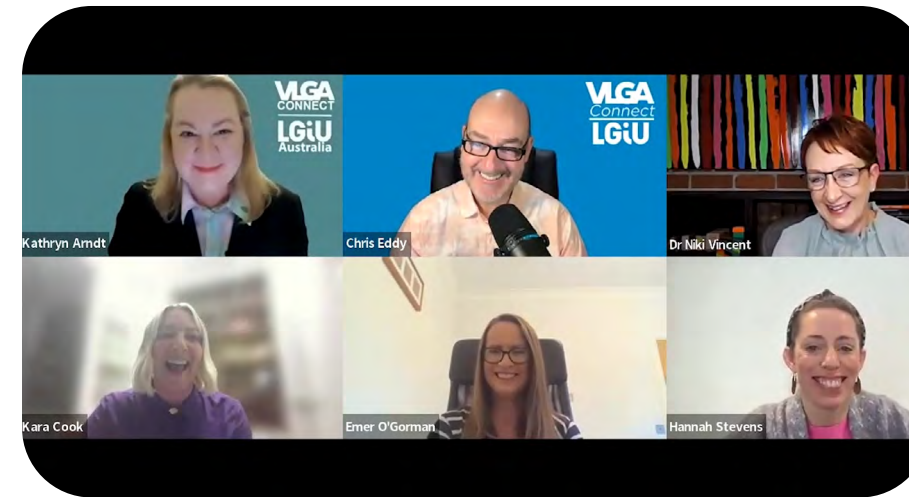
Our *Local Leaders* series continued throughout the first half of the year, interviewing mayors, deputy mayors and CEOs from member councils, discussing their lived experience in their roles and the challenges and opportunities faced within their municipalities and their hopes for the future.

The VLGA continued to provide insights and thought leadership to significant changes affecting the sector.

The release of Independent Broad-Based Anti-Corruption Commission (IBAC) Operation Sandon Special Report into the City of Casey, and the recommendations announced as part of it, had significant impacts on the way councils would and could operate in the future. The VLGA sat down with David Wolf, the Deputy Commissioner of IBAC following the release of the report, as well as other experts in across planning, law and policy for their insights.

The Victorian Government Housing Statement was another announcement where the VLGA led the conversation. Joined by industry leaders and experts in housing on a series of panels, the VLGA broke down the key issues in the statement, how it affects councils and their municipalities.

The VLGA thanks all our interviewees and panellists who have generously given their time and insights to our VLGA Series.





2023/2024 Treasurer's Report

As the 2022-23 financial year drew to a close, it became evident to management and the Board that financial pressures being experienced by councils and the state government were likely to lead to a period of financial constraint by the VLGA.

While membership income remained sound, event and program income were expected to decline as some well recognised programs, mainly our support for the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation's (VicHealth) Communities of Practice initiative ended and the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation's (VRGF) Building Councillor and Community Capacity prevention program was significantly reduced when the VRGF was dissolved and its work absorbed across a number of state government departments.

In addition, the Board supported management's proposals that our 2023-27 Strategic Plan required ongoing investment, as indicated in the Treasurer's 2022-23 report, particularly in our people including a return to a more stable level of staffing. These circumstances led to the Board approving a deficit budget for 2023-24 with the underlying objective that the VLGA return to surplus during the period of the strategic plan.

With the above in mind, it is pleasing to report that our deficit of \$189,448 was better than budget, achieved by increasing our investment earnings and controlling costs to less than budgeted.

In summary:

- Operating Income for the year decreased by 8.8% to \$1,372,244 (2022-23 \$1,504,003) due largely to the decline in event and program revenues consistent with reduced activity anticipated in the final year of a council term;
- Operating costs grew by 20% to \$1,561,692 (2022-23 \$1,305,373) with investment in people, mainly as a result of recruitment to a more stable level of staffing and to facilitate on-going delivery of our strategic plan, up by \$209,233;
- The Net Deficit for the year was \$189,448 (2022-23 surplus of \$198,630), which was better than budget expectations as noted earlier; and
- Despite the deficit for the year, our financial position remains positive with net assets of \$2,018,546 at 30 June 2024 (\$2,207,994 at the same point last year).

One of many exciting events this financial year was entering into a lease for our new premises in Melbourne city requiring application of the lease accounting standard resulting in a new asset, termed an intangible asset, totalling \$245,587 at 30 June 2024 offset by lease liabilities totalling \$250,232. The asset will be amortised over the five-year lease period and the liability will decline as we meet out lease payments.

The period ahead, as we continue our investment in the many initiatives identified in our strategic plan, should be looked forward to with optimism as we harness our resources in the best interests of our members, and we continue to support the local government sector focus on good local governance.

Finally, I wish to acknowledge outgoing Treasurer, Andrew Sloman, for his contribution in this role over the past few years.

Mike Blake
Treasurer

Board Members 2023/24



Cr Denise Massoud



Cr Susanne Newton



Ms Louise Hill



Mr Andrew Sloman



Cr Grace La Vella



Cr Josh Fergeus



Cr Steve Holland



Cr Annalivia Carli Hannan



Mr Mike Blake

Government & Risk Committee (GRC)

Independent Members



Ms Leanne Mulcahy



Ms Rita Harris

The VLGA board submits the financial accounts of the Victorian Local Governance Association for the financial year ended 30 June 2024.

Principal Activities

The principal activities of the association during the financial year were to provide support to members of the association.

Significant Changes

No significant change in the nature of these activities occurred during the year.

Operating Result

Year Ended 30 June 2024	Year Ended 30 June 2023
(\$189,448)	\$198,630

Board Members 2023/24

1 July 2023 - 30 June 2024

Board & Sub-Committee Members*	Board Meetings		Governance & Risk Meetings	
	Eligible to Attend	Attended	Eligible to Attend	Attended
Ms Louise Hill	7	7	6	6
Cr Susanne Newton	7	7	^	
Mr Andrew Sloman	7	6	6	6
Cr Grace La Vella	7	4	^	
Cr Denise Massoud	7	7	6	6
Cr Josh Fergeus	7	6	6	5
Cr Steve Holland	7	7	^	
Cr Annalivia Carli-Hannan	7	2	^	
Mr Mike Blake	7	6	^	3
Independent Committee Members**				
Ms Leanne Mulcahy	^	1	6	6
Ms Rita Harris	^	1	6	6

^ not a member

Sitting Fees (paid per meeting attended)	
President	\$586
Board members	\$448
Sub-Committee	\$448

Footnote:

* Sitting fees apply for board member attendance at board and sub-committee meetings

**Independent sub-committee members (non-board member)

Staff & Partners

Core Staff

- **Kathryn Arndt** - Chief Executive Officer
- **Rhys Thomas** - Head of Local Government Programs & Policy
- **Belinda Ryan** - Communication & Engagement Lead
- **Kathy Vlahopoulos** - Learning & Development Lead
- **Simon Harrex** - Programs & Policy Lead
- **Heather Falkiner** - Executive Assistant
- **Natalie Walker** - Acting Head of Strategy & Programs (temporary contract)

Grant Funded Staff

- **Simon Harrex** - Gambling Harm Policy Lead (until June 2024)
- **Davey Wilson** - Stepping Forward Project Officer (until December 2023)
- **Chris Mulcahy** - Project Support Officer (until December 2023)

Acknowledgment of Partner Organisations

- Child Friendly Cities & Communities (CFCC) Network
- Local Government Intelligence Unit (LGIU)
- Local Government Victoria (LGV)
- Local Government Inspectorate (LGI)
- Scanlon Foundation
- La Trobe University
- University of Melbourne
- Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation (VRGF)
- Welcoming Cities
- LGPro Vic
- LG News Roundup

Sponsors & Supporters

- Hunt & Hunt Lawyers
- Justitia Lawyers & Consultants

Our Members



VLGA

Victorian
Local Governance
Association

**The Victorian Local Governance
Association**

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