VLGA

Victorian
Local Governance
Association



Annual Report

2024 | 2025









Celebrating 30 years of the VLGA

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 of councils by the former Kennett state government. The formation of the VLGA stemmed from the need 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.

Beginning as an advocacy and advice body, the VLGA has transformed into a well-respected peak body for local government. Good governance practices are at the core of everything the VLGA does. The VLGA is the council and councillor support network.

It's primary aim is to respond to local democracy, campaign to protect the role and independence of local governments and involve local communities. It's role is just as relevant as it was 30 years ago, if not more so.

The VLGA - Our Story

The Victorian Local Governance Association (VLGA) is your councillor support network.

We support councils and elected representatives (councillors) to deliver positive outcomes for their local communities through high performance leadership and effective governance.

We are the only peak body nationally that has a singular focus on good governance and effective leadership.

For more than 30 years we have offered 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 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.

President's Report

It is my pleasure to bring you the 2024-25 Victorian Local Governance Association (VLGA) Annual Report.



Cr Grace La Vella

This year marked the commencement of a new council term. More than 2200 people nominated as candidates from across Victoria in the October 2024 Victorian Local Government elections.

Election analysis undertaken by the VLGA revealed that 57% of councillors elected were new to the role.

This year also marked the introduction of the Victorian Government's mandatory professional development requirements for mayors, deputy mayors and councillors which came into effect in October 2024.

These changes were first flagged by the then Local Government Minister, the Hon Melissa Horne MP, at the VLGA's November 2023 *FastTrack* annual leadership conference. In response to these new governance reforms, the VLGA responded swiftly and developed a comprehensive professional development (CPD) program that directly aligns with the mandatory requirements.

This, coupled with the VLGA's model CPD Policy, ensures councils can effectively plan their ongoing councillor professional development program over the duration of this council term, tailored directly to the learning needs of councillors.

In addition to launching the VLGA's ongoing CPD Program, we delivered 48 sessions of candidate training to 20 councils prior to the election and launched an annual VLGA Mayoral Leadership Program for mayors and deputy mayors.

These programs have been central to the key objectives of the VLGA's 2023-2027 Strategic Plan and continue to ensure we are best placed to support councils and councillors in good governance and effective leadership.

This term has also presented additional challenges with councillors and council staff increasingly tackling issues stemming from rising levels of negative, abusive and sometimes threatening rhetoric.

The VLGA's first ever Victorian Councillor Census, launched this year, revealed a significant number of councillors did not expect the level of hostility they encountered, especially from other councillors, with 41% of women and 26% of men regularly experienced threatening or intimidating behaviour from another councillor.

It was disappointing to see that bullying and harassment were identified as key factors for councillors not standing for re-election, particularly women.

As part of our commitment to capturing and tracking councillor demographics, attitudes and key challenges to local council governance over time, the VLGA will conduct the Census annually.

This is an opportunity for all councillors in Victoria to directly inform sector advocacy, policy and Victorian local government discussions.

This year marks 30 years since the VLGA was founded. From inception to now we have supported councillors to be high calibre leaders and ethical decision makers.

As the Victorian Councillor support network, it is vital that we continue to foster and support councillors who are new to the sector this year. The launch of the VLGA's Young Councillor Network (YCN) has been a beacon of support for this next generation of councillors, giving them the chance to learn from one another, exchange experiences and ideas and create relationships across the sector.

While it is easy to dwell on the challenges facing local government at present, it is also important to celebrate the significant role the sector plays in advocating for communities and delivering better outcomes for the people that live and work there.

We were delighted to welcome the Minister for Local Government, the Hon Nick Staikos MP, to the VLGA's *FastTrack* event in May. It was reassuring to hear how passionate he is about the sector and his commitment to enhancing the working environment for councillors. We look forward to continuing to work closely with the state government to ensure local democracy is upheld.

While the local government sector will continue to face pressures as our communities grow, evolve and diversify, it is always inspiring to see what can happen when we build strong relationships, solid foundations and work together.

The strength of the sector and the VLGA's work in representing the interests of local government is made stronger through our partnerships and work with member councils.

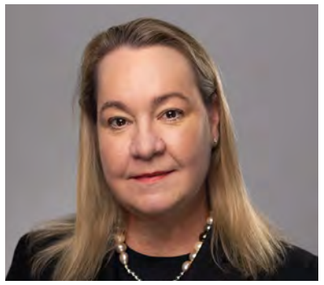
We remain committed to ensuring our members are well supported, and we thank them for their ongoing support.

Thank you also to Kathryn and the team at the VLGA for your dedicated and unwavering support of the sector.

Finally, thank you to everyone I have had the pleasure to serve with on the VLGA Board for the last 4 years. Your work and leadership of the VLGA have ensured it remains a trusted, respected and strong representative voice.

Cr Grace La Vella
VLGA President

CEO's Report



Kathryn Arndt

The role of the Victorian Local Governance Association (VLGA) in strengthening and supporting councils and councillors to build respectful culture, improve conduct, and demonstrate good local governance has never been more important than right now.

The sector is experiencing ongoing and significant change. The landscape elected representatives are working in is different, the expectation from community is rising, and new governance and integrity reforms are ensuring more attention is focused on conduct, councillor professional development, and model governance rules.

This year marks 30 years since the VLGA began championing local democracy.

Over that time, the organisation has established itself as the peak body for councils, with a singular focus on demonstrating and upholding good local governance. We have built a reputation as being the leading voice for councillorsand a key provider of training and professional skills development.

During the past 12 months the VLGA has continued to develop and deliver programs and services which support our members and best position them to respond to the challenges of the sector and their communities.

The VLGA is the only peak body currently offering a complete program of councillor professional development modules, directly aligned with the Victorian Government mandatory requirements introduced in October 2024.

In this local government election year, we delivered a comprehensive Candidate Development Program and Councillor Induction Program, held the inaugural VLGA Mayoral Leadership Program, and rolled out an extensive Councillor Professional Development Program.

The VLGA has now established a Faculty of Facilitators – a highly experienced team of local government professionals, who deliver customised professional development programs for councils and councillors on behalf of the VLGA. The faculty includes experts in various fields including former council CEOs, finance and strategic planning executives, and leaders in communications and conflict resolution.

The VLGA strongly believes that to effectively build more resilient communities it is vital we work in partnership, not only with councils but also with state and federal governments, other peak bodies and key integrity agencies.

At our *FastTrack* annual leadership conference in May, the VLGA was instrumental in bringing together people from the local government sector in Victoria, including Local Government Minister The Hon Nick Staikos, Lord Mayor of Melbourne Nick Reece, the Victorian Ombudsman Marlo Baragwanath, Chief Municipal Inspector Michael Stefanovic from the Local Government Inspectorate, former councillors, CEOs and Administrators, the Auditor-General's office, and Alison Byrne, CEO of IBAC, to share their collective wisdom and insights around the theme *Leading with Integrity*.

Across three panels, participants took a deep dive into the key issues which have a significant impact on the role of councillors and councils, including ways to best manage the CEO and councillor relationship, ensuring high standards of conduct and integrity, and the collaboration between the local government sector and oversight bodies.

While the day focused on how councils can lead their communities with integrity and good governance, what was perhaps more evident is how strong the sector is when there is a unified focus on working together and learning from each other. The VLGA remains committed to partnering with others to achieve better outcomes for the sector and the people elected to represent it.

The VLGA has been empowering women to become elected representatives for almost 20 years. We know our work is having a positive impact.

Our election analysis showed that VLGA member councils had better outcomes when it came to gender representation than non-member councils. The average number of women councillors at member councils is currently sitting at 46%, compared to 38% at non-member councils.

In lead up to the October local government elections, and as part of our ongoing commitment to achieve gender parity across elected representatives by the next election, the VLGA tailored training modules in recognition of the unique challenges faced by women councillors, from sexual harassment to gender-based backlash on the campaign trail.

The VLGA's *Local Women Leading Change* (LWLC) 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, the VLGA delivered community leadership programs and diversity and inclusion training to councils across Victoria as part of an effort to upskill and prepare prospective future councillors.

The VLGA continued its partnership with Gender Lens Australia, working with them to complete a detailed analysis of election results, as well as the launch Edition 8 of the VLGA's *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. The launch of this handbook was one of the many highlights for the VLGA this year.

In other sector leading work, we conducted the first-ever VLGA *Victorian Councillor Census* in July 2024.

This was the first Census to be conducted in the sector in more than a decade.

Over 300 councillors from across Victoria responded to the Census – an impressive response rate of more than 50 per cent, demonstrating a strong desire and a need for this data to be captured.

The Census looked to address the opportunities and barriers for councillors, their motivations for standing, any factors influencing their decision to stand or not stand for re-election, and identified areas where councillors required additional support.

The findings were released in March 2025, addressing a significant information gap and providing great insights into how the sector can respond and be better placed to support and empower councils and councillors to be successful in their roles.

This valuable data will help inform, influence and lead important conversations across the local government sector and will allow supports to be targeted appropriately, and issues to be addressed and responded to proactively. It has also been used to help inform the VLGA's program of work.

The VLGA will conduct the Census annually to capture and track councillor demographics, attitudes and key challenges for local council governance over time.

The VLGA continued to deliver its member-exclusive series of Lunch and Learn sessions, with topics based on key issues impacting councillors – such as navigating difficult conversations, diversity and inclusion, and community engagement and advocacy. 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.

The *VLGA Connect* series continues to be a highly regarded information resource for the sector, keeping councillors and those working in the sector informed about the latest news, issues, and reforms.

This year *The Governance Update* (TGU) was rebranded to *VLGA Connect News* as part of the series new format. The weekly news program also incorporates the VLGA's Local Leaders series, where CEOs, mayors and deputy mayors share their insights on key issues affecting both the sector and their communities.

This, coupled with the VLGA's *In Conversation* and live panel series, has provided an opportunity for key decision makers and industry leaders to provide in-depth analysis about current and emerging issues affecting local government.

The VLGA's *Global Live Executive Panel* series has gone from strength to strength with registrations averaging 150 people for the four panels held this year. The panels have covered some of the big issues impacting local government around the globe, including Civility in Public Life, Growing the Local Economy, and Building the Council Workforce of Tomorrow. This year marks five years since we invited the Local Government Information Unit (LGiU) in the UK to partner with us in the delivery of these truly global panel sessions. Attendees have been from Europe, South America, Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand.

As always, I would like to thank and acknowledge Chris Eddy for his work in hosting the VLGA Connect series and our FastTrack annual leadership conference. Chris' knowledge, insights and experience working in the local government sector, ensures these programs are a trusted source of news and information for our members. I would also like to thank John Lloyd Fillingham (JLF) for his work producing and editing these programs.

As we prepare to begin the second year of this council term, I would like to acknowledge the important work being undertaken across the sector. The changing nature of local government posed many challenges this year. It was a challenging introduction for new councillors as well, navigating the additional councillor professional development requirements, along with the development of Council Plans and Budgets. Your commitment to the sector and your communities should be commended and we look forward to supporting you as you continue your councillor journey over the next 12 months and beyond.

I would like to thank and acknowledge outgoing VLGA President, Cr Grace La Vella and outgoing Board Members Susanne Newton, Denise Massoud and Annalivia Carli-Hannan. Thank you to the VLGA Board for their guidance, input, and support across the year.

To the VLGA staff, thank you for your passion and commitment. Working in local government requires agility and a strong commitment to work together to support our members and respond to changing needs and you are to be congratulated for your contribution to supporting the sector and our members over the past 12 months.

In closing, I would like to extend my sincere thanks to our VLGA member councils and supporters. As a membership-based organisation, the strength of the sector and our work in representing the interests of local government is only made stronger through our partnerships and work with member councils.

It is your support that has allowed us to continue to champion a positive working landscape for councillors for more than 30 years, one underpinned by good governance, effective leadership and respectful relationships. We remain committed to supporting councillors and the people that support councillors to perform at the highest level, strengthening governance practices and helping to enhance the outcomes for the communities you represent.

We look forward to continuing to work with you and support you as we enter the second year of this council term.

Kathryn Arndt
Chief Executive Officer



FastTrack: Leading with Integrity Panel 2: Integrity in Action Upholding Councillor Conduct and Accountability

Minister for Local Government The Hon Nick Staikos MP delivers the keynote address at *FastTrack*.

Highlights from 2024-2025

- Delivered more than 45 induction sessions to Victorian Councils between November 2024 year and February 2025
- 20 Victorian Councils participated in our candidate development sessions
- 67% of Community Leadership Program participants were elected to council in the 2024 Victorian Local Government election
- Delivered the first Victorian Councillor Census in more than a decade
- More than 50% of Victorian councillors provided feedback as part of the VLGA Victorian Councillor Census
- Delivered training to 29 mayors and deputy mayors in line with the new mandatory requirements as part of the VLGA Mayoral Leadership Program
- Launched a comprehensive ongoing Councillor Professional Development Program, which aligns directly with the Victorian Government mandatory guidelines
- Broadcast 43 VLGA Connect episodes featuring more than 30 guests
- Continued to advocate for better protection from rising levels of negative, abusive and sometimes threatening rhetoric
- Responded to more than 5 parliamentary inquiries and submissions
- Established the Faculty of Facilitators (a team of highly skilled and experienced local government professionals), who deliver customised professional development for councillors and council officers
- Successfully delivered our annual leadership conference FastTrack to councillors, mayors and senior council leaders from across Victoria
- Launched the 8th edition of the Local Women Leading Change Handbook
- Delivered four Lunch and Learn sessions exclusive for member councillors
- Launched the Alumni Network for former councillors
- Launched the Young Councillor Network to support councillors aged under 40
- Held four Global Executive Live Panels in partnership with LGIU (UK)

Professional Development & Events

Candidate Support Program

In the lead up to the 2024 local government elections, the VLGA continued its programs to support candidates on their election journey and prepare them for life as a councillor.

These workshops gave prospective councillors a head start understanding local government and the role of councils and councillors in the community.

By preparing more informed candidates and voters, these programs work to attract and support high calibre, ethical candidates who are ready to serve and support their communities.

Supporting the Victorian Government's push towards gender equity in elected representation, this program of work included a series of workshops tailored to support women looking to stand for election. For almost two decades the VLGA's *Local Women Leading Change* (LWLC) program has examined the gendered challenges to becoming a local representative, and provided support and strategies to overcome them.

In delivering all of our programs, the VLGA worked closely with councils to ensure they were relevant to the specific needs of each region in which they were presented.

20 councils

45 sessions

98% member participants

2 community leadership programs

67% clp participants elected



Councillor Induction Program

Following the introduction of new local government reforms by the Victorian Government in October 2024, it is now a requirement that all councillors complete an induction training program that satisfies the obligations set out in the *Local Government (Governance and Integrity Regulations) 2020* within a period of four months of swearing in.

The VLGA designed and launched a Councillor Induction Program in November that specifically aligned with the new mandatory training guidelines, providing councillors with the skills and information they need to set them up for success.

The VLGA invited councils to partner with them to deliver councillor induction training that was customised to the individual needs of each council.

The VLGA delivered more than 45 sessions to Victorian Councils between November 2024 year and February 2025, further cementing it as the leading training provider to Victorian councillors, mayors and deputy mayors.

99% member participants

21 councils

48 sessions

Councillor Professional Development

In February 2025 the VLGA launched its full program of ongoing councillor professional development to be delivered over the next four years.

To ensure all councils can comply with the Victorian Government's mandatory requirements, no matter their size or location, our professional development program combines cost effective and time efficient intensives, online modules and bespoke training.

The VLGA has identified 13 individual modules for delivery in Year 1 and has mapped out its full program of mandated modules until the end of this council term.

This ensures that councils are fully aware of their obligations, the costs involved and can factor council professional development into their budget planning.

The VLGA is currently the only peak body offering a complete program of modules that directly align with the mandatory requirements.

Our professional development programs are designed to enhance councillors capabilities and ensure elected representatives are well equipped to represent their communities.

Faculty of Facilitators

To ensure councils and councillors across Victoria are receiving professional development specifically tailored to their needs, the VLGA has established a highly credentialled Faculty of Facilitators.

Our faculty is an experienced team of experienced local government professionals, who deliver customised professional development programs for councils and councillors on behalf of the VLGA.

Diverse Expertise

The faculty comprises a wide range of professionals with expertise in various aspects of local government operations and leadership.

Experienced Professionals

The facilitators include former council CEOs, finance and strategic planning experts, and leaders in communication, conflict resolution, and governance.

Customised Training

The faculty collaborates with councils to tailor training programs to address their unique needs and challenges.

Supporting Councillor Development

The faculty plays a crucial role in enhancing councillor capabilities and ensuring they are well-equipped to serve their communities.

Alignment with Mandatory Training

The VLGA's programs are aligned with the Victorian Government's mandatory training requirements for councillors.

Focus on Good Governance

The VLGA's training programs aim to inspire and support councils and councillors in practicing good governance and achieving positive outcomes for their communities.



Local Women Leading Change handbook launch attendees capture the moment.



Commissioner for Gender Equality in the Public Sector Dr Niki Vincent.



Tanja Kovac leads the panel.



Local Women Leading Change handbook launch at the Richmond Town Hall.

Local Women Leading Change

The VLGA has a long and proud history of being a leader in gender equality, promoting the benefits of balanced gender representation and delivering high quality programs and resources which improve gender equality outcomes for the sector.

The VLGA has been supporting women's participation in local government and decision-making since the establishment of the Victorian Local Government's Womens Charter by the VLGA and other sector leaders almost 30 years ago.

In the lead up to the 2024 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.

Our election analysis last year shows VLGA member councils had better outcomes when it came to gender representation than non-member councils.

The average number of women councillors at member councils is currently sitting at 46%, compared to 38% at non-member councils.

Partnering with Gender Lens Australia, the VLGA delivered more than 20 candidate development sessions around issues which directly impact women.

An updated edition of the *Local Women Leading Change* handbook – an essential resource for women candidates for the more than 25 years - was released in July 2024. The guide was downloaded more than 1000 times during the election period.

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.



FastTrack Panel 1: Fostering the CEO-Councillor Relationship



Victorian Ombudsman Marlo Baragwanath



FastTrack attendees with the Minister for Local Government.



Lehmo addresses attendees.



Cr Peter Maynard.

FASTTRACK 2025
LEADING WITH INTEGRITY

The success of the local government sector is dependent on the willingness for key agencies, councils and other tiers of government to work together.

At our *FastTrack* annual leadership conference held in May 2025, the VLGA was instrumental in bringing together people from across Local Government in Victoria including Local Government Minister Nick Staikos, Lord Mayor of Melbourne Nick Reece, the Victorian Ombudsman Marlo Baragwanath, Chief Municipal Inspector Michael Stefanovic from the Local Government Inspectorate, former councillors, CEOs and administrators, Peter Graham from the Auditor-General's office and Alison Byrne, CEO of IBAC to share their collective wisdom and insights on the topic *Leading with Integrity*.

Across three panels, participants took a deep dive into the following topics:

- Fostering a strong Councillor-CEO relationship
- Integrity in Action: Upholding Councillor Conduct and Accountability
- Preventing Fraud and Corruption: Strengthening Intergovernmental Collaboration.

While the day focused on how councils can lead their communities with integrity and good governance, what was evident was how strong the sector is when there is a unified focus on working together and learning from each other.

The VLGA through the strong relationships it has built with key stakeholders across the sector and looks forward to continuing to work together to achieve positive outcomes for councils, elected representatives and the communities they represent.

Mayoral Leadership Program

The VLGA held its inaugural Mayoral Leadership Program in December 2024.

The program was attended by 29 mayors and deputy mayors from across Victoria and directly aligned with the mandatory regulatory requirements outlined by the Victorian Government.

The full-day program provided mayors and deputy mayors with the skills they need to fulfill their respective roles with a high degree of competency, as well as satisfying the legislative requirement to undertake training within one month of being elected mayor.

The Mayoral Leadership Program prepares mayors and deputy mayors to lead effectively throughout their term, looking at the role and relationships as well as the leadership skills required to ensure good governance.

An impressive list of experienced trainers and facilitators were engaged to deliver this program including media training specialist and journalist Doug Weller, leading local government lawyer and public law expert Tony Raunic and employment lawyer and trained mediator Melissa Scadden

The Mayoral Leadership Program covered the following key topics:

- Understanding the powers and duties associated with the positions of mayor and deputy mayor
- Working as a leadership team with elected councillors
- The support available to the mayor and deputy mayor
- Building and maintaining relationships between councillors
- Leading the councillor group and resolving conflicts
- The role of the mayor in the Model Councillor Code of Conduct
- The importance of establishing a good working relationship
- Communication and role clarity between the mayor and CEO
- Leading the CEO's performance review process
- Communication and public speaking
- Speaking to the media
- Effective advocacy
- Performing civic and ceremonial duties
- Chairing meetings



Melissa Scadden, Justitia Lawyers

"We work in a very diverse sector but at the end of the day we all experience very similar issues, very similar challenges and it's actually really validating to know that you're not the only one."



Doug Weller leads the *Mayoral Leadership Program* Strategic Communications session.



Indigo Shire Council Deputy Mayor Cr Jane Dowsley.



Sharing experiences is a key part of the day.

The Victorian Councillor Census

The first-ever VLGA Victorian Councillor Census was conducted in July 2024 in collaboration with QDOS Research, who were responsible for collecting the data and ensuring the complete anonymity of respondents.

The findings of the VLGA's first ever Victorian Councillor Census were launched in March at an event held at the Lyceum Club in Melbourne with about 50 people in attendance.

Through targeted stakeholder engagement we built two strong expert panels for the event.

Panel 1 consisted of Peter Brasher Local Government Inspectorate, Dawn Bray Local Government Inspectorate, Mike Gooey Executive Director Local Government Victoria, John Armitage Director of QDOS Research and Simon Harrex from the VLGA.

Panel 2 consisted of Dr Josh Fergeus (City of Monash), Cr Jane Karslake (Glen Eira City Council), Mayor Cr Jack Kowarzik (Cardinia Shire Council) and former Cr Lauren Dempsey (Northern Grampians Shire Council).

The Census addressed a significant information gap and provided the local government sector in Victoria with the tangible data it needed to respond and be better placed to support and empower councillors to be successful in their roles in the future.

One of the most significant findings of the Census was identifying the challenges and barriers currently preventing women and men from re-standing as councillors.

The Census is a critical tool that has already directly informed the VLGA's sector advocacy and our program of work moving forward.



Cr Jane Karslake and Cr Jack Kowarzik



Dr Josh Fergeus



Launching the 2024 Victorian Councllor Census results.



Exceutive Director Local Government Victoria Mike Gooey



The councillor panel discusses their experiences.

The Census in Focus

- More than 300 councillors across Victoria responded to the Census.
- This was a response rate of more than 50 per cent which demonstrates the desire and need for this data to be captured.
- The average age of respondents was 57 years.
- This was the first time a census of this kind had been undertaken in the sector in more than a decade.



Former Northern Grampians councillor Lauren Dempsey.



Representatives from LGI, LGV, QDOS and the VLGA discuss the Census results

What has the Census told us?

- The primary motivators to become a councillor were community service and a desire to enact change.
- 47% of respondents had served as a councillor for between three and four years.
- The average weekly hours spent on council related activities was 29.2 hours.
- A large percentage did not have a clear understanding of the strategic nature of the role initially.
- Remuneration was not seen as commensurate to the time demands of the job.
- 69% of those surveyed agree that councillors should be entitled to claim childcare costs as part of performing council duties.
- 73% of those surveyed would recommend the role of councillor to others.



Average time each week spent on council activities

29.2 hours



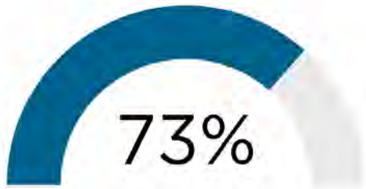
64%

find the time commitment required is higher or much higher than expected



73%

believe the time demands are not appropriate for the renumeration



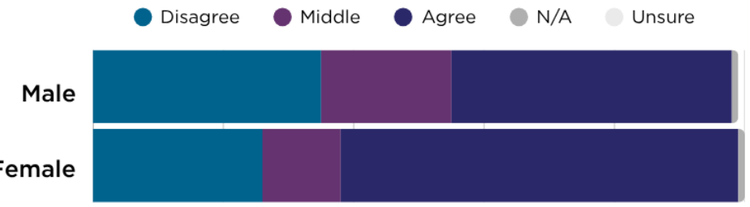
73%

would recommend the role of councillor to others

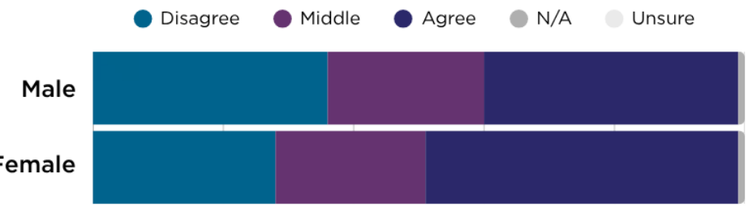
Civility Issues in Focus

- A significant number of councillors did not expect the level of hostility they encountered, especially from other councillors.
- More than 80% of respondents had experienced threatening or intimidating behaviour in their role as a councillor.
- 41% of women and 26% of men regularly experienced threatening or intimidating behaviour from another councillor.
- Bullying and harassment were identified as key factors for councillors, particularly women councillors, not standing for re-election.

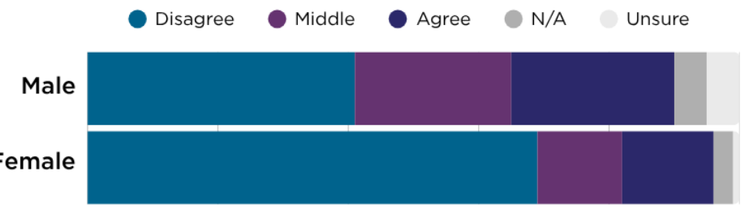
I received a higher level of hostility than I expected from some other Councillors



I received a higher level of hostility than I expected from some members of the public



There are good dispute resolution mechanisms in place to deal with conflict between Councillors



What they said...

"It's important that our council representatives are diverse in race, gender, age and ability."

"The councillor role is rewarding and a privilege, bringing huge learning opportunities."

"This role provides a unique opportunity to impact one's own community in a positive and constructive way."

"There has been terrible behaviour by other councillors, which has had an impact on councillors, staff and the organisation, however there is little that can be done to deal with it."

"A better knowledge of what services council is required to deliver under the act as against what services council might elect to provide."

"I wish I knew and understood meeting procedures, governance rules and Councillor Code of Conduct way better than I do now."

"It's made me averse to posting on social media. I no longer do so, as it invites negative feedback and hostility from anti-council groups and individuals."

"We need better, more educated people with the desire to assist the community"

Looking Ahead

The Census has allowed the VLGA and the Victorian Government to identify trends in the data provided and ensure that support programs are targeted appropriately, and issues are addressed and responded to proactively.

Regular collection of this data will provide an accurate pulse check on the challenges elected representatives are facing and help identify what additional support or professional development is needed to ensure councils are operating efficiently and effectively.

The VLGA plans to conduct the Victorian Councillor Census annually.

Our Plan to Respond



Expand Local Women Leading Change to empower more women to nominate in 2028.



Develop an EAP Register for councils to provide wellbeing support for councillors.



Formalise the VLGA's advice network to provide councillors with expert advice.



Formalise Councillor Professional Development to meet the mandatory guidelines.



Expand community leadership programs to encourage diverse and informed candidates in 2028.



Repeat the Victorian Councillor Census annually to identify trends and target support.

Advocacy

Our Role in Reducing Gambling Harm

The VLGA continues to deliver on the 'Building Council Capacity' project, a long-standing project that was renewed and funded by the Department of Health for the 24/25-25/26 financial years.

The project seeks to maintain the standing of the VLGA as a leading organisation offering Victorian councils support in responding to issues of gambling harm in their municipality.

This is achieved through:

- Providing councils (councillors and officers) access to information focused on reducing the risk of harm from gambling.
- Supporting councils in the response to gambling licence applications.
- Identify important stakeholders and offer relevant information and assistance.
- Providing information and updates to the local government sector on gambling.
- Working with councillors and council officers in the development of gambling harm focused actions that are aligned with good governance and visible in council policy and planning.

Throughout the 24/25 financial year, the VLGA has been instrumental in supporting councils by providing key information that includes sector updates, resource sharing and new research.

This specifically comprises applying a local government lens and highlighting and interpreting the information applicable to the local government sector.

The VLGA has provided submissions to all relevant consultations, supported the review or update of council gambling harm focused policy, and guided council in the response to gambling license applications.

A continuing offer to VLGA members has again been the Local Government Working Group on Gambling (LGWGOG). With 5 group meetings across the year, the VLGA brought together a high standard of guest speakers and presentations this year, provided an overview of VLGA's work in gambling harm reduction, and remained a trusted source of information for officers and councillors keen to learn more about the working being carried out across the sector and the supports in place for councils working to reduce gambling harm in their communities.

The VLGA also runs the Local Government Gambling Network (LGGN) communities of practice for council officers, working with councils to navigate issues and guide them in responses and work regarding gambling.

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 advocate on behalf of our council members.

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 Forum
- Local Government Performance Reporting Steering Committee
- Gender Equality Advisory Committee (GEAC)
- EPA Waste and Recycling Industry Reference Group
- Welcoming Cities Advisory Committee
- Local Government Advisory Committee – Recycling Victoria
- Child-Friendly Cities and Communities (CFCC) Network
- Local Government Inspectorate's External Stakeholder Working Group - Councillor Conduct Framework Review

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

Submissions

- Inquiry into the Adequacy of the Legislative Framework for the Independent Broad-based Anti-Corruption Commission
- Victoria's Lobbying Reform Consultation
- Inquiry into fraud and corruption control in local government: a follow up of two Auditor-General reports
- Victorian Independent Remuneration Tribunal
- Statutory Review of the Rate Cap Mechanism

Networks



Young Councillor Network

The VLGA's Young Councillor Network (YCN) was launched at the start of the 2024 Council term in response to feedback from our members that more support was needed for younger elected representatives.

This feedback was supported by the findings of the VLGA Victorian Councillor Census 2024 which identified that younger councillors often experienced additional challenges in performing councillor duties, including balancing work and study commitments, parenting responsibilities and social and community expectations.

The VLGA YCN is a network that is focused on supporting councillors aged 40 years old and under from Victorian councils.

The network offers a safe and supportive environment for members to come together for bespoke professional development, to share challenges, learnings and ideas, and to problem solve and network throughout the council term. The network currently has 39 members.

Child Friendly Cities & Community

The Child Friendly Cities and Community (CFFC) group and charter is supported and managed by the VLGA. This includes overseeing the advisory group, supporting the co-chairs, managing resources, and administration and promotion of network meetings.

This extends to marketing of the CFCC and connecting it with local government by championing the CFCC charter principles of working alongside children to empower them to act as active and engaged citizens and share their unique perspective with their communities.

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 senior governance officers to provide input into policy development and implementation, sector advocacy, and support and networking opportunities.

The GAN has helped councils to navigate and unpack the impact of the changes reforms to the *Local Government Act 2020*, 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.

VLGA Alumni



The VLGA Alumni is a network for former local government councillors, launched at the beginning of this council term.

It provides an opportunity for former elected representatives to stay connected with the local government sector, share knowledge, and access exclusive events and professional development opportunities offered by the VLGA at member rates.

Communications & Engagement

6.39%
average post engagement rate

114,965
social media reach

198,663
post impressions

51,603
website pages viewed

14,797
YouTube video views

43
podcast episodes released

96 days, 10 hours
total watch time

17,789
unique website visitors

11,037
social media followers

10,096
podcast downloads

575
social media posts

39,080
post reach



Chris Eddy and Tony Raunic dissect the week's local government news.

VLGA Connect

This year the VLGA launched a new format for its VLGA Connect (weekly podcast).

The news format, combining one-on-one interviews, with panel discussions on key issues impacting the sector has resonated well with audiences. Our engagement reach has more than doubled since the new program format was introduced in January 2025, with an average of 350 downloads each week.

VLGA Connect News has further cemented itself as a trusted source for local government news and information.

We receive regular requests from councils for their mayor or ceo to appear on the program and the podcast continues to be a great platform for promoting VLGA events and councillor professional development.

This year we have disseminated 43 episodes of VLGA Connect News.



Chris Eddy and Kathryn Arndt interview
Local Government Minister Nick Staikos MP.

Treasurer's Report



Mike Blake, Treasurer

Consistent with the VLGA's 2023-27 Strategic Plan and its growth initiatives, the Board approved a budget deficit for the 2024-25 financial year. The end of year result was a $98,069 loss – which was less than the originally approved budget deficit of $157,753.

The deficit included costs associated with the investment of $20,000 in the first of its kind Victorian Councillor Census. In anticipation of declining program and project income, the Association maximised its investment in term deposits resulting in stronger interest income.

Evident from the Statement of Surplus/ (Deficit) and other Comprehensive Income is that the Association remains heavily reliant on revenues from membership subscriptions. The main increase in expense compared to 2023-24, other than employee costs, was in amounts paid to fee for service consultants engaged to support the VLGA's candidate and councillor training program in addition to investment made to retain external financial supports to assist in financial and budget management and external human resources capability to support organisational growth and development.

Despite the deficit of $98,069, the Association's net assts remain solid at $1,920,477, meaning that the VLGA is in a sound position to continue investment in strategies aimed at supporting governance improvements and capability in the local government sector in Victoria - and growth in membership and reach.

The Board approved budget for 2025-26 anticipates a deficit arising from the need to invest in the 2023-27 Strategic Plan initiatives, including a major upgrade of the VLGA's website and digital platforms. This deficit is affordable but will continue to be carefully managed and be a focus of the planned mid-period review of the Strategic Plan.

Mike Blake
Treasurer

The VLGA board submits the financial accounts of the Victorian Local Governance Association for the financial year ended 30 June 2025.

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 2025	Year Ended 30 June 2024
($98,069)	($189,448)

Board Members 2024/25

1 July 2024 - 30 June 2025

Board & Sub-Committee Members*	Board Meetings		Governance & Risk Meetings	
	Eligible to Attend	Attended	Eligible to Attend	Attended
Ms Louise Hill	9	9	6	6
Cr Susanne Newton	3	3	^	
Mr Andrew Sloman	7	6	6	6
Cr Grace La Vella	9	8	5	5
Cr Denise Massoud	3	3	3	3
Cr Josh Fergeus	2	2	^	
Cr Janet Pearce	9	9	3	3
Cr Annalivia Carli-Hannan	3	1	^	
Cr Lana Formoso	9	9	^	1
Mr Mike Blake	9	9	5	5
Independent Committee Members**				
Ms Leanne Mulcahy	^		6	6
Ms Rita Harris	^	4	6	6

^ not a member

Sitting Fees (paid per meeting attended)	
President / GRC Chair	$604
Board members	$461
Sub-Committee	$461

Footnote:

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

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

Our Board

Board Members 2024/25



Cr Denise Massoud
(to October 2024)



Cr Susanne Newton
(to October 2024)



Cr Grace La Vella



Cr Josh Fergeus
(from November 2024)



Cr Janet Pearce



Cr Annalivia Carli Hannan



Cr Lana Formoso



Mr Mike Blake



Mr Andrew Sloman
(to 6 June 2025)



Ms Louise Hill

Governance & Risk Committee (GRC)



Ms Leanne Mulcahy
(Independent Member)



Ms Rita Harris
(Independent Member)



Cr Josh Fergeus
(from November 2024)



Cr Janet Pearce



Mr Mike Blake



Ms Louise Hill

Our Members

Baw Baw Shire Council
Borough of Queenscliffe
Brimbank City Council
Buloke Shire Council
Campaspe Shire Council
Cardinia
City of Casey
Central Goldfields Shire Council
City of Darebin
East Gippsland Shire Council
Gannawarra Shire Council
Golden Plains Shire
City of Glen Eira
Glen Eira City Council
Greater Dandenong City of Opportunity
Greater Shepparton
Hepburn Shire Council
Hobsons Bay City Council
Horsham Rural City Council
Hume City Council
Indigo Shire Council
City of Kingston
Knox City Council
Loddon Shire
Macedon Ranges Shire Council
Manningham
Mansfield Shire
Maribyrnong City Council
City of Melbourne
City of Melton
Merri-bek City Council
Mildura Rural City Council
Mitchell Shire Council
moira Shire
City of Monash
Moorabool Shire Council
Mornington Peninsula Shire
Mount Alexander Shire Council
Moyne Shire
Murrindindi Shire Council
Nillumbik The Green Wedge Shire
Northern Grampians Shire Council
City of Port Phillip
Pyrenees Shire Council
South Gippsland Shire Council
Shire of Strathbogie
West Wimmera Shire Council
City of Whitehorse
City of Whittlesea
wyndhamcity city. coast. country
City of Yarra
Yarriambiack Shire Council

VLGA

Victorian
Local Governance
Association

The Victorian Local Governance Association

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celebrating 30 years