



Maribyrnong People and Participation Strategy 2021-2026

Acknowledgment

We acknowledge the Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of this nation. We acknowledge the people of the Kulin nation as traditional custodians of the lands on which Maribyrnong City Council is located and where we conduct our business. We are committed to honouring Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' unique cultural and spiritual relationships to the land, waters and seas and their contribution to society.

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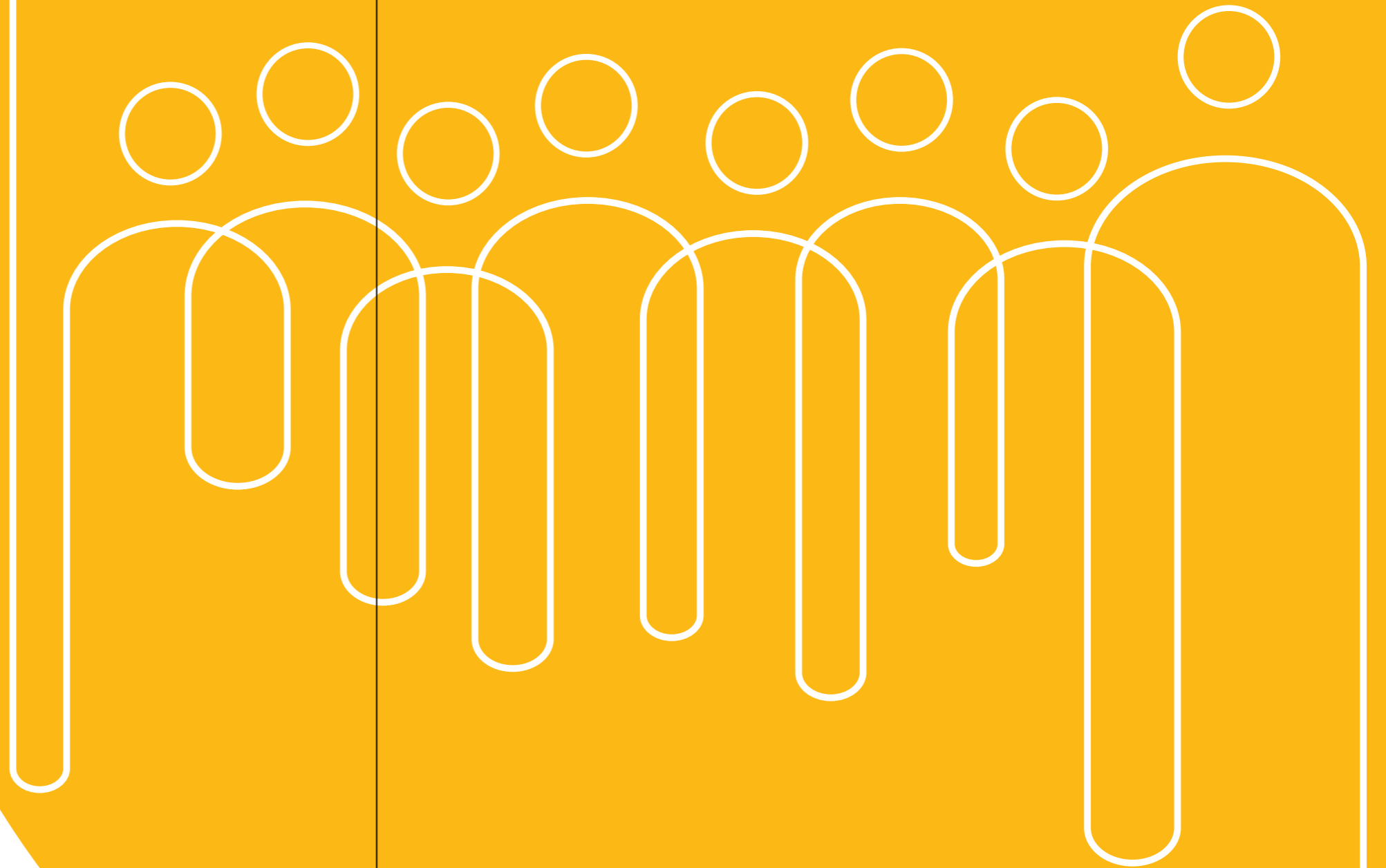
Foreword

Every day across our community, people are doing amazing things to contribute and participate.

Whether it's volunteering to address the problems and challenges faced by our communities or the environment, or helping a neighbour, friend, or family member in need, there are participatory actions occurring all the time that help weave the fabric of our society and act as the glue that holds our community together.

Council enables and supports participation through diverse and multi-dimensional programming. Specific examples include support of its volunteer strategy, community leadership programs, and grantmaking.

Council understands that it needs to continue to grow and support its community into the future by empowering individuals to build their social capital, and in turn their health, wellbeing, and resilience, which cultivates the social cohesion of our community.



The ambition

The Maribyrnong People and Participation Strategy 2021-2026 has an ambitious and bold vision to reframe how Council supports, develops, and empowers the community to build its social capital through a culture of active participation in community life.

Why people and participation?

Research shows that the main reason people volunteer is the human desire to help others and to make their community a better place.

The way people are choosing to volunteer and contribute is changing. People are increasingly seeking opportunities that are flexible and connected to an issue or a cause that has meaning to them; the COVID-19 pandemic has changed the ways people are choosing to participate and impacted volunteering organisations.

A shift in mindset is needed to adapt to a broader view of volunteering that encompasses participation across a broad spectrum ranging from traditional formal volunteering roles often associated with providing services, to the many and varied forms of informal participation.

There is also a need to recognise that the value of participation is not just the ability to fulfill a specific role, but to be involved in activities that have meaning for the individual.

This acknowledges that volunteering, community leadership and community participation each inform the other to build an enabling environment, where community take an active role in issues that are important to them.

It's also essential to recognise that pathways to participation are unequal, and that barriers to participation must be addressed to better involve and engage groups less likely and able to participate. Active inclusion requires deliberate and resourced action.

All these factors require Council to operate differently; to reposition itself as a connector and capacity-builder to provide the infrastructure and backbone that will enable ecosystems of participation to flourish.

Realising this bold vision will be achieved by strengthening partnerships, building networks and connections, sharing knowledge and information, recognising, communicating, promoting, and celebrating the value and impact of volunteers and participation.

Delivering this vision will take courage, commitment, and ongoing and secure resources.

Council cannot achieve this ambition alone but must work in partnership to harness the expertise, skills and experience of the community and volunteer involving organisations (VIOs) to foster a strong, resilient, and vibrant culture of participation in the City of Maribyrnong.

The policy context

The Strategy aligns with Council's values of respect, courage, and integrity and with the objectives of the Council Plan 2021-25 (incorporating the Municipal Health and Wellbeing Plan). Specifically Council Plan objectives 'A Place for All', and 'Ethical Leadership', where Council commits to working in more inclusive, collaborative and community engaged ways.

Embedded in the consultative approach to the Strategy's development are the community engagement principles as outlined in the *Local Government Act 2020* and Council's Community Engagement Policy.

The Strategy also responds to the priority area of 'Enabling Active Citizenship' in the Maribyrnong 2040 – Growing the Future Together community plan.

In addition, the Strategy relates to a range of other Council policies and plans including the Diversity and Inclusion Plan / Disability Action Plan, Intercultural Maribyrnong Strategy, Reconciliation Action Plan, Towards Gender Equity Strategy 2030, and the Strategy for Children, Young People, and their Families 2030.

How the Strategy was developed

Council is committed to in-depth community engagement processes in line with its Engagement Policy.

Extensive research and multi-phase community engagement was undertaken, to better understand the state of volunteering in the City of Maribyrnong and seek community feedback on the draft Strategy.

In addition, in-depth reviews of Council's community leadership and volunteering programs were conducted.

The findings of these investigations and engagements informed the development of the Strategy. They included:

- Research into the state of volunteering in the City of Maribyrnong that identified a range of themes and issues relating to participation.
- Phase one community engagement and consultation was undertaken with community members (volunteers, community leaders, non-volunteers), local volunteer involving organisations and not-for-profits (volunteer resource centres (VCRs), recreational and sports clubs, and services providers), and staff across Council.
- Review and examination of Council's community leadership programs, Braybrook on Board 2015-16, Growing our Community 2017, and Connecting Maribyrnong 2019-20.

- A report to Councillors outlining findings of the Community Grants program redesign and recommended options for implementation.
- Consideration of how Community Grants can act as an enabler to participation through funding and in-kind support.
- Phase 2 community engagement broadened the opportunity for the community to view and participate in the project.

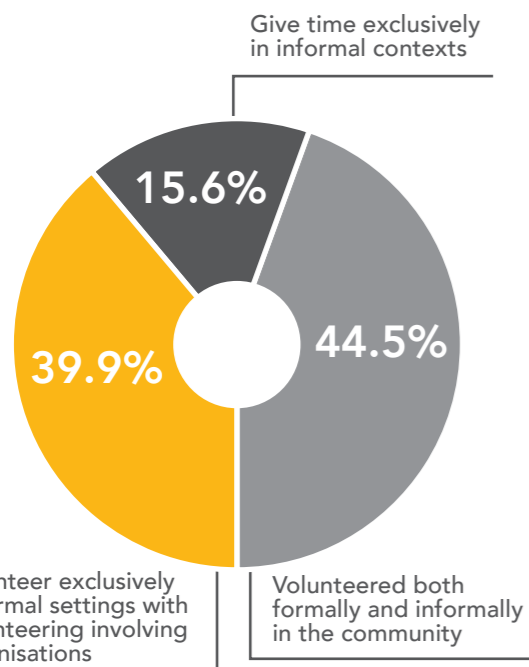
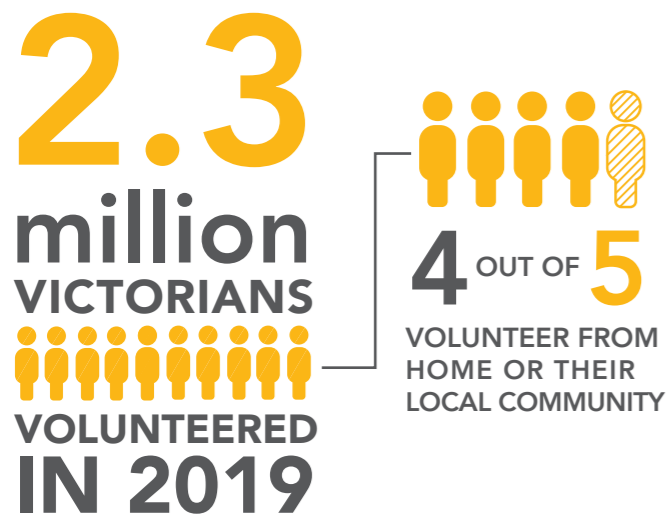
The community engagement period ran for six weeks from 7 February to 20 March 2022 and included online engagement via the Your City Your Voice platform with a questionnaire seeking specific feedback from respondents about whether they agreed with the draft strategy's key principles and priorities.

A total of 344 residents visited the project page and there were 70 responses to the survey. In addition, two face-to-face engagement sessions were held during March at the Maidstone Community Centre, and Maribyrnong Community Centre, and a third information session held face-to-face with interested parties.

This final and comprehensive engagement process discovered that there is clear support for the key principles and key priorities outlined in the draft strategy.

What the data tells us

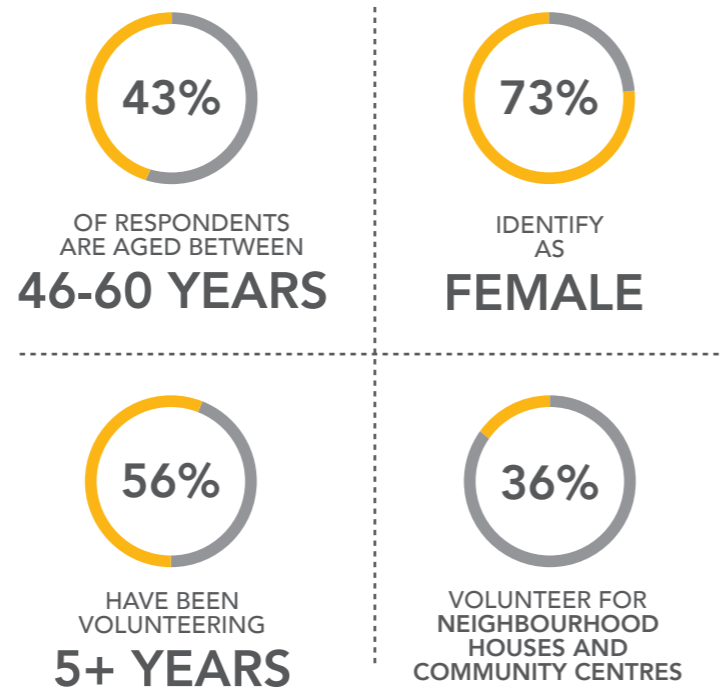
Volunteering in Victoria



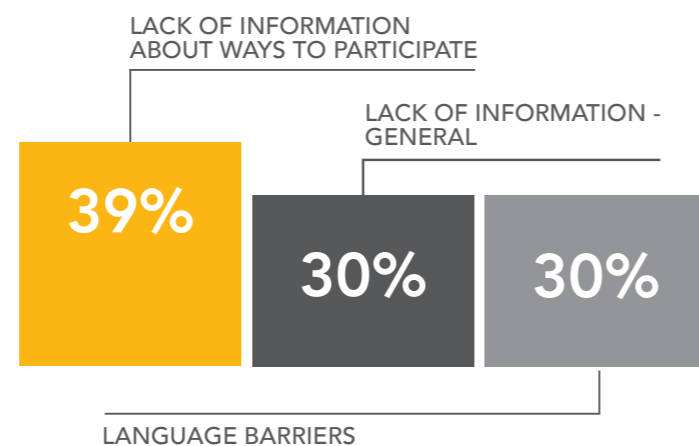
Community



PEOPLE VOLUNTEER WITH PARTICIPATING ORGANISATIONS

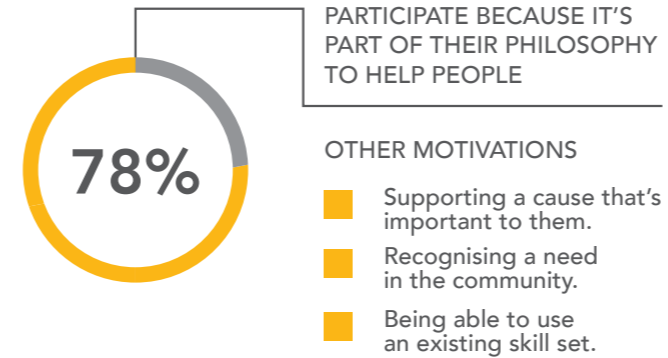


TOP BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION

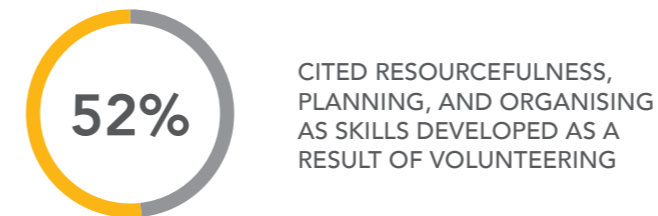


Volunteering in the City of Maribyrnong

MOTIVATIONS TO PARTICIPATE

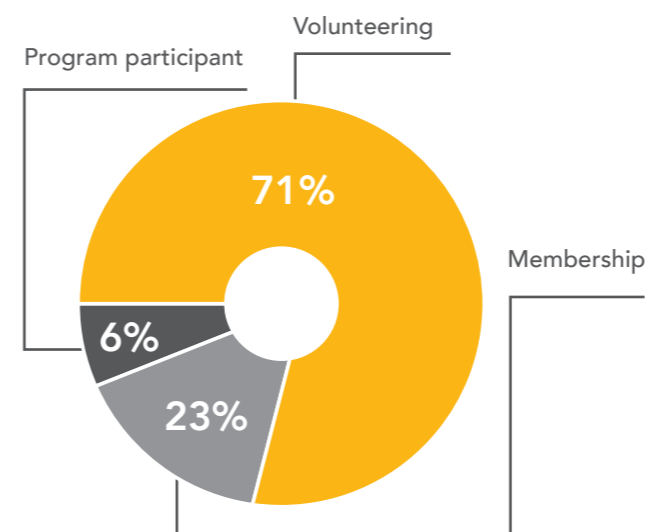


122 IDENTIFIED SKILLS DEVELOPED THROUGH VOLUNTEERING



Volunteering involving organisations

TYPES OF ENGAGEMENT



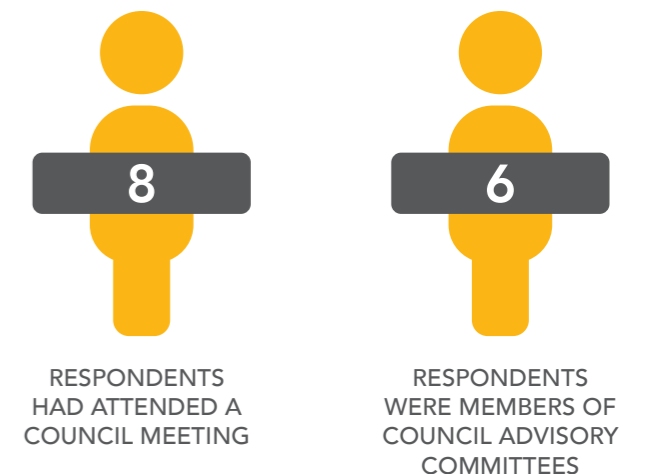
8 KEY CHALLENGES AND GAPS FOR VOLUNTEERING INVOLVING ORGANISATIONS

- Connections with broader networks
- Secure funding
- Information
- Processes
- Communication
- Recognition
- Measuring collective impact
- COVID-19

5 KEY STRENGTHS

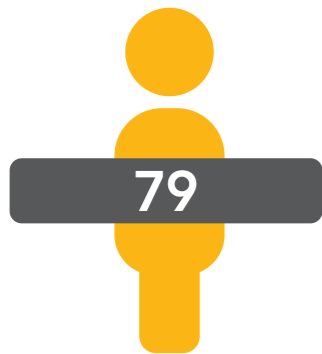
- Inclusive culture
- Partnerships and collaboration
- Diversity of people in the organisation
- Ability to overcome challenges
- Passion

Engagement with Council

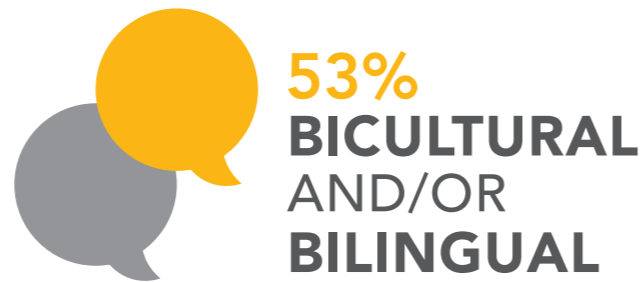


What the data tells us

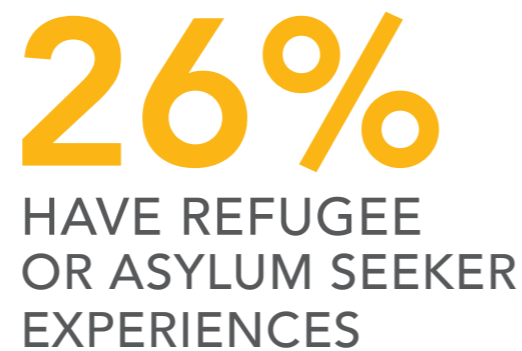
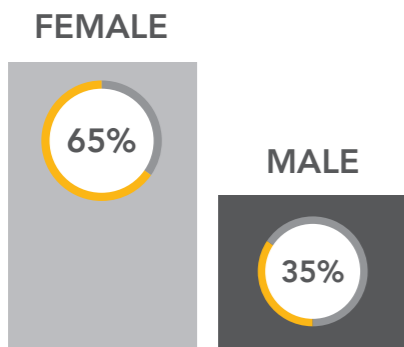
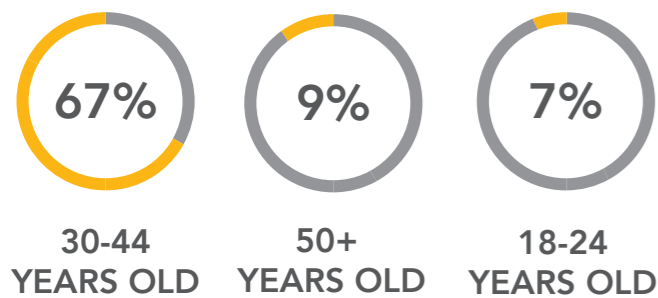
Maribyrnong City Council's Community Leadership Programs



COMMUNITY MEMBERS ENGAGED IN COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP PROGRAMS



AGES OF PARTICIPANTS



Supporting a participatory ecosystem



Challenges and barriers

Time constraints

Lack of free time is one of the largest barriers to participation. People are busy and work or family commitments are some of the key reasons people do not volunteer.

Time constraints mean people are less interested in formal volunteering which is perceived as being less flexible and more time intensive.

Lack of free time is a universal and complex issue, and one that cannot be solved by any agency. However, offering a diversity of flexible volunteering opportunities and recognising other forms of participation may go some way to address the issue.

Decline in formal volunteering

There is a decline in formal volunteering, and studies suggest that people are less interested in regular, formal, or long-term volunteering commitments.

This has a significant impact on volunteering involving organisations, many of whom rely on volunteers for the function of their organisations and in the delivery of key services.

Communication, processes, and cost

Difficulty in finding out about volunteer opportunities, overly formal and inaccessible recruitment processes, and financial cost of involvement.

Lack of resources

Many volunteering involving organisations report a lack of resources to properly recruit, train and manage volunteers within existing structures.

Volunteer preparedness

Not all community members are ready to step into formal volunteering roles that may require specific skills sets.

Volunteer management systems, risk, and compliance

Simpler, more effective regulation is needed to reduce the complexity of volunteer protection and insurance requirements. Improved volunteer management systems and training are needed.

Equity, inclusion, and participation

While volunteering enriches our community in countless ways, it is an unequal playing field.

Volunteering Australia's latest statistics demonstrate that those most likely to volunteer have a relatively high family income, are in a relationship, and have a tertiary education.

This aligns with research about community participation and community engagement.

The act of engaging volunteers (those with the privilege and skills) to 'volunteer to' vulnerable groups can have the unintended effect of reinforcing inequities.

Becoming a volunteer in the formal sense requires the skills and experience to perform in a required volunteer role, and many volunteer involving organisations report difficulties in recruiting suitable volunteers.

In addition, many volunteer involving organisations state they are unable to recruit or engage volunteers with barriers due to a lack of resources such as funding, staff supervision time and the necessary skills to involve volunteers with barriers.

To truly build equity and address power dynamics, we must understand volunteering from a diverse perspective, remove barriers and build pathways to participation.

Working in partnership with communities to build a sense of reciprocity is critical and avoids placing the responsibility on marginalised groups for not participating more.

This will include better supporting and engaging groups that are traditionally less likely to participate in formal and structured volunteering activities such as culturally and linguistically diverse communities, First Nations peoples, people with disability and young people.

In addition, it requires us to broaden our view to acknowledge, support and celebrate all forms of participation.

For instance, in many cultures voluntary activities aren't understood as volunteering, but rather as a form of maintaining cultural traditions and strengthening community connections. These contributions are no less significant because they are less formal.

Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the volunteering sector with studies showing a 40% reduction in formal volunteering activities.

Volunteer involving organisations stated that the pandemic affected their ability to manage and recruit volunteers and given the high number of organisations with a business model that relies on volunteers to deliver programs or services, there is a need for sustained action to reinvigorate the sector.

Conversely, volunteer involving organisations reported a greater community awareness of the issues they work to address, an increased use of online services to connect, and technical upskilling within their organisations with 64% of volunteer involving organisations planning further adoption or investment in technology over the year ahead.

COVID-19 highlighted the power of participation and the resilience of our community.

As the community responded to local needs, informal, community-led activities occurred through diverse means and channels, groups formed and self-organised, making a critical contribution to support the most vulnerable.

Better connecting, supporting, and acknowledging the ways in which community participates is key to the Strategy's principles.

Addressing barriers and enabling pathways

Thanks to Council's extensive community engagement processes, we have a clear understanding of the major barriers our community faces to participation, including lack of free time and concerns around COVID-19.

Not all barriers are surmountable, such as lack of free time. However, by listening to our community, working with their strengths, and where possible, addressing these barriers, Council aims to better support and enable pathways to participation.

This is outlined in the Strategy's principles listed in the following pages.

Our principles

The Strategy is underpinned by a community development and social justice framework that respects diversity, equity, people, place, and planet, and is guided by a set of principles (detailed overleaf).

Our principles



Collaborative

We build partnerships and networks that foster strong connections and supporting structures to enable knowledge and skills sharing.

We provide the infrastructure backbone that supports ecosystems of participation to flourish.



Adaptable

We are responsive, adapting to the needs of the community, recognising that they are seeking more meaningful roles with greater flexibility and that participation happens across a spectrum and takes many forms.



Empowering

We support place-based, community-led, and co-designed programs that cultivate a sense of reciprocity where community members influence decisions and pursue opportunities that align with their aspirations, ideas, capacity, and capabilities.

We support opportunities for participation that are built around people not institutions.



Championing

We champion and celebrate the skills, expertise, and wisdom of our community, their strengths, aspirations, and the value of their contributions.

We communicate, promote, and celebrate all forms of participation, raising awareness and acknowledging that voluntary actions take many forms.



Inclusive

We work with everyone and put intercultural and intergenerational perspectives at the heart of what we do.

We work to remove barriers to participation, to ensure opportunities are accessible and available to all in our diverse community.

We support and encourage practices and opportunities that are inclusive, accessible, culturally aware, and safe.

The spectrum of participation

How individuals participate happens across a spectrum, and there is a myriad of ways in which our community is involved in community life.

From the informal end of the spectrum, helping a neighbour or supporting a cause by reposting a social media message, to more traditional methods such as holding a formal voluntary role with an organisation that delivers services to the community. There is no single way to participate.

Broadening the view of volunteering to encompass all forms of participation means we can better capture the ways they overlap and at times interconnect.

It also acknowledges that community members do not necessarily see the contribution they make through unpaid effort as volunteering.


They may see participation as community leadership, collective problem solving, activism or cultural maintenance, where the concept of supporting family and community is interwoven with kinship responsibilities and is a fundamental part of culture.

Participation is connected to people's sense of empowerment, agency, and ability to strengthen their community.


Social capital




Types of participation




Informal Volunteering
Time willingly for the common good without financial gain, given outside an organisational setting.




Micro-volunteering
Easy, 'bite-sized' activities that can be done anywhere, anytime, on an individual's own terms. For example: counting birds in your garden for a research project, participating in a community clean-up day or weeding a community garden.




Virtual volunteering
Activities that take place in whole or in part, online. For example: signing an online petition, sharing a cause on social media.



Episodic volunteering
Activities that are periodic or on a recurring basis, rather than ongoing. For example: volunteering for a community planting day, to support a one-off community event, to participate and share expertise for a programmed activity.




Formal Volunteering
Time willingly given for the common good without financial gain. Usually within an organisation and in a formal, ongoing role. For example: volunteering for an organisation, club, or group. Usually involves a level of structure and management.




Corporate/workplace volunteering
Includes activities where an organisation supports staff to give their time, skills, or support to another organisation during work or paid hours.

This list not exhaustive but illustrates the multitude of ways individuals can participate.


Community leadership
Attached to Council's Community Leadership programs, participants are enabled to pursue place-based projects that align with their aspirations and interests within an overarching theme. Strong connections with pathways into local leadership roles, and development of social enterprise.




Acting in mutual support
Where individuals support each other outside structures of volunteering. For example: helping a neighbour, friend, or family member, or helping a stranger.




Civic participation / active citizenship / participatory democracy
Where individuals participate in government decision making. Sometimes described as 'invited spaces' where community is asked to provide input or help make a decision but are not ultimately in control of the agenda. Can be instrumental in building trust and empowerment. For example: being part of an advisory group, attending a Council meeting, participating in community engagement.




Getting involved
Participating in group activities that help bring communities together. For example: playing a team sport, being part of a band, being in a book club, or speaking up about a social issue.



Campaigning
Online or offline activities to mobilise support for a social, environmental, or political aim.

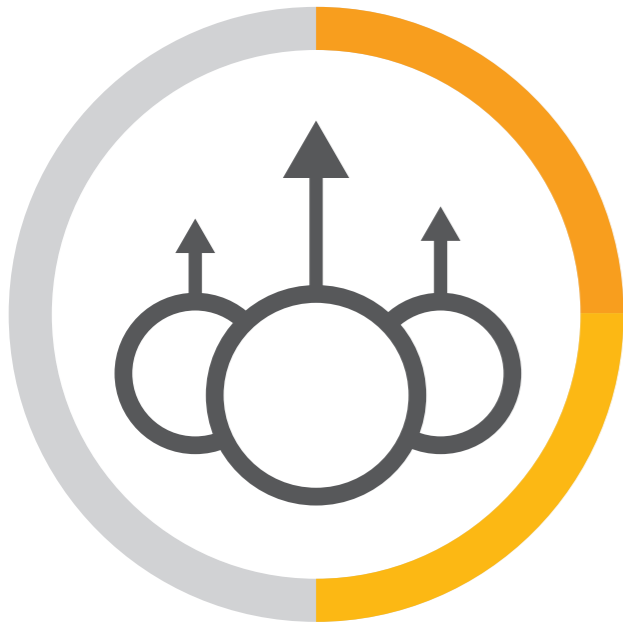


Activism
Online or offline efforts to promote, direct, impede or intervene in social, political, or environmental reform.



Investing in participation

Volunteering and participation bring huge economic and social benefits to organisations and our community as a whole. However, they require ongoing investment and resourcing. Council must address this if it is to foster a healthy and vibrant ecosystem of participation.



Economic benefits

In 2019, it is estimated that volunteering in Victoria enabled at least \$58.1 billion worth of benefits across the community.

These were the sum of commercial benefits worth \$31.8 billion and civic benefits valued at \$26.3 billion, where civic benefit represents a cost avoided by the government (Volunteering Victoria).

Health and wellbeing

The experience of contributing to the common good and helping others is commonly linked to better health outcomes and improved overall wellbeing with surveys identifying that most volunteers (95%) associate it with better mental health and feelings of wellbeing.

Delivering community services

Volunteers keep our not-for-profit organisations running, with 90% of community organisations relying on volunteers to do what they do. This is across disability, health, welfare, aged care services, sports and the arts, environmental protection, disaster resilience, response, and recovery.

Employment and self-actualisation

Volunteering connects people to career pathways. It is a way to build skills and references and can provide a pathway to paid employment. It is also a powerful means to build social capital, personal connections, and relationships.

Our priorities: the big ideas

01

Building capacity



- Enable place-based, community-led approaches.
- Support co-designed and collaborative opportunities that are flexible and adaptable.
- Support and implement asset-based community development approaches.
- Support the community to address local needs and self-organise.
- Recognition that pathways to participation are not equal. Work to remove barriers to participation.
- Recognise and invest in our community leaders.
- Engage harder to reach groups (First Nations communities, culturally and linguistically diverse groups, young people, people with disability) and address and remove barriers to participation.
- Encourage practices and opportunities that are inclusive, accessible, culturally aware, and safe.
- Design opportunities around people not institutions.
- Boost the volunteer sector through capacity building activities in partnership with peak bodies, other levels of government, the community, and private sectors.
- Be a champion for change.
- Support volunteering involving organisations through training, council officer and in-kind support.
- Support volunteering involving organisations to match opportunities to new technologies.

02

Foster an ecosystem



- Strengthen networks and partnerships with the community and volunteer sector.
- Link the work of the Strategy across Council departments to avoid siloing and increase collaboration.
- Leverage Council's extensive connections and comprehensive understanding of local communities.
- Provide access to Council facilities, for example: indoor spaces within Council facilities (communities centres, libraries) and outdoor spaces (community gardens) to create informal volunteering and participation opportunities.

07

Communication, promotion, and celebration



- Share information and opportunities to participate.
- Communicate, promote, and celebrate all types of participation, the informal and formal.
- Recognise and value the skill and expertise in the community.
- Recognition, promotion, and celebration to raise the profiles of those who participate and the contribution they make to the community.

03

Knowledge sharing and evaluation



- Undertake deeper localised research into informal volunteering in Maribyrnong.
- Monitor how key principles and new practices are embedded.
- Act as a central point for knowledge sharing in collaboration with volunteering involving organisations and volunteer resource centres.

06

Building resilience



With the climate emergency the issue of our age, and the ravages of the COVID-19 pandemic continuing to affect communities locally and globally, better supporting a diversity of participation is key in helping the volunteer sector and community to build resilience and preparedness for the challenges ahead.

A safe climate and healthy environment is one of Council's key objectives in the Council Plan 2021-25, pledging to work with our community to respond to climate emergency challenges. Community members, volunteers and community leaders will all be an essential part of the solution.

Council must act as the capacity builder and connector to support diverse ecosystems of participation that enable agility, adaptability, and innovation.

04

Community Leadership programming



Community Leadership programming is an essential part of supporting a participation ecosystem. It supports place-based, community-led actions and allows community members to build competencies and a sense of agency around matters that are important to them.

05

Community Grants programming



Enact the four interlinked actions as per of the recommended actions of the Community Grants program redesign:

- Embed community grant making into a community development approach.
- Integrate community grant making into the broader suite of support that is offered to community organisations.
- Develop an outcomes focused approach to community grant making with an explicit focus on identified organisational priorities.
- Utilise online platforms more effectively to streamline process and centralise administration.

Through our research, consultation and investigation, there are a range of measures that need to be prioritised to achieve the ambition of this strategy. These are the big ideas.

The call to action

To realise big ideas that leverage change requires courage, time, and resources.

Appropriate funding models are needed to actualise inclusivity and diversity, and address barriers.

Staff, training, professional development, and the skills to involve people are all essential.

The challenges faced by our community thanks to COVID-19, and the social inequity it highlighted, along with the climate emergency, demand that we collaborate to seek solutions that support community endeavour and participation.

Every day, people in our community are participating in ways big and small to make a difference.

It is our role to invest in that participatory action, to ensure it is supported and resourced, to build connections and trust, encourage co-operation and a sense of self-determination, so collectively we can solve problems, find new and innovative solutions, and build our community's social capital, their health, wellbeing, resilience, and support their participation in civic life.

Measuring success

An evaluation framework will be developed as part of the Strategy Action Plan.

It will incorporate collective impact¹ and theory of change models² to connect with contemporary thinking and to prioritise accountability.

A technological solution for measuring, mapping, and evaluating community development and complex systems approaches may need to be sourced.

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¹ An intentional way of working together, sharing information, identifying shared goals and accountability.

² A methodology for planning, participation, and evaluation, and the goals and steps needed to achieve them.

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