

# Case study: Leading change towards inclusive practice

## Strengthening Volunteer Capability Through Regional Collaboration

**Strong volunteer programs rely on organisations having access to practical training, shared knowledge, and opportunities to learn from one another. Across Gippsland, five Local Government Areas partnered with Volunteering Gippsland to deliver a coordinated volunteer capability program that made high-quality training more accessible, while reducing duplication between councils.**

The LGA Network Volunteer Capability Program is a collaborative initiative delivered across five Local Government Areas – Baw Baw, Latrobe, Wellington, South Gippsland and Bass Coast – in partnership with Volunteering Gippsland. The program was designed to strengthen volunteer-involving organisations by delivering coordinated, place-based training that reduced duplication, improved consistency, and increased access to high-quality learning across the region.

### **Responding to a Regional Need**

The program was developed in response to a recognised need for more coordinated support for volunteer-involving organisations across Gippsland. Previously, training and development opportunities were often delivered independently by individual councils, leading to duplicated effort, inconsistent access, and fewer opportunities for organisations to learn from one another. In response, the five councils came together to deliver a shared training series focused on governance, storytelling, grant writing, and volunteer lifecycle management.

By strengthening the capability and sustainability of volunteer-involving organisations, the initiative also contributed to broader community wellbeing across Gippsland. Strong volunteer-led organisations play an important role in supporting social connection, participation and local services, particularly in regional communities.

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### A Collaborative Delivery Model

The program was delivered through a structured partnership between the five councils and Volunteering Gippsland, with shared responsibility for planning and delivery.

The partnership was supported through several practical approaches:

- Fortnightly online coordination meetings between councils and Volunteering Gippsland
- A shared resourcing model, with councils providing venues, catering and staffing support
- Centralised project coordination, bookings, communications and facilitator management through Volunteering Gippsland
- A consistent regional program delivered across multiple locations and timeframes

This collaborative approach made efficient use of resources while maintaining local accessibility and relevance. Sessions were designed to be practical, accessible and locally relevant, supporting participation from volunteers and community organisations with varying levels of experience and capacity.

### Program Reach and Participation

The four-session series achieved strong regional engagement:

- **Session 1:** Governance – 77 registrations (6–8pm)
- **Session 2:** Social Media & Storytelling – 44 registrations (9:30–11:30am)
- **Session 3:** Grant Writing – 90 registrations (6–8pm)
- **Session 4:** Volunteer Life Cycle – 82 registrations (6–8pm)

In total, the program engaged 57 organisations across Gippsland, with 173 participants travelling from diverse communities including Phillip Island, Toora, Golden Beach, Paynesville, Briagolong, Heyfield and Neerim South – demonstrating demand well beyond individual council boundaries.

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### Key Outcomes and Impact

Participant feedback showed strong improvements in knowledge, confidence and practical application of learning.

Reported outcomes include:

- Increased confidence in grant writing and storytelling
- Immediate application of learning to real-world funding submissions
- Improved communication strategies within volunteer organisations
- Greater confidence among professionals supporting volunteer organisations to guide funding and governance decisions

A standout outcome was observed following the grant writing session, where seven organisations from the South Gippsland Hub successfully secured local government grants. This demonstrated a direct and measurable link between practical training and successful funding outcomes.

One participant shared:

***“We have already used Liz’s advice to write several grant applications... Likewise, we have implemented several new ideas to thank our volunteers and promote new volunteering opportunities in an appealing way.”***

Another participant reflected:

***“Getting into a room with other enthusiastic volunteers is good for the soul. I always come away pumped up.”***

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Participants also valued the opportunity to connect face-to-face with volunteers and other community groups from across the region. For many, these conversations reduced feelings of isolation, encouraged the exchange of ideas, and sparked new opportunities for collaboration.

### **Broader Community Benefits**

Beyond individual learning outcomes, the program strengthened the capacity of volunteer-involving organisations to support their communities.

Participant feedback identified a range of wider benefits:

- Increased volunteer confidence and capability
- Stronger community connection and participation
- Improved organisational sustainability
- Enhanced wellbeing through social engagement and peer support
- Increased capacity for local organisations to attract funding and volunteers

The program also demonstrated the value of coordinated investment in volunteer capability, showing how shared delivery models can generate tangible benefits for communities while making better use of limited resources.

### **Partnership Strength and Efficiency**

The program demonstrates how regional partnerships can reduce duplication while making better use of shared resources.

The shared delivery model resulted in:

- Reduced duplication of training programs across participating councils
- Improved coordination and consistency of content delivery

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- More efficient use of council and partner resources
- Increased reach across geographically dispersed communities

### Lessons Learned

Key learnings from the initiative highlighted the value of coordinated regional approaches to volunteer capability development:

- Delivering training locally helps reduce participation barriers for regional and rural communities.
- Combining practical skill development with opportunities for peer connection increases the value of training.
- A shared regional model reduces duplication and makes better use of limited sector resources.
- Flexible session times and accessible delivery formats support volunteer participation.
- There is strong ongoing demand for practical support in governance, funding and volunteer management.
- Creating opportunities for face-to-face networking helps reduce isolation and strengthen collaboration across the volunteer sector.

The program also reinforced the importance of collaboration between councils and sector partners in building consistent, sustainable support for volunteer-involving organisations. It demonstrated that training initiatives can do more than build skills. They can increase social capital and create stronger connections across regional communities.

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### Future Opportunities

The success of the program demonstrates strong potential for ongoing delivery and expansion. The model provides a scalable framework for regional collaboration that could be adapted to other capability-building areas within the volunteer and community sector.

Future opportunities include:

- Expanding the model to new topics and regions, with local communities increasingly leading their own hub-based delivery
- Strengthening data collection to measure long-term behavioural and system outcomes
- Maintaining the collaborative structures established between councils
- Expanding opportunities for networking and peer-to-peer learning within future sessions

The LGA Network Volunteer Capability Program shows how collaboration between councils and regional partners can expand access to high-quality volunteer training while making better use of shared resources. By combining consistent regional delivery with local accessibility, the program strengthened volunteer-involving organisations, supported stronger community connections, and created lasting benefits for volunteers and the communities they support.

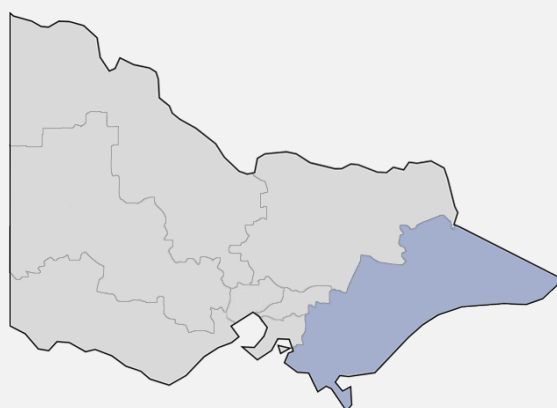
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<https://www.volunteeringvictoria.org.au/leading-volunteers/vma-2022-2026/>



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*Volunteering Victoria acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea, and community. We pay our respect to Elders past and present.*