RMCG

APRIL 2022

Community Leadership Program evaluation

Final Report

South Gippsland Shire Council

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

We acknowledge the Bunurong and Gunaikurnai as the Traditional Owners of the Country where this project is based and recognise their continuing connection to land, waters and culture. We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging and the Elders of other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Moreover, we express gratitude for the knowledge and insight that Traditional Owners and other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people contribute to our shared work.

COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP PROGRAM EVALUATION

Executive Summary

RM Consulting Group (RMCG) has undertaken an external evaluation of South Gippsland Shire Council's (SGSC) Community Leadership Program (CLP), which has been held twice, in 2020 and 2021.

The program aimed to equip participants with skills that would enable them to effectively work with other people, strengthen their leadership capability, manage conflict, and delegate work. The participants were expected to use the skills they gained to positively influence and support the development of local communities in South Gippsland. There were three specific goals for the program:

1. Encourage widespread participation in community and civic life in the municipality
2. Support the development of community leadership skills
3. **Support an improvement in the relationship between the Council and its community.**

In accordance with the program's original design, this evaluation aimed to:

▪ Assess whether the CLP is achieving its goals as stated in the CLP project scope
▪ Identify whether there are other appropriate metrics for monitoring the outcomes of the CLP
▪ Identify opportunities for improving the program
▪ Understand how it compares to other similar scale leadership programs.

Data collected for this evaluation was drawn from:
▪ A survey of 27 participants and applicants
▪ 8 interviews (online/phone)
▪ Pre- and post-program surveys of participants
▪ Council data for customer contact

RESULTS OF THE EVALUATION

This evaluation has identified that the SGSC CLP is delivering high impact leadership skills and outcomes for its modest scale. The program is currently targeted at the right level for participants and is clearly meeting its three original goals. The program is highly valued by both participants and administrators.

It is recommended that the program be continued in its current form, with no significant changes. The evaluation has also identified six general recommendations that focus on improving program implementation and outcomes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1.   Maintain program funding

The CLP is meeting and exceeding its original aims and is providing a valued service to both the community and to Council. It has also facilitated a bond of trust between community members and Council.

Recommendation 2.   Maintain best practice community focus

The CLP should continue efforts to evolve so that it achieves and maintains best practice. Focus should increase in the following areas:

- Incorporating active elements in program design (project or idea development)
- Allowing scope in the program to be adaptable, providing opportunities to extend learning in response to group interests or needs
- Providing context for the program and identifying pathways for further leadership development
- Providing opportunities for participants to learn from each other and from past participants, to accelerate their development and impact
- Securing local investment and support, noting this may be difficult in less populated areas

Recommendation 3.   Increase program administration and facilitation support

Increase program facilitation support to ensure the program is cohesive and inclusive. This may include a single, lead facilitator who attends all sessions and provides the connective thread between sessions, learnings and ideas. Additional resourcing should also be considered to support the needs of applicants and participants with diverse backgrounds, culture, language and gender; people with a disability; people with a range of IT capabilities and access; and for program administration.

Recommendation 4.   Maintain evaluation approach, but overcome data limitations

Long term outcomes of the program are difficult to measure after only two years, but indications to date are that the program has achieved high impact in its current form. Even so, program administrators should continue the undertake data collection as was done with Cohort 2, as it provides a very good basis for ongoing evaluation and program improvement. To monitor the longer-term impact of the program, appropriate indicators should be identified and monitored regularly. These indicators should include participants' engagement with Council processes, grants and councillor elections / meetings, and the community satisfaction survey results. This data can identify how people's involvement with council changes over time, based on their involvement in the CLP. However, for this data to be useful for monitoring the long-term impact of the program, some of Council's data management limitations must be overcome.

Future evaluations should continue to monitor whether the program is addressing changes in community leadership needs.

Recommendation 5.   Seek to support the sustainability of the alumni network

To ensure the most value is obtained from leadership programs, participants need follow-up support and opportunities. They benefit from encouragement, leadership, mentoring, invitations to contribute, and chances to observe how others are using the skills they have acquired through the program. Follow-up and support from council should focus on development of the alumni network so that they become the hub of post-program activity and, over the next few years, become somewhat self-sustaining.

Recommendation 6.   Develop a Communication, Recruitment, and Selection Plan

Administrators should develop a structured Communication, Recruitment and Selection Plan for future programs. This plan should, at minimum:

- Include community-wide promotional activity
- Address community diversity and barriers to inclusion
- Follow good governance principles (including transparency and fairness)

1 Introduction

1.1   COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

BACKGROUND

RM Consulting Group (RMCG) was appointed to undertake an external evaluation of South Gippsland Shire Council's (SGSC) Community Leadership Program (CLP). The CLP was initiated by SGSC in response to the recommendation of the Commission of Inquiry that was established following the dismissal of the previous Council. The recommendation stated that during the period of administration, Council should develop and deliver an extensive community leadership development program to encourage widespread participation in community and civic life.

PURPOSE OF THE CLP

The CLP aimed to equip participants with skills to enable them to effectively work with other people, strengthen their leadership capability, manage conflict, and delegate work. The participants were expected to use the skills they gained to positively influence and support the development of local communities in South Gippsland. There were three specific goals for the program:

- Encourage widespread participation in community and civic life in the municipality
- Support the development of community leadership skills
- Support an improvement in the relationship between the Council and its community.

SCOPE OF THE PROGRAM

The program consisted of the following components:

- Leadership capacity building sessions (9), these sessions covered topics such as:
    - Getting to know South Gippsland
    - Values
    - Teamwork
    - Understanding self
    - Board and committee governance
    - Emotional intelligence
    - Going public (giving presentations)
    - Strategic Leadership
    - Being and effective committee or board member
    - Culture
    - Local Government 101
- Online groups forum and resource sharing
- Individual Action Plan (IAP) for each participant
    - Template provided and time after each session to work and reflect on it
- Leadership Grants (further learning)
- Leadership and Alumni network.

1.2   EVALUATION OBJECTIVES

In accordance with Council's original design for the program, this evaluation aimed to:

- Assess whether the CLP is achieving its goals as stated in the CLP project scope
- Identify whether there are other appropriate metrics for monitoring the outcomes of the CLP
- Identify opportunities for improving the program
- Understand how it compares to other similar scale leadership programs.

2 Evaluation Framework

2.1   PROGRAM LOGIC

Figure 2-1 provides SGSC's design logic for the community leadership program. This clearly identifies the short-, medium-, and long-term goals of the program.

Based on this program design, several lines of questioning were developed to understand the outputs and outcomes of the program. These are detailed in the next section, the evaluation framework.
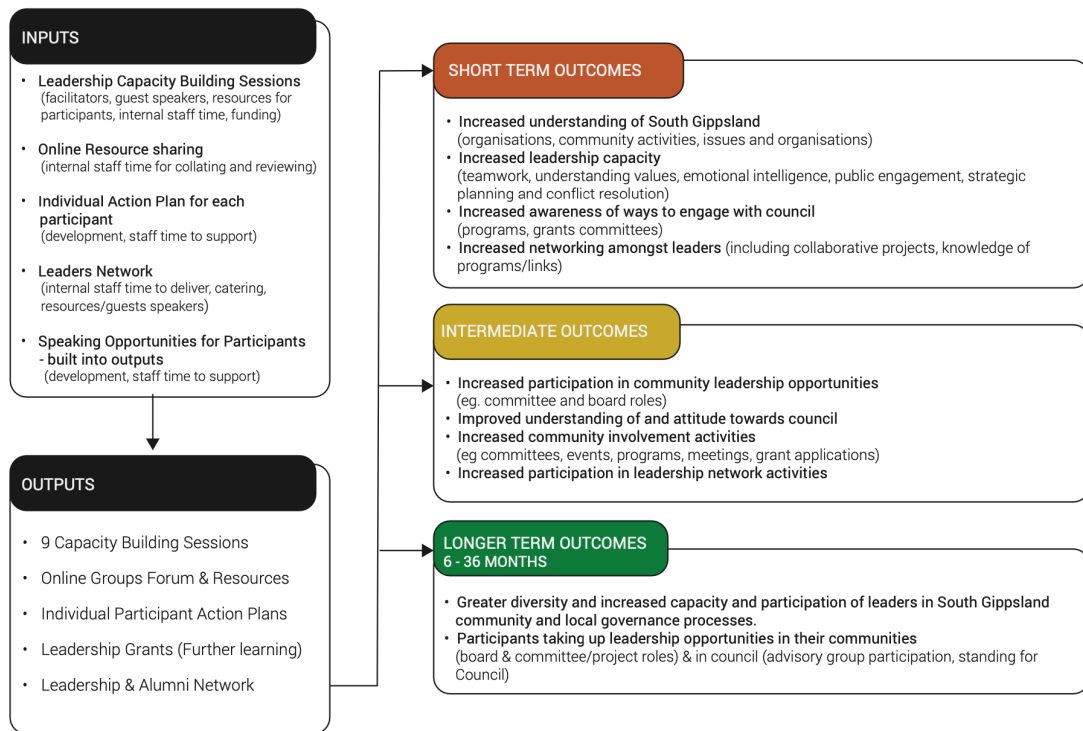

Figure 2-1: **Community Leadership Program logic**

2.2   EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

The evaluation framework below (Table 2-1) shaped our approach to this evaluation. It is structured around the following themes:

- **Impact** – the level of achievement against the goals of the program
- **Efficiency and effectiveness** –the extent to which activities were delivered as planned and maxmised the value from the available resources
- **Value** – the legacy of the of the program

For each theme, the evaluation framework identifies the purpose, key evaluation questions, and data sources for each question. The main sources of data for this evaluation are the interviews, surveys, and program documentation, which are further described in section 2.3.

Table 2-1: Evaluation framework

EVALUATION PURPOSE	KEY EVALUATION QUESTIONS	SOURCE OF DATA				
		Participants	Applicants	Administrators & sponsors	Facilitators	Desktop review
Impact To determine progress of program toward goals: • Encourage widespread participation in community and civic life in the municipality • Support the development of community leadership skills • Support an improvement in the relationship between the Council and its community	Have participants increased participation in community and civic life across South Gippsland?	Y	Y	Y	-	Y
	Have participants taken on more leadership opportunities in their communities and council?	Y	-	Y	-	Y
	How effective was the program in improving leadership capabilities of participants?	Y	-	Y	-	Y
	Does the program improve relationships between Council and participants?	Y	Y	-	-	-
Efficiency and effectiveness To improve program implementation	Was the program implemented as planned?	-	-	Y	Y	-
	How can the program be improved?	Y	Y	Y	Y	-
Value To determine if program should be continued long-term.	Is this program worth the investment?	Y	Y	Y	Y	-

2.3   DATA COLLECTION

There were five methods for data collection to inform the evaluation:

1. 27 surveys: 25 online using *Survey Monkey* plus 2 submissions via email.
2. 8 phone or online stakeholder interviews
3. CLP documentation (including scope, implementation plan, pre and post participation surveys)
4. Relevant program documentation publicly available for other community leadership programs
5. Council data on community participation and involvement.

The interviews were semi-structured. Guiding questions were used to explore key focus areas, however discussions were conducted to flexibly respond to interviewees' concerns, interests, and insights. Appendix 1 outlines the evaluation and consultation plan for the project.

Data has been collated so that individual responses and comments remain confidential.

NOTE: Data collection techniques differed for cohort one and two, meaning that the ability to analyse the data changed. Cohort one data did not trace individuals, so is only analysed using <u>average</u> scores. Cohort two data collection provides the ability to trace longitudinal changes for <u>individuals</u>. This improved data collection means that the results for cohort two provide more information and meaning.

3 Program impact

This section addresses the following key evaluation questions:

- *Have participants increased participation in community and civic life across South Gippsland?*
- *Have participants taken on more leadership opportunities in their communities and council?*
- *How effective was the program in improving leadership capabilities of participants?*
- *Does the program improve relationships between Council and participants?*

3.1   KEY FINDINGS

The findings presented here are based on the analysis presented in section 3.2:

Participation in community and civic life has increased

- Most participants across both cohorts maintained or increased their level of involvement in volunteer-based community groups, committees and boards immediately following their involvement in the program. Participants specifically noted their increasing involvement in community performance / theatre groups, school groups / councils, festivals, community health organisations, sporting groups, garden groups and rotary clubs. (Third party feedback also suggests involvement in environmental groups such as Landcare.)

- Six to 12 months on from the program, participants reported that their involvement has continued to increase as new opportunities arose. This included participation in more community organisations, but also in Council engagement processes.

- Understanding participant involvement in council processes is reliant on survey data. This data is robust in the short-term but becomes less reliable in the long-term, as participant motivation to participate in long-term surveys wanes. Council does collect data on how people engage with the organisation more broadly, but in terms of evaluating the CLP, there are limitations with the data that mean it will be difficult to draw conclusions about whether program alumni increase their participation in council processes in the long term. RMCG reviewed the available data and concluded that there has certainly been contact with council through engagement processes and general enquiries post-program, however it is unclear whether there has been change as a result of the program.

There has been uptake of leadership opportunities

- Participants across the program have taken up more leadership opportunities both on Council and within the community following their involvement with the program. One (out of five participants who nominated for Council elections) was successfully elected as a Councillor and over a third of cohort two participants reported that they had taken up more leadership opportunities within the community.

Leadership capability has increased

- The content of the program is hitting the mark. Self-reporting is showing that the knowledge has translated into community action, with the majority of participants reporting that their confidence and capacity has increased.

Understanding of council and community has improved

- Program participants have reported a higher level of understand of the strengths and challenges faced by all communities across South Gippsland, and a better understanding of ways to work with Council.

- Council has anecdotally reported more interactions with participants with requests to assist community groups and activities, and an increase in the number and the quality of grant applications.

3.2   ANALYSIS

PARTICIPATION IN COMMUNITY AND CIVIC LIFE

Participation immediately post program

Finding: Based on the post program survey undertaken by SGSC, most participants have either maintained or increased their level of involvement in community and civic life.

Post-program, most people in cohort one maintained their level of involvement in volunteer organisations, committees, and community events. Those who responded indicated they were involved in one or more organisations including sporting clubs, community groups, festivals and council or organisational engagement processes. Many said their volunteer participation varies from time to time depending on their other commitments and capacity. On average, the group members were more involved in event organisation post their participation in the program (Table 3-1).

Table 3-1: Cohort 1 pre and post program survey results

TOPIC	COHORT 1 PARTICIPANT SELF ASSESSMENT		
	Average **before** the program N=18	Average **after** the program N=16	Increase, no change or decrease
Level of participation in the community (average rating on a scale of 1-10)	7	7	No change
Number of organisations participant volunteers for	2	2	No change
Number of community events participant helps organise	1	2	Increase

In cohort two, 44% of program participants reported a higher level of activity in the community following their involvement in the program. Participants indicated that they have become involved in community groups and activities such as:

- Climate actions groups
- Community Children's centre
- Community garden groups
- Auskick
- School councils
- Community performance / theatre groups
- Community radio
- Rotary clubs
- Community health programs e.g. Meals on wheels.

The average number of organisations that participants volunteer for increased from seven to eight over the life of the program (cohort 2), with 33% of participants self-reporting that they have become involved with more groups following the program. The average number of organisations that participants volunteer for, or sit on a committee for, was two.

55% of the participants reported that they have assisted with organising more community events post program.

Table 3-2: Cohort 2 pre and post program survey results

TOPIC	COHORT 2 PARTICIPANT SELF ASSESSMENT			
	Average **before** the program. N=18	Average **after** the program. N=18	No. of participants who reported a **higher** rating **post** program	% of cohort who reported a **higher** rating **post** program
Level of participation in the community (average rating on a scale of 1–10)	7	7	8	44%
Number of organisations participant volunteers for	2	2	6	33%
Number of community events participant helps organise	2	3	10	55%

Medium term community involvement post-program

There is some data to suggest that community involvement has increased over the medium term. In the medium term (6-12 months post program), 50% of survey respondents (a mixture of cohort one and two) indicated that they have increased their level of participation in community and civic life. This has taken the form of:

▪ Completing council surveys and participating in the Community Vision process

▪ Involvement in more community groups

▪ Participation in Landcare

▪ Involvement in local radio broadcasting.

This suggests that participants from across both cohorts have continued to become more involved with opportunities that have arisen following the end of the program. However, better long-term data is required to be certain of this conclusion.

From council data and communication, it appears that the program has raised participants awareness of the mechanisms and effectiveness of communicating with council, with an anecdotal rise in requests on behalf of community organisations. These requests have included 4 or more of the participants contacting council for assistance to set up events or activity in their communities. In addition, anecdotal information suggests that participants have been involved in more grant applications, with an increased subscription rate (increasing by about 20 applications in the past 12 months). The quality of applications from those organisations that participants are involved in have been assessed as high quality. Two strategic applications (where participants are involved in the organisations) succeeded in the 2021 budgeting process.

Participation in SGSC engagement processes

It is impossible to draw conclusions about whether long-term participation has increased, as the program has only been running for two years. Insights about participant activity in council processes is reliant on survey data, which is robust in the short-term but becomes less reliable if participants do not continue to respond to long-term surveys. Council does collect data on how people engage with the organisation, however there are limitations with that data. RMCG's review of the data concluded that there has certainly been contact with council through engagement processes and general enquiries post program, however it cannot be determined whether this has changed pre and post program.

Council data limitations included:

▪ The understanding that some people engage with council as part of their professional work (e.g. architects seeking town planning approvals)

▪ The timeframes in Council's databases are unclear

▪ Some data entries may be duplicates

▪ Some Council engagement processes, understandably, enable participants to contribute confidentially which means it is not always possible to determine if past participants have contributed.

With these limitations in mind, 12 participants in cohort one and 15 participants in cohort two have been identified as having contact with Council before the program for a range of a reasons, including professional services, planning, and general enquiries. The median number of contact points was three, and the maximum number of contact points recorded was 27. Following the program until the time of this report, the median number of contact points was two and the maximum was eight.

Fourteen participants have been identified as having engaged with Council through targeted engagement processes, including grant applications. Two participants from cohort one and one participant from cohort two have been involved in the recent Community Vision Panel. There were also six participants from cohort one and eight from cohort two who were not panel members but still provided feedback throughout the Community Vision process.

For long-term monitoring purposes, this type of data can be a very good indicator for how people's involvement with council changes over time, based on their involvement in the CLP. However, unless some of the data limitations can be overcome, it is difficult to use it to draw conclusions about the long-term impact of the program.

UPTAKE OF LEADERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES IN COMMUNITIES AND COUNCIL

Finding: Overall, there has been an increase in the uptake of leadership opportunities both on Council and within the community following the program.

Nominations to Council elections

Five of the program participants initially nominated as candidates for the last council elections (in 2021). One of the program participants withdrew prior to the nomination due date, and four participants continued into the election. Out of the four candidates, one was successfully elected and three were unsuccessful. It is acknowledged that some participants may have been initially motivated to nominate because of the high profile dismissal of the previous Council. Nevertheless, given the size of the cohorts, this a significant number of nominations and represents a significant positive impact from the program.

Uptake of community leadership opportunities

For cohort one, the uptake of leadership opportunities in the community remained similar pre and post program. For cohort two, 39% indicated that they had taken up more leadership opportunities following their involvement in the program. Where provided by participants[1], these positions included:

▪ State based scout leadership role

▪ Treasurer of a sporting group

▪ President of a local friend's group

▪ Committee member for a community house

▪ Vice president of a children's centre.

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[1] RMCG participant survey

In addition, council has evidence that other participants have taken on leadership roles, including:

- Initiating a youth sporting activity
- Using a broader network to set up a local musical event.

Table 3-3: Cohort 1 pre and post program survey results

TOPIC	COHORT 1 PARTICIPANT SELF ASSESSMENT		
	Average **before** the program N=18	Average **after** the program N=16	Increase, no change or decrease
Number of committees participants sit on	1	1	No change
Number of boards participants sit on	1–2 (noting that this only applies to the 4 people who indicate they do participate in a board)	1 (noting that this only applies to the 3 people who indicate they do participate in a board)	Decrease

Table 3-4: Cohort 2 pre and post program survey results

TOPIC	COHORT 2 PARTICIPANT SELF ASSESSMENT			
	Average **before** the program. N=18	Average **after** the program. N=18	No. of participants who reported a **higher** rating **post** program	% of cohort who reported a **higher** rating **post** program
Number of committees participants sit on	2	2	7	39%
Number of boards participants sit on	Not collected	1–2 (noting that this only applies to the 7 people who indicate they do participate in a board)	7	39%

LEADERSHIP CAPABILITIES OF PARTICIPANTS

Immediate impacts

Finding: the content of the program is hitting the mark. Self-reporting is showing that the knowledge has translated into community action.

Across both cohorts, participants reported in their pre and post session surveys that their level of understanding of all subject matters had increased as a result of the sessions. Each participant was asked to rate their level of understanding on a scale of 1-5, where 1 is low and 5 is high. We took the weighted average of the scores from each session and cohort, which indicates that overall their level of understanding has increased.

Figure 3-1 shows the weighted average for each topic before and after the session for cohort one. Figure 3-2 shows the same for cohort two.
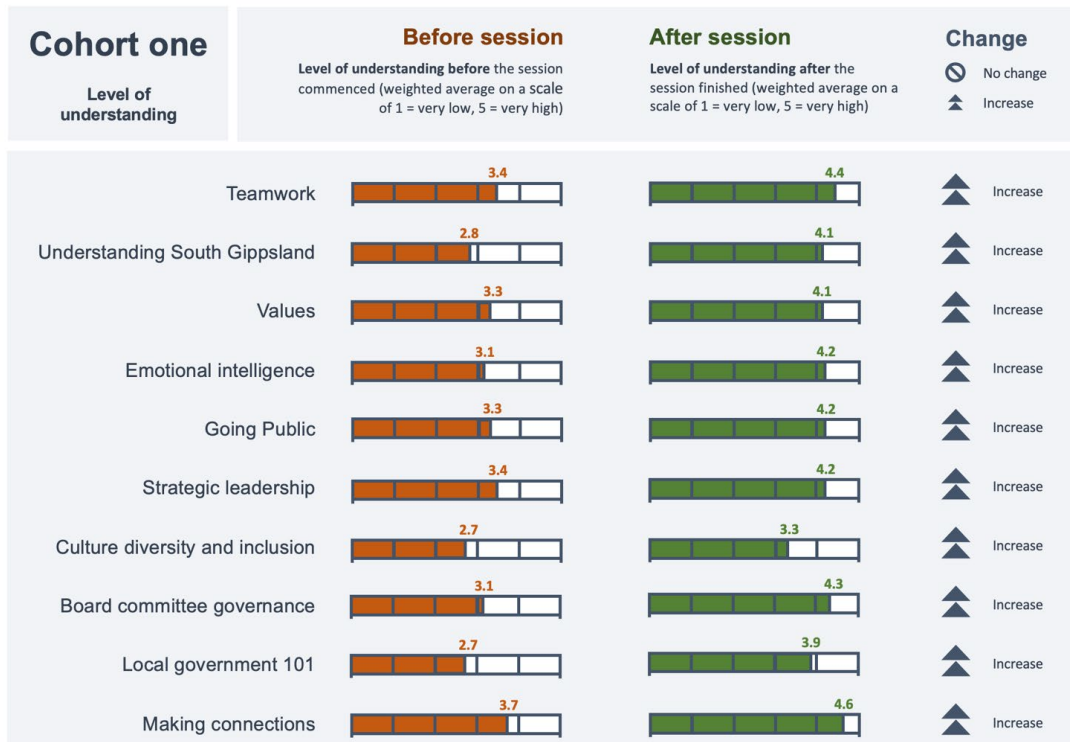
Figure 3-1: Cohort 1 – Self-reported level of understanding of each topic before and after the session
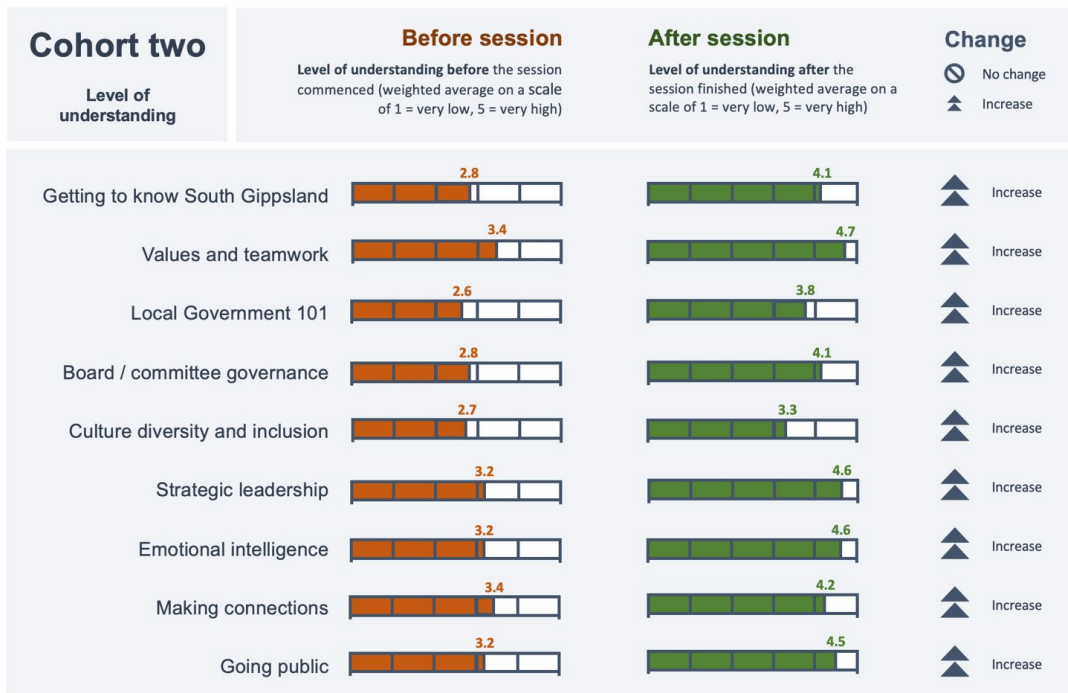
Figure 3-2: Cohort 2 - Self reported level of understanding of each topic before and after the session

Short-term post program impacts

The first cohort were asked to rate their level of understanding, confidence, or connection on a scale of one to ten before the program commenced and after the program commenced. The average rating was determined pre and post program as individuals could not be tracked. Overall the average rating remained the same pre and post program across most topics. The main area where the average rating increased was *Level of understanding of the ways to work with Council.* The results are outlined in Table 3-5.

Table 3-5: Cohort 1 pre and post program survey results

TOPIC	COHORT 1 PARTICIPANT SELF ASSESSMENT		
	Average rating (out of 10) before the program. N=18	Average rating (out of 10) after the program. N=16	Increase, no change or decrease
Level of confidence in overall leadership skills and ability	7	7	No change
Confidence in collaborating with others to achieve a common goal	8	8	No change
Level of networks / connection with other community members	6	6	No change

Similarly, the second cohort were asked to rate their level of understanding, confidence, or connection on a scale of one to ten before the program commenced and after the program commenced. Unlike the first cohort, each participant in the second cohort was asked to identify themselves so their level of progress could be

monitored. On average, the rating remained the same pre and post program for all areas, except for level of confidence in overall leadership skills and ability, where the average rating increased.

On a participant level, over three quarters (77%) of individuals reported a higher level of confidence in overall leadership skills and ability and understanding of the ways to work with Council. Half (50%) of individuals reported an increased level of confidence in collaborating with others and connection with other community members. The results are provided in Table 3-6.

Table 3-6: Cohort 2 pre and post program survey results

TOPIC	COHORT 2 PARTICIPANT SELF ASSESSMENT			
	Average rating (out of 10) before the program. N=18	Average rating (out of 10) after the program. N=18	No. of participants who reported a **higher** rating post program	% of cohort who reported a **higher** rating post program
Level of confidence in overall leadership skills and ability	7	8	14	77%
Confidence in collaborating with others to achieve a common goal	8	8	9	50%
Level of networks / connection with other community members	7	7	9	50%

Based on self-reporting, early indicators suggest that the program has helped the majority of participants to be more confident in their leadership capability and to implement change, gain a greater understanding of their strengths and weaknesses, have a better understanding of good governance, recognise how important it is to listen and develop their networks within the community.

> *[The Program] increased my confidence and knowledge as Operation Partner in our business. [I have] introduced HR manual and various policies and onboarding process for 3 new staff in the last 3 months.*
>
> ~ RMCG Survey respondent

> *It was excellent to assist me in reflecting on my community organisational roles and for developing new approaches to being a leader. It proved useful information and resources and kept me interested throughout the program.*
>
> ~ RMCG Survey respondent

> *The session on governance was enormously helpful. I discovered that the things that had made earlier committees I'd been on unbearable were in fact things that should never have been happening in a correctly-functioning body.*
>
> ~ RMCG Survey respondent

Understanding the different perspectives from all of the fellow participants on the various challenges leaders in community face has helped me remember and focus on listening to all voices when there is a decision to be made affecting community.

~ RMCG Survey respondent

I had the opportunity to meet people that I wouldn't have otherwise met. These connections have provided me inspiration and confidence as I listen to and learn from others in our community. And I have found myself linking up with several members of my program cohort for other projects such as the online candidate forums, SGCLP alumni network, and GSLN.

~ RMCG Survey respondent

UNDERSTANDING OF COUNCIL HAS BEEN IMPROVED

Finding: Program participants have reported a marginally higher level of understand of the strengths and challenges faced communities across South Gippsland and ways to work with Council after participating in the program.

The first cohort reported a higher level of understanding of the strengths and challenges faced by all communities across South Gippsland post program than beforehand (pre-program average rating of five, post program average rating of six).

The second cohort reported the same average rating of seven, pre and post program, however when the data is analysed on an individual level, 77% of participants in the second cohort reported a higher level of understanding of the strengths and challenges faced by all communities across south Gippsland post program.

The level of understanding of the ways to work with Council has increased marginally across both cohorts. For cohort one and two, the average rating on a scale of 1-10 (with 10 being very high) increased from five to seven. For cohort two, the data on an individual level showed that 83% of participants reported an increase in understanding following their participation in the program.

As the relationship with Council is one of the programs core objectives, RMCG proposes that a higher understanding could be targeted in future programs. This may be achieved through longer or additional sessions on this topic, or through an active or exploratory group activity.

Table 3-7: Cohort 1 pre and post program survey results

TOPIC	COHORT 1 PARTICIPANT SELF ASSESSMENT		
	Average rating (out of 10) before the program. N=18	Average rating (out of 10) after the program. N=16	Increase, no change or decrease
Level of understanding of the strengths and challenges faced by all communities across South Gippsland	5	6	Increase
Level of understanding of the ways to work with Council	5	7	Increase

Table 3-8: Cohort 2 pre and post program survey results

TOPIC	COHORT 2 PARTICIPANT SELF ASSESSMENT			
	Average rating (out of 10) before the program. N=18	Average rating (out of 10) after the program. N=18	No. of participants who reported a **higher** rating post program	% of cohort who reported a **higher** rating post program
Level of understanding of the strengths and challenges faced by all communities across South Gippsland	5	7	14	77%
Level of understanding of the ways to work with Council	5	7	15	83%

Many participants commented that their level of understanding of the ways to work with Council has improved as has their understanding of the challenges faced by communities.

> *I am a volunteer in 4 NFP and has helped me in the running of committee's meetings and also give me a more understanding of where to go for information in the local council.*
>
> *~ RMCG* Survey respondent

> *I've learnt a lot about how to work with the local council thanks to the terrific Community Leadership Program and the local community groups I'm involved in.*
>
> *~ Pre and post program survey respondent*

> *I have learned a lot about who to reach out to within council for support on different topics, and had a good insight in how the council operates. I feel there is still much to learn and I need more experience, but that will improve as time goes by and I work together more with the council.*
>
> *~ Pre and post program survey respondent*

MAINTAINING IMPACT: POST-PROGRAM SUPPORT

There are usually three ways participants go after undertaking a leadership course:

- 'fliers' take off and use the skills to actively lead and advance (perhaps doing additional leadership training, starting new groups, linking in with regional activity or groups)

- 'regulars' use the skills occasionally and it is helpful in their community exchanges (with others, with Council, with their regular community groups)

- 'drifters' are not sure where or how to use their new skills and need some guidance and perhaps assistance to find the right opportunities.

To ensure the most value is obtained from this program, all participants need opportunities to be encouraged, led, mentored, contribute, or to observe how others are using the skills, after the program has ended.

The current Alumni Network is hosted by council and is providing this continuance to the leadership program. It supports skill development, connections, and leadership activity. However, follow-up will be required year-on-year, after each cohort, and this eventually places great burden on the Project Officer as alumni numbers increase. This is where the true value of the Alumni Network is to be realised. Some of the weight and responsibility must shift from council to the network, and they become somewhat more self-sustaining. The investment and efforts of council are thereby leveraged and leadership in the community expands.

4 Program efficiency and effectiveness

This section addresses the following key evaluation questions:

- *Was the program implemented as planned?*
- *How can the program be improved?*

4.1   KEY FINDINGS

The findings presented here are based on the analysis presented in section 4.2:

Program was well designed and implemented

- Despite being launched during COVID-19 pandemic, the program was well designed and implemented
- Participants were pleased with program design and implementation
- Several survey respondents and interviewees valued the project officer's exceptional communication, organisation and implementation
- Participants feedback on the session logistics include session timing (with varying preferences) in-person vs online (preference for in-person) and venues and catering (all excellent).

Program design and delivery was improved in response to participant needs and COVID restrictions

- Participants and administrators said that changes associated with COVID-19 were handled as well as possible
- The second year of the program was improved in response to participant feedback
- There is evidence of a strong monitoring, evaluation, reporting and improvement ethos, which is fundamental to the success of ongoing programs.

There are some opportunities for improvement, but wholesale change is not required

- While the delivery approach was generally well regarded, the program could benefit from extra support, for both administrative matters and for program cohesion (i.e. include a single lead facilitator to link each session and ideas/learnings).

4.2   ANALYSIS

PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

Finding: Program was well designed and implemented

The program was launched in 2020 and continued through 2021, two years highly interrupted by the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite this significant challenge, the survey data for the program shows that participants were pleased with program design and implementation. The program was described as comprehensive and well organised. Some facilitated sessions were more highly rated than others. The program designers took this feedback was into account when designing the second year of the program.

> *The program is really well thought-out.*
>
> ~ *Survey respondent*

COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP PROGRAM EVALUATION   19

It was a great program. [It took me] Completely out of my comfort zone and a lot more intensive than I expected. All good things!

~ Survey respondent

Several survey respondents and interviewees made specific mention of the Community Leadership Program project officer noting that they did an exceptional job of communicating, organising, and implementing the program. There were some suggestions that additional administrative support would be helpful and several reflections on the preference for face-to-face meetings, noting that making connection with other participants is more difficult online.

<The project officer's> communication was 5 star. <Their> facilitation and organisation were amazing.

~ Survey respondent

<The project officer> is a terrific facilitator and I'd like to see <their> role in the program continue.

~ Survey respondent

The project officer did not have sufficient support… to take care of recalcitrant technology, furniture, and other venue setup duties…

– RMCG survey respondent

For this evaluation, participants gave some feedback on the session logistics:

- **Timing**: there were varying perspectives about dates and times. Some felt the mix was right, some want more daytime sessions and others prefer after hours sessions. This is a common tension in community events and can only be overcome with split sessions targeting different cohorts.
- **In-person vs online:** Those participants who discussed this point said that the mix of in-person and online events was managed well, but most would prefer most (preferably all) sessions to be in-person in the future. One respondent would like a hybrid model continued to reduce costs and increase safety.

IMPROVEMENTS

Finding: Program design and delivery was improved in response to participant needs and COVID-19 restrictions

The program design and delivery was altered in both years of the program. The first change was due to the impacts of COVID-19 restrictions, which meant that some sessions were held online, and the logistics for in-person had to change to include sanitation and mask wearing. Participants and administrators said that changes associated with COVID-19 were handled as well as possible.

In addition, the program designers made positive changes to the program based on feedback from participants. This adaptive approach meant that program design and delivery improved as it progressed.

Across its first two years, the program was changed for the better, responding to the needs of participants. They changed the order of program for the second cohort to improve the flow.

~ Survey respondent

For example, after identification that the first iteration of the program was not cohesive enough, without evident connection between one session and the next, the second program was designed to include an information session for facilitators to give understanding of the whole program.

COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP PROGRAM EVALUATION

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In addition, evaluation data collected throughout this program is of high quality. There is evidence of a strong immediate and short-term term monitoring, evaluation, reporting and improvement ethos, which is fundamental to the success of ongoing programs. The monitoring process was adjusted for cohort two, which provided valuable information for this current evaluation. RMCG recommends that program administrators continue their current approach to data collection as it supports ongoing evaluation and program improvement.

To further strengthen the ability of Council to report on the medium and longer-term impact of the program, we suggest also monitoring participants engagement with Council processes, grants and councillor elections / meetings. Another useful indicator, that could be used a proxy for understanding change in how the community perceives and interacts with Council, is the community satisfaction survey results.

Finding: There are some opportunities for improvement, but wholesale change is not required

Consistent facilitation

While the delivery approach was generally well regarded, we received a couple of suggestions about the facilitation approach. One administrator suggested that the program would benefit from a lead facilitator who plays a larger role hosting sessions, ensuring sessions are cohesive and narrating a consistent thread throughout the program.

Some other leadership programs have a primary facilitator who runs multiple sessions, holds the relationships and sets and maintains the thread of the program. While the CLP program officer plays this role to an extent, the program could benefit from extra support for program cohesion.

While participant survey data did not cover the facilitation approach, two participants made comment on inconsistent and variable quality in the facilitation. Future evaluation surveys could ask participants questions such as: "Were the sessions and the topics well connected and cohesive?"

Community leadership focus

While the program provided the opportunity for community members across the Shire to develop and enhance leadership skills, its background as a response to the 2019 council dismissal means that it also had a goal of preparing and encouraging some community leaders to consider running for council.

For some participants and applicants, this understanding lead to an incorrect assumption that the entire purpose of the program was to produce councillors, resulting in a lack of confidence in the selection process.

> _I suspect it was formed to select and "train" those who different levels of government wanted selected._

> _~ Survey respondent_

One participant identified Council election as the sole reason for their interest in the program and saw no other value in community leadership training.

Two participants felt that the program has been focussed on corporate/council leadership rather than community leadership. As these respondents pointed out, the value of community leadership goes beyond council representation and has long term impacts on the strength and vitality of a community.

> _Community leadership requires more informal forms of engagement that build leadership recognition over time. Community leaders are not appointed. They take on roles without formal structures. These are important forms of leadership that are not often recognised in the conventional leadership discourses._

> _~ Survey respondent_

We are investing in communities of the future…Anything that we can do to grow and encourage that kind of leadership in the program is good.

~ Survey respondent

Community leadership programs vary in their approach, with some focussing on build a broad-based network of community leaders who will take on formal leadership roles and some focussed primarily on supporting current volunteers or community organisations to help their communities.[2] It is possible to support both concepts. RMCG recommends that program administrators review the balance required for future programs.

Promotion, recruitment and selection

Building community awareness is a challenge for any new program. Some of the people surveyed and interviewed said that the CLP is still not widely recognised across the South Gippsland community. Now that this program has graduated two cohorts, it is time to reflect on the promotion and participant recruitment approach.

RMCG recommends that administrators develop a structured Communication, Recruitment and Selection Plan for future programs. This plan should, at minimum:

- – Include community-wide promotion actions

- – Address community diversity and barriers to inclusion

- – Follow good governance principles (including transparency and fairness)

Some participants would like the program to target more diverse groups or young people. The aim should be to ensure that the program reflects the diversity that exists within the South Gippsland community. Actions should be taken to both identify and reduce barriers to participation for under-represented sectors. Diversity includes such factors as ethnicity, gender, geographic spread, rural or urban, education level, and age. Support may be required to ensure barriers do not exist for participants who have diverse backgrounds, beliefs, or disabilities.

Transparent and fair governance during the selection process provides an important example to the community and to future participants for how Council processes must be undertaken. It was noted in evaluation interviews that the selection process to date lacked transparency. Established selection rules and criteria should be developed, available and followed.

To increase Shire-wide awareness and involvement in the program, RMCG suggests utilisation of businesses and community networks, and involvement of alumni, for a range of (ongoing) promotion and recruitment activities.

Participant recommendations for promotion included more articles and images in local and social media, particularly stories about who the participants are and what they are. Case studies inspire others, and small communities more strongly connect to activities when they recognise local role-models.

Other incremental changes

RMCG found that the other suggestions made about the program were focussed on incremental rather than wholesale changes. They are summarised in Table 4-1.

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[2] Flanagan-Smith, C. (2020) *Independent review Regional Community Leadership Program*, report prepared for Regional Development Victoria

Table 4-1 : Participant suggestions for improvement

AREA	SUGGESTION
Program design	▪ Application process for program needs improvement ▪ Consider targeted audience for the group at different times (e.g. minority or special interest groups) ▪ Longer program – e.g. 12 sessions. Always more to talk about, especially on the big issues ▪ Refresh the content – among other things, use alumni network feedback
Session facilitators	▪ Use graduates as speakers and/or mentors in future programs ▪ Bringing in more speakers who are external to our Shire, i.e. from other Councils, state government or other community groups.
Session content	▪ Increase participant time together. COVID-19 restrictions made it impossible to be together in person all the time, but future cohorts would benefit from all sessions being face to face. ▪ Allow more room for the participants to apply the new knowledge to matters in their organisations or communities. ▪ Run a session on being a small community incorporated association and legal obligations of office bearers. ▪ Build 'Council's decision-making processes' into the program ▪ Improve program to include a project element that allows participants to demonstrate and practice the skills ▪ Provide opportunity to meet with leadership & Councillors
Target participants	▪ Develop a program appropriate for young people, late teens to early 20s ▪ Aim for gender balance ▪ Aim for a ward balance ▪ Bring in more businesspeople
Session logistics	▪ More consideration as to geographical location of meetings ▪ Shorter time gaps for follow up meetings
Other	▪ Develop course into a Certificate 3 course for employment and education prospects

5 Value of the program

This section addresses the following key evaluation question:

▪   *Is this program worth the investment?*

5.1   KEY FINDINGS

The findings presented here are based on the analysis presented in section 5.2:

Many participants see this program as an investment in the future of South Gippsland

▪   All participants found the program valuable

▪   Many participants found the program encouraged participants to step into committee leadership roles, helped them improved their leadership skills, work better with others, and increase their networks. Many see it as an investment in the future of South Gippsland.

▪   The program has had a significant impact in a short amount of time. The benefits of the investment will be realised over time as people understand how local government works and appreciate good governance. Further investment is likely to result in greater benefits for the community and Council over time.

5.2   ANALYSIS

Finding: All participants found the program valuable

All participants found the program valuable in one way or another, which is reflected by the self-reporting data outlined in the previous section. It was clear from the RMCG survey that the program encouraged participants to step into committee leadership roles, work better with others, and increase their networks. When asked what the impact would be if the program stopped tomorrow, the main finding was that it may prevent people from getting the support, confidence, and skills they need to take up leadership opportunities and do them well within the community.

> *Committee leaders have come out of this program, (*and*) that may cease.*
>
> *~ RMCG survey respondent*

> *The program supports and motivates (potential) community group leaders. It helps them to find best practises (*sic*) to work, connect with others and knowing where to look for support. if the program were to stop, these leaders would have a harder time finding the resources they need, and it may result in their initiatives not coming into fruition which would be a loss for the community.*
>
> *~ RMCG survey respondent*

> *We would lose a lot of opportunities to give south Gippslanders the chance to see what they're capable of. We would lose the links that are essential for community groups to network with and learn from each other. We would risk the negative attitude towards council returning due to misinformation. This program is an investment in our future.*
>
> *~ RMCG survey respondent*

> *I have found myself more connected to the shire, my community, and the local community organisations I am involved with. The community leaders I've met have also become people I can call upon for advice and to also offer my support to. The network effect is very valuable.*
>
> *~ RMCG survey respondent*

Only one RMCG survey respondent, with a personal focus on nominating for Council election, did not support continuation of the program. This participant felt that the two programs had provided enough of a "reservoir of participants … for the time being". This participant saw no value in continuing leadership training for broader community purposes.

Finding: *Many found the program encouraged participants to step into committee leadership roles, helped them improved their leadership skills, work better with others, and increase their networks. Many see it as an investment in the future of South Gippsland*

From the perspective of administrators, facilitators and council staff who were interviewed, the program has been a welcome investment in the community and for Council. Most interviewees believe you cannot over invest in building leadership skills and confidence.

Anecdotally in the short period of time that this program has been running, interviewees have seen an increase in the number of people putting their hands up for leadership opportunities, whether it is for Council roles or engagement processes, or community organisations. Some also reported that there has been a positive shift in the way community members interact with Council staff. Interactions are more respectful, and they feel as if the knowledge that Council staff have is more understood and valued.

Finding: *The program has had a significant impact in a short amount of time.*
The program has had a significant impact in a short amount of time. The benefits of the investment will be realised over time as people understand how local government works and appreciate good governance. Further investment is likely to result in greater benefits for the community and Council over time.

There has already been a significant increase in skills and confidence, which are being used in Council and within a wide range of community-based organisations, as well as to mentor others. Overall, this program has achieved a big impact in a short amount of time and with further investment the impact is likely to become greater.

> *It has made a real difference – number of people putting their hands up, sought after, there has been a lot of confidence gained.*
>
> ~ Interviewee

> *We are investing in communities of the future. Anything that we can do to grow and encourage leadership through the program is good. For us to withdraw now, we would lose the opportunity to build on what we've started. These people will also be mentors for others. It is about what they are able to foster within the communities and how they continue to build those relationships. The more people we have with great leadership skills the more than can develop others.*
>
> ~ Interviewee

> *It is a really empowering model. Can never have too many capacity programs.*
>
> ~ Interviewee

> *Anecdotally you get a difference in the way community members are treating staff. Councillors had been told that staff were a basket case when they're not. During the program, participants saw that staff are providing them with information that they hadn't got before and were a resource for them. There certainly feels like an increased level of respect.*
>
> ~ Interviewee

> *The program provides connectivity, trust, the backbone of the community. Community organisations need development of leaders, succession planning – Council can't take on all these leadership roles.*
>
> ~ Interviewee

6 Other leadership programs

There are many regional and local government leadership programs in Victoria, some with long histories of success. They provide the basis for comparing delivery of leadership training at a community level.

6.1 THE SPECTRUM OF LEADERSHIP

Leadership occurs across a very broad spectrum. Sometimes, active community members find it difficult to understand that they are 'leaders' when they take on any role in their community: from a small contribution advocating for a change or helping organise a community event, to a larger contribution taking on the Presidency of a sporting club, or even nominating for election as a local government Councillor.

The roles of community leadership programs are equally broad. Local programs cater to local needs, including:

- Increasing community understanding of Council, and ways to work effectively together
- Upskilling individuals so that they can be more active in community leadership opportunities
- Strengthening community organisations and improving their project proposals
- Encouraging participation of under-represented sectors of the community
- Encouraging a wider range of residents to stand for Council.

Community leadership programs need to evolve with the changing needs of their community.

The SGSC Community Leadership Program was set specific aims from the outset, and the current program design responds directly to these. Results from this evaluation indicate that the program is achieving its goals very effectively. Nevertheless, over the next 3-5 years, ongoing evaluation of the program may indicate that a shift in focus is required.

As leaders rise from community activity and groups through to government and its agencies, higher levels of understanding are required on topics such as governance, negotiation skills, financial management, legal responsibilities, and risk. Community-centred leadership courses cannot deliver the full range of skills for these higher responsibilities in one program. The local community leadership program is an early step in the building of capacity and capability and sits within a spectrum of training opportunities.

6.2 LOCAL GOVERNMENT LEADERSHIP PROGRAMS

There are a range of comparative local government community leadership programs across Victoria, tailored to local needs. They are of variable content, structure, purpose, and required commitment. A few of these programs are outlined here.

VICTORIAN LOCAL GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS

City of Melton – community leadership

This program aims to enhance leadership skills and create networks for existing, new and emerging leaders of community groups within the City. The program selection has a strong focus on diversity and ensuring participants are representative of the broader community.

The program includes workshops on:

- **Leadership**: group dynamics, leadership theory, personal and community leadership
- **Communication:** communication skills, networking, public speaking
- **Community capacity:** local resources, networking, working with volunteers
- **Understanding Government**: responsibilities of Government, working effectively with Council

- **Leading Change:** Good Governance, decision making, goal setting, reflection process.

Greater Shepparton Council

This program is aimed at existing and emerging leaders in the community, to develop and up-skill their leadership capacity. It comprises 7 x 3hr sessions:

- Introduction
- Communication Preferences
- Community Leadership
- Public Speaking
- Goal Setting & Monitoring
- Understanding Community and Diversity
- Reflection & Resilience
- Co-design workshop.

Surf Coast Shire Council – community leadership

This program demands a higher commitment of participants, and is run over 11 weeks, involving 6 x ½ day weekend sessions and 5 x 2hr weeknight sessions:

- Introduction and purpose
- Working with First Nations people
- Community development principles and practice
- Leadership styles
- Planning community projects
- Reflections & learnings from program alumni
- Storytelling and the power of shared knowledge
- Marketing an idea to the community
- First Nations history and culture
- Role of local government and their decision-making processes
- Presentations and reflections (ideas, learnings and projects).

The program aims to develop emerging community leaders, and to improve their leadership knowledge, skills, care and connections. It helps to develop networks of change-makers, improves understanding of how to work with Council, and has a strong focus on connecting with First Nations knowledge and culture.

Frankston City – youth leadership focus

Frankston has a tailored youth leadership program based on a representative council format, to give young people a voice, an opportunity to lead, and a platform to represent other young people within their community. Youth Council encourages participants to explore their own personal government and community objectives. The activities and objectives in this program include:

- Plan, organise and facilitate a youth project and event, based on Youth Councils chosen vision
- Providing feedback for new and existing Council initiatives through a consultative process on issues that may affect young people in the community
- Volunteer at events and within the community
- Participate in training and workshops for personal development and future possibilities.

City of Whittlesea – multiple programs in leadership

Council promotes two community leadership training pathways, the first through Council but run by a specialist facilitator, the second through the Victorian Local Governance Association. Both courses are mixed-delivery

and begin with an online introductory unit through Latrobe University Business School, called 'Enabling Leadership'. This preliminary course introduces enrolled participants to the following topics:

- Leadership styles
- How to lead others
- Leading for results
- Introduction to local government and how it works.

The two courses on offer are:

1. Engaging Leadership – run by a facilitator over 9 weeks, it is focussed on developing practical skills, personal abilities, and networks to enable participants to work with community and create positive change. The program is delivered in a mix of both online and in-person sessions with local case studies and speakers to build practical knowledge based on real world experiences.

2. Empowering Leadership – aims to develop knowledge of the system of local government and good governance, specifically empowering participants to work within Council, as candidates, councillors, or stakeholders. This program is run by the Victorian Local Governance Association.

Nillumbik – Women's Community Leadership and Connections Program

An eight-week program (8 x 2.5-3hr sessions), entailing:

- Introduction & purpose
- Understanding Council
- Equity-centred leadership
- Understanding your community and role in it
- Project planning and design
- Collaborating with Council
- Preparing for action.

The program started in 2021 and aims to provide an opportunity for women to build their leadership skills and networks to become more confident, active, and engaged leaders and community connectors. During the program, each participant works to develop a project that can help build community resilience and supportive networks. In 2021, these projects included a repair café, a new group for carers, a health and wellbeing hub and exercise group for new parents.

SGSC PROGRAM AND OTHER LOCAL GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS

The South Gippsland Community Leadership Program sits comfortably within the range of parameters for local government programs in terms of its structure, content, purpose and commitment required from participants.

There is a strong focus on personal skills of leadership in the program, as well as knowledge around the community's interaction with Council. At this stage, the program does not have a strong focus on developing a project or proposal, as do many of the other local government programs. The SGSC program has a strong follow-up with its Alumni Network, and this provides opportunities for sharing knowledge and for the development and support of ideas and projects. This ongoing support and connection is important in the retention and further growth of leadership skills and interest.

It may be useful for applicants to better understand the position of SGSC community leadership program in the leadership spectrum, and its relationship to other tailored programs (such as those that are specifically designed for local government councillor training, corporate governance, or regional leadership). There is also scope to build flexibility into future programs that allows participants to explore and extend learning in areas of particular interest to the group.

6.3   RELATIONSHIP TO REGIONAL PROGRAMS

Evaluation of the SGSC Community Leadership Program indicates that it is accurately aimed at a local level, upskilling community members who are then increasing their participation in leadership activity and improving their interactions with Council.

This program is not comparable to regional programs for reasons of intent, scale and required commitment (both time and financial). It is important to highlight that the SGSC Community Leadership Program is not attempting to achieve the same outcomes as the regional programs.

Where participants are interested, the skills gained through this program community can be built on by subsequently undertaking more leadership training, either at regional leadership programs, or through formal education (including the AICD Company Director's Course, or coursework at a registered Business School or University).

Across Victoria, the following regional programs receive support from Regional Development Victoria (RDV) under the 'Regional Community Leadership Program':
- Victorian Community Leadership Program (VRCLP) Secretariat
- Alpine Valleys Community Leadership Program
- Community Leadership Loddon Murray
- Fairley Leadership Program
- Gippsland Community Leadership Program
- Future Shapers Ballarat
- Leaders for Geelong
- Leadership Great South Coast
- Leadership Wimmera
- Northern Mallee Leaders.

The RDV-supported programs demand significant time and financial contribution. For example, the Gippsland Community Leadership Program is undertaken over 10 months, with 22 full-day sessions, including 4 two-day residentials. Participants (and/or their employers) pay between $600 and $6000 (a range of scholarships are also available). The highly competitive application process and personal financial commitments encourage participants to conscientiously attend the course and to then utilise their acquired skills and knowledge in a professional manner.

For people who are interested in standing as a nominee for local government elections, must complete a short, online Local Government Candidate Training program (https://www.localgovernment.vic.gov.au/council-governance/candidate-training). In addition, the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) continually runs a Councillor Development Training Program (https://www.mav.asn.au/events/councillor-development/councillor-professional-development).

As noted in the section 6.2, the City of Whittlesea runs multiple courses in leadership. Their 'Empowering Leadership' course is run by the Victorian Local Governance Association and is intended for people seeking a deeper understanding of local government, particularly those with an intent to nominate for local government elections.

It is useful for participants in the SGSC Community Leadership Program to understand these options, either as alternatives (during the application process) or as future training and advancement opportunities (for participants).

7 Summary of findings and recommendations

Evidence shows that the South Gippsland Community Leadership Program has met its objectives and had high impact over a short period of time (2 years). This has been achieved through a period of great community disruption, caused by both the period of Administration of Council and by the restrictions imposed on the community through the Covid-19 pandemic. The program is young but is highly valued by those who know and understand it, including the two cohorts of participants.

RMCG's evaluation of the program recommends no significant changes but acknowledges that that the program will benefit from several minor adjustments and ongoing monitoring and review.

7.1 BEST PRACTICE COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

While there is no single way to develop community leadership capacity, best practice community leadership programs focus on the following

- **Skills development:** Focus on increasing participant ability and skills to lead positive action in their communities
- **Community awareness**: Increase participant awareness of local and regional issues and drivers
- **Community action:** Support participants to undertaken real projects in their communities
- **Community investment:** Support local businesses and individuals to invest in their program
- **Network building:** Help participants and alumni to build and expand diverse networks
- **Social inclusion:** Increase leadership skills and networks of people traditionally excluded from leadership
- **Alumni networks:** Support alumni to maintain and apply leadership skills in their communities
- **Evolution:** Share and learn from their own experiences and that of other programs, organisations and researchers.

7.2 PROGRAM RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1.   Maintain program funding

The CLP is meeting and exceeding its original aims and is providing a valued service to both the community and to Council. It has also facilitated a bond of trust between community members and Council.

Long term outcomes of the program cannot be measured after only two years, but indications to date are that the program has achieved high impact in its current form.

Recommendation 2.   Maintain best practice community focus

The CLP should continue efforts to evolve so that it achieves and maintains best practice. Focus should increase in the following areas:

- Incorporating active elements in program design (project or idea development)
- Allowing scope in the program to be adaptable, providing opportunities to extend learning in response to group interests or needs
- Providing context for the program and identifying pathways for further leadership development
- Providing opportunities for participants to learn from each other, and from past participants, to accelerate their development and impact
- Securing local investment and support, noting may be difficult in less populated areas

Recommendation 3.   Increase program administration and facilitation support

Increase program facilitation support to ensure the program is run cohesively. This may include a single, lead facilitator who attends all sessions and provides the connective thread between sessions, learnings and ideas. Additional support should be considered for inclusiveness (e.g., cultural awareness, disability or IT support) and administration.

Recommendation 4.   Maintain evaluation approach, but overcome data limitations

Program administrators should continue the approach to data collection as used for Cohort 2 because it supports ongoing evaluation and program improvement. To monitor the longer-term impact of the program, it is suggested to use indicators such as: participants engagement with Council processes, grants and councillor elections / meetings and community satisfaction survey results.

For long-term monitoring, data such as participation in council engagement process, applications for Councillor elections, grant applications, and community satisfaction rating can be very good indicators for how people's involvement with council changes over time, based on their involvement in the CLP. However, unless some of Council's data management limitations can be overcome, it is difficult to use it to draw conclusions about the long-term impact of the program.

Future evaluations should continue to monitor if the program is addressing any changes in community needs.

Recommendation 5.   Seek to support the sustainability of the alumni network

To ensure the most value is obtained from leadership programs, participants need opportunities to be encouraged, led, mentored, contribute, or to observe how others are using the skills, after the program has ended. Follow-up and support from council should focus on development of the Alumni Network so that they become the hub of post-program activity and over the next few years, become somewhat self-sustaining.

Recommendation 6.   Develop a communication, recruitment and selection plan

Administrators should develop a structured Communication, Recruitment and Selection Plan for future programs. This plan should, at minimum:

- Include community-wide promotional activity
- Address community diversity and barriers to inclusion
- Follow good governance principles (including transparency and fairness)

Appendix 1: Evaluation consultation plan

Introduction

EVALUATION PURPOSE

RMCG has been appointed to undertake an external evaluation of South Gippsland Shire Council's (SGSC) Community Leadership Program (CLP).

This evaluation framework and consultation plan outlines our approach to consultation and the activities that RMCG will undertake to obtain stakeholders' feedback about the program.

CLP PURPOSE

The CLP was established with three specific goals:

6. Encourage widespread participation in community and civic life in the municipality
7. Support the development of community leadership skills
8. Support an improvement in the relationship between the Council and its community

CLP EVALUATION PLAN

Early in the development of the CLP, the project team develop an Evaluation Plan to support implementation. To support the CLP Evaluation Plan, a series of questions were asked of participants before, during and after each program (2020 and 2021).

This consultation plan and evaluation framework draws upon the goals, purpose and questions set out in the CLP Evaluation Plan.

Consultation approach for evaluation

TARGET STAKEHOLDERS

There are three key groups of stakeholders that RMCG will be contacting:

1. Program applicants and participants
2. Program sponsors, organisers, and facilitators
3. Administrators from other leadership programs, not associated with SGSC's program (up to three, selected and contacted directly by RMCG)

METHODS

This project offers three methods for stakeholder participation: online survey, phone interview, or video-interview.

The evaluation allows for:

- Up to 40 online surveys
- Up to 10 phone or online stakeholder interviews/meetings
- Up to 3 face-to-face interviews/meetings, if required

The evaluation survey will be conducted using an online platform. It will be sent to a wide group of program applicants and participants.

Interviews will be semi-structured; guiding questions will be used to explore key focus areas, but discussions will flexibly respond to interviewees' concerns, interests and insights. The interview data will be used to contextualise survey findings, identify key lessons learned and test recommendations and next steps.

CONTACT PROTOCOL

The first and second groups, which include all SGSC's known program stakeholders, will be contacted through the following process:

- An introductory email or phone-call will be issued from SGSC to each stakeholder, advising them of the external Program Evaluation.
    - Stakeholders will be provided with the names and email &/or phone contacts for the RMCG engagement team (Anna Kilborn and Melissa Ludeman).
    - Stakeholders will be given a minimum 3 days to opt out of the evaluation program. If a stakeholder opts out, they will not be contacted by RMCG and will be excluded from the evaluation.
- RMCG will then contact each involved stakeholder, first by email.
  This first email will be cc'd to Lucinda Young at SGSC, but subsequent emails and communications will not be shared, unless requested to do so by the stakeholder. The first RMCG email will provide information about:
    - the purpose of the evaluation
    - RMCG's role, and team members names and contact details
    - confidentially and how information will be handled
    - options for completing the questionnaire/survey (email/online, phone, videocall)
    - opportunity to ask questions or voice concerns

We note that SGSC and RMCG agree that some specific stakeholders should be interviewed face to face or using an online Teams/Zoom platform due to their close and detailed association with the project. These priority stakeholders include SGSC program staff and SGSC's CEO.

We will ask those individuals to partake in a video-interview. Written notes will be taken during interviews. No interviews will be video- or sound- recorded. Interviewees will have the option to provide additional written comment if they so desire.

Online survey method is preferred for most interviewees, as this provides advantages and efficiencies for timing (when convenient to the interviewee) collation and analysis.

CONFIDENTIALITY

SECURITY OF INFORMATION

Contact details of stakeholders will not be used, distributed or shared outside the RMCG project team. Contact information will be securely stored, and virus protection of computer systems used on this project will be maintained and regularly updated.

DE-IDENTIFICATION AND COLLATION OF DATA

This is an external and independent evaluation of the Community Leadership Program. Unless express permission is sought and obtained from the stakeholder, feedback will be de-identified and collated before being reported to SGSC. Where useful and relevant, comments may be quoted in the Evaluation Report, but will not be attributed to any individual.

Evaluation plan

EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

Table 1: Evaluation framework

EVALUATION PURPOSE	KEY EVALUATION QUESTIONS	SOURCE OF DATA				
		Participants	Applicants	Administrators & sponsors	Facilitators	Desktop review
Impact To determine overall impact of program toward goals: ▪ Encourage widespread participation in community and civic life in the municipality ▪ Support the development of community leadership skills ▪ Support an improvement in the relationship between the Council and its community	Have participants increased participation in community and civic life across South Gippsland?	Y	Y	Y	-	Y
	Have participants taken on more leadership opportunities in their communities and council?	Y	-	Y	-	Y
	How effective was the program in improving leadership capabilities of participants?	Y	-	Y	-	Y
	Does the program improve relationships between Council and participants?	Y	Y	-	-	-
Efficiency and effectiveness To improve program implementation	Was the program implemented as planned?	-	-	Y	Y	-
	How can the program be improved?	Y	Y	Y	Y	-
Value To determine if program should be continued long-term.	Is this program worth the investment?	Y	Y	Y	Y	-

SURVEY AND INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

PARTICIPANTS AND APPLICANTS

Note that 'applicants' (who were not successful) will not be asked the questions marked with an asterisk (*).

Table 2: Evaluation questions for applicants and participants (survey and interview)

EVALUATION PURPOSE	QUESTIONS
Opening	▪ Tell us about your involvement in the program
Impact To determine overall impact of program toward goals.	▪ Has your participation in community and civic life across South Gippsland increased? Please explain your answer
	▪ Have you taken on more leadership opportunities in your community and/or at council? Please explain your answer
	▪ How effective was the program in improving your leadership capabilities? Please provide examples*
	▪ Has your perspective on South Gippsland Shire Council changed after participating in the program? Please explain your answer*
Efficiency and effectiveness	▪ How can the program be improved?
Value	▪ What would happen if this program were to stop tomorrow?
	▪ Is this program worth continuing? Why?
General	▪ Is there anything else you'd like to say about the program that hasn't been covered in the above questions?

ADMINISTRATORS AND FACILITATORS

Table 3: Evaluation questions for administrators and facilitators (survey and interview)

EVALUATION PURPOSE	QUESTIONS
Opening	▪ Tell us about your involvement in the program
Impact To determine overall impact of program toward goals.	▪ Have you noticed that participation in community and civic life across South Gippsland has increased? What evidence supports this?
	▪ Have participants taken on more leadership opportunities in their communities and/or at council? Evidence?
	▪ How effective was the program in improving participant leadership capabilities? Evidence?
	▪ Have community perspectives on South Gippsland Shire Council changed as a result of the program? Evidence?
Efficiency and effectiveness	▪ Are there instances where you changed the approach to the program? Why? ▪ How can the program be improved?
Value	▪ What would happen if this program were to stop tomorrow?
	▪ Is this program worth continuing? Why?
General	▪ Is there anything else you'd like to say about the program that hasn't been covered in the above questions?

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