



mosaicLAB

OVERCOMING LEADERSHIP OBSTACLES

How Victoria's Local Government Leaders can leave a lasting legacy

Ideas from the Municipal Association of Victoria
Annual Conference

10 February 2023



Local government representatives from across Victoria joined MosaicLab in a discussion about leadership legacies at the **2023 Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) Conference**. A number of delegates took part in MosaicLab's interactive conversation station and responded to the following questions:

WHAT'S YOUR BIGGEST LEADERSHIP CHALLENGE?

WHAT DO YOU WANT YOUR LEGACY TO BE?

This resource showcases the ideas and reflections shared at the event, which have been grouped into key themes.



THEME 1

PLANNING STRATEGICALLY FOR THE FUTURE

PARTICIPANT DILEMMAS

- ◆ Effective planning for community and council.
- ◆ Staying ahead of the game.
- ◆ Youth & sport (the population growing faster than infrastructure).

RESPONSES: LEAVING A LEGACY

Setting aside time to work on the strategic vs. the operational is vital. Give yourself space to work at this level and plan out time ahead to have strategic thinking time with colleagues. For example, plan for 1-2 days or even a week to get away with the team and think more strategically.

Ask your team key 'what is hard' questions. This will help you build the strategic picture and bring people into that conversation rather than struggling alone. From there you can build your strategy up to a coherent bigger picture. Define your trade-offs so this bigger picture catalyses some energy rather than being trapped in 'rates, roads and rubbish' conversations.

Planning into the future and for the changing needs of communities is one of the biggest challenges for local government. The 'jolt' exercise, where you invite a community leader and an expert to bring in new thinking, may help you shift your focus to the bigger picture. Sometimes hearing a message from outside your area or organisation may have more impact than when it's delivered by a familiar voice. By finding 'experts' that people respect, you can find a way to effectively 'jolt' your project or process in refreshing ways, and this often leads to outcomes that you hadn't expected.



“Define your trade-offs so this bigger picture catalyses some energy rather than being trapped in ‘rates, roads and rubbish’ conversations.”

THEME 2

SERVING THE WHOLE COMMUNITY

PARTICIPANT DILEMMAS

- ◊ Wanting to make everybody happy and support all ages in the community.
- ◊ Being a voice for the whole community.
- ◊ Making everybody happy.

RESPONSES: LEAVING A LEGACY

Many people in leadership are driven to leave a legacy so it comes as no surprise the serving the community is high on our leaders' minds. As one delegate shared with us, "it's a great honour to be a councillor and be able to serve the many diverse cultures in our multicultural community".

To start, it's important to think about what 'making everyone happy' means. Sometimes it's better to aim for "I can accept that" or "I'm willing to live with that" rather than "I love that, I'm super happy". You can't possibly be the voice for all your community, but you can listen and provide opportunity for influence in decisions. Find ways to share the dilemma so that people who aren't getting exactly what they want understand the reasoning, and evidence, for that decision and can accept it.

It's also important to draw on your team and your network, especially where you have gaps in knowledge, expertise, and experience. Find ways to discuss what's hard and explore solutions from different angles. Be willing to share the dilemma, so that you can lighten your load and build synergies with others who can help you serve the needs of many.

Engaging a diverse community is something that needs careful planning. Think about: who exactly is your community? How many different viewpoints are you listening to and does it feel balanced? What would make it easier for people in your community to contribute to decisions that affect them? Take a long-term approach and build relationships with key members of all groups within your community. Ask them what they need and how they want to engage with you.



"Be willing to share the dilemma, so that you can lighten your load and build synergies with others who can help you serve the needs of many."

THEME 3

ENGAGING AND COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY

PARTICIPANT DILEMMAS

- ◆ Having an excellent communication and engagement strategy internally and externally.

RESPONSES: LEAVING A LEGACY

Build a strategic engagement and communications framework with high level buy-in. Ask your leaders what worries them about engagement and what success looks like, and then build that into a high-level framework that drives all activity and can withstand scrutiny.

Creating robust processes will ensure clear and consistent messages are being shared with the community and there will be a joint understanding across all staff about how to engage with community. You could include an audit process, looking into internal process and external benchmarking against other LGAs as a way of tracking how you are going.

Invest time in building skills across the organisation. Run some training sessions for different cohorts across the organisation, including councillors, in the fundamentals of engagement and communication and the differences between the disciplines.



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THEME 4

ADVOCATING FOR LOCAL COMMUNITIES

PARTICIPANT DILEMMAS

- ◆ Strengthening the capacity and role of local government with communities and state government.
- ◆ Empower councillors to advocate to state government on behalf of their communities.
- ◆ Funding going to the city not the regions.

RESPONSES: LEAVING A LEGACY

Have a good understanding of what's important within your community so that you know how best to advocate for what they want and need. We are seeing more local government engagement working to understand a particular issue that goes beyond the remit of local government. The outcome of these processes is an advocacy position that is backed by evidence of community support. Some municipalities are taking this a step further and investing in a standing deliberative panel over a 12 month period. The panel then builds the knowledge of local government issues and can explore and articulate what is most important to their community on a whole range of topics.

Train councillors in how to be good listeners and engagers, to know what the community values and know how to share this story with other levels of government.

Learn from the experience of others and gather insight from what others have done. Get the right people involved early and bring them in to the development of your plan. Identify who the key people are in your community and consider bringing them into an interactive strategy session. Seek out leaders at all levels.



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THEME 5

BUILDING TRUST AND LEADING COLLABORATIVELY

PARTICIPANT DILEMMAS

- ◇ Gaining the loyalty of those who would see you fail because they want to be the leader.
- ◇ Encouraging inclusiveness.

RESPONSES: LEAVING A LEGACY

Ultimately, to build trust, your colleagues and community need to be able to make up their own mind on what you say and how you act. We like to say “track us don’t trust us” as a way to invite people to monitor our actions and encourage them into a dialogue if things go off track. Trust comes with time, and in some cases it may never come, but if people see you as accountable then they are more likely to work with you.

We’ve learned over many years of working with people and communities in conflict or outrage that if you only speak to your side then the others will ‘dig into’ their side. Find a way to bring to understand their argument (and what they’re really passionate about) so that you can find a way to middle ground.

It’s important to have a deep understanding of the community you’re advocating for, to proceed confidently that you’re including ALL voices. Having a clear and transparent process for engaging with your community, and make sure you pay attention to hearing balanced view points.

Finally, building better relationships comes from consistent engagement and communication - clearly communicating what you will do, doing it, and then communicating that you did it. Asking for feedback/ input, taking that feedback on board to shape your actions and decisions, and then reporting back to the community on how their input shaped your decisions. Demonstrate through your behaviour and how your council listens, engages and is accountable to the actions and follow through.



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MosaicLab is grateful to the conference organisers and all the delegates who visited our hub and shared their leadership dilemmas.



MosaicLab is an experienced team of facilitators and community engagement practitioners specialising in high influence and deliberative engagement.

Our team can help you to determine the best way to address your engagement dilemmas, issues or opportunities. **Contact us** to discuss how we can help you design and/or deliver a robust process or tailored training session.



FACILITATING CHALLENGING CONVERSATIONS

Our **Facilitating Challenging Conversations** self-directed short course offered through the MosaicLab Academy online training platform helps you predict, identify, prepare for and navigate conflict and outrage.

You don't have to be a facilitator to take this course. It's aimed at anyone in a role that includes regular interaction with stakeholders or communities, particularly where there might be a lack of trust or a history of emotion and conflict.

Get a taster of this course with our free download:
[**Tips for making hard conversations easier.**](#)

