

Towards thriving community participation: A Regional Action Plan



A 10-YEAR REGIONAL PARTICIPATION
ACTION PLAN FOR THE WIMMERA
SOUTHERN MALLEE



► COMMUNITY ► VOLUNTEERING ► LEARNING ► PARTNERSHIPS

Contents

INTRODUCTION.....	1
A 10-year Regional participation action plan for the Wimmera Southern Mallee.....	1
What is 'participation' and how is it different from 'volunteering'?	1
Defining participation	2
Why develop a regional participation action plan?.....	2
Plan implementation – a sustainable and accountable approach.....	2
Acronyms.....	3
Acknowledgements	3
THE PLAN.....	5
The six key pillars	5
Pillar 1: places to participate	6
Pillar 2: Participation for everyone.....	8
Pillar 3: Working together	12
Pillar 4: Investing in participation.....	14
Pillar 5: Promoting participation.....	16
Pillar 6: Sparking individual participation.....	18
RESOURCES	20

Prepared by

Ross Wyatt, Sofiah Mackay, Think Impact, in collaboration with the Wimmera Southern Mallee community and the Centre for Participation.

Think Impact is a specialist social impact consultancy based in Melbourne. Our focus is to support organisations, across all sectors, to manage for better impact.

Contact

For further details please contact:

Think Impact
Our Community House
552 Victoria Street
North Melbourne, VIC 3051, Australia
ross@thinkimpact.com.au
+61 402 001 237

ABN 15 129 607 576

Disclaimer

Although every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the material and the integrity of the analysis presented herein, Think Impact accepts no liability for any actions taken on the basis of the contents of this report.



Introduction



'The Wimmera Southern Mallee region has a long history of people coming together to improve the community's outcomes. We do this because being involved is important. This Plan is about working together to get everyone involved in our community, and the Wimmera Southern Mallee Development team is keen to play its part in bringing this Plan to life and supporting the Centre for Participation and their team in doing this.'

Chris Sounness, CEO,
Wimmera Southern Mallee Development

In 2023, the Centre for Participation (CfP) and partners recognised the need to bolster community participation across the region to address evolving challenges and opportunities facing communities.

With support from State and Federal Government, CfP engaged the community to develop a comprehensive 10-year *Regional participation action plan* aimed at enhancing community participation across the Wimmera Southern Mallee. The plan was developed with community through interviews, community workshops and a 'Community Drivers Group'.

The Wimmera Southern Mallee community clearly expressed structural and social barriers that are getting in the way of supporting all people to actively participate in the community. They also expressed a clear 10-year vision of a region with thriving community participation and identified key areas for action required to get there.



WHAT IS 'PARTICIPATION' AND HOW IS IT DIFFERENT FROM 'VOLUNTEERING'?

Volunteering is, and always will be, an essential part of Australia's social fabric. So, it is little wonder that for many decades government policy, funding support and community organisations have focused on supporting volunteerism as a means of addressing challenges of social cohesion. However, the cracks are starting to appear in this approach. Numerous studies have identified limitations in the current approach, and it leads many to wonder if our approaches to engaging, developing and fostering volunteers is right for the contemporary world. After all, formal volunteering has its roots in Australia's colonial era.

These factors are contributing to:

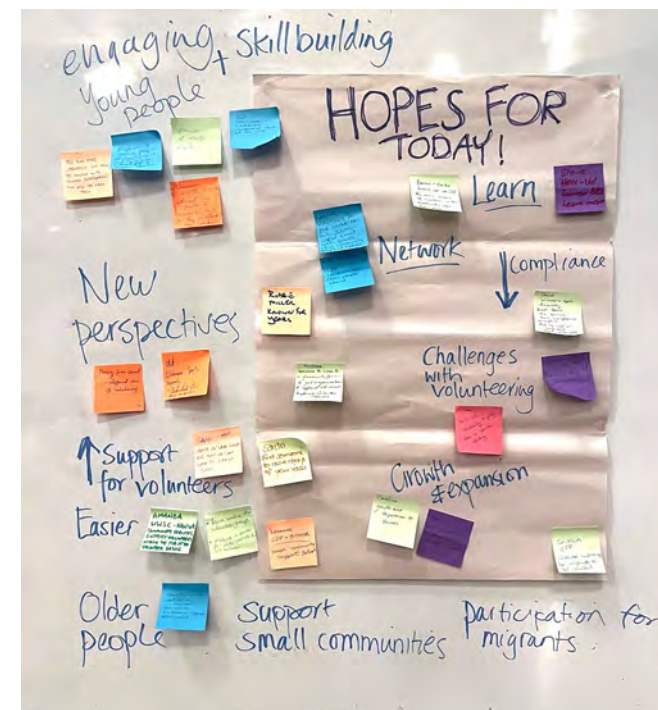
- a reduction in the number of volunteers
- a reduction in the time spent volunteering
- structural and compliance barriers to formal volunteering
- increased insurance (and other) costs associated with engaging volunteers
- use of volunteering for 'mutual obligation' activities.

In fact, it was shortly before European settlement in Australia that the word 'volunteer' found currency in English language. In the 1600s, from the Latin *voluntarius*, meaning willing or of one's own choice, volunteer only had a military connotation. In 1648 Thomas Gage wrote a book using volunteer to refer to someone who went on religious missions. Until the mid-nineteenth century, most dictionaries defined the noun only in its military connotation. Today of course the noun has both community and military connotations. This history is interesting as the original aspects of free-will and choice still have strong relevance. We talk of volunteers 'giving their time, 'helping others', and often, 'giving back'.

The history of formal volunteering practices and traditions in Australia are therefore derived from the British legacy as a penal colony (Oppenheimer 2015). These practices are also strongly linked to religious customs in which largely white, Christian, middle-class people sought to enact the teachings of the Bible through 'helping those in need'.

Many people who perform voluntary actions do not strongly identify as volunteers. Some forms of volunteering rooted in religion or custom have evolved over generations and are considered a core part of local tradition. Motivations may have become intertwined with feelings of duty and solidarity or with a person's moral code and are often rooted in people's desire to exercise choice and to act spontaneously. These motivations all influence how people understand and interpret voluntary action. Public attitudes to volunteering also differ, with volunteers stigmatised or de-prioritised in some contexts while idealised in others – according to the task, status of the people involved and other factors.

'Participation', on the other hand is a word more suitable to describing the broader spectrum of activities which work to build social cohesion.



DEFINING PARTICIPATION

The participation continuum (Figure 1) illustrates a range of ways people participate across the Wimmera Southern Mallee region. Formal and informal volunteering is part of the spectrum, however, there are many other ways people participate that contribute to both individual and community thriving.

This Plan reflects a shift in language and perspective towards a 'participation' view of how people can be involved in and contribute to their communities. This shift enables community support organisations to broaden the focus of their activities resulting in **thriving participation** and ultimately **strong and resilient communities**.



WHY DEVELOP A REGIONAL PARTICIPATION ACTION PLAN?

Over the past decade, social cohesion has declined in Australia. The Australian Social Cohesion Index 2023 showed a decline in trust, national pride, sense of belonging, and most worrying, our involvement in communities. Australia's National Strategy for Volunteering (2023–2033) states that while 56.7% of Australians volunteer their time formally or informally, the rate of volunteering has been declining. Rising inequality and cost-of-living challenge the capacity of people to participate in community.

[National research](#) into the relationship between volunteering and social cohesion found there was a need to shift the traditional focus on **supporting volunteers** to a greater focus on **enabling people to participate** in their community – sometimes as a volunteer, but also in many other ways.

This *Regional participation action plan* aims to align the community behind a shared vision and priority areas for collective action.

'Feeling connected and fulfilled is important for our individual mental health and wellbeing. Participating in society can take many forms. This regional participation plan will assist in empowering our community members to participate in ways that help them feel comfortable, accepted and valued.'

– Councillor Robyn Gulline,
Mayor of Horsham Rural City Council

PLAN IMPLEMENTATION – A SUSTAINABLE AND ACCOUNTABLE APPROACH

Implementation of this plan will take a whole-of-community approach. Everyone can play a role by shifting thinking and practice from the 'traditional' focus on supporting volunteers, to a broader focus on **enabling people to participate in their community** – sometimes as a volunteer, but also in many other ways.

This project has identified the need for a 'Community Drivers Group' to maintain momentum following the development of this Plan.

The Community Drivers Group (CDG) will play a key role in driving the implementation of the 10-year *Regional participation action plan* for the Wimmera Southern Mallee region. It has an open membership model with members including local government, volunteer involving organisations (VIOs) and community members. The Centre for Participation will provide backbone support in collaboration with local government, VIOs and other key stakeholders.

'Social connection and a sense of purpose in life are critical to health and wellbeing. These elements of life in our region have been impacted by COVID-19 and other factors. A regional participation plan is an important step in creating and consolidating opportunities for individuals and communities to build health and wellbeing in a changed world.'

– Dorothy McLaren, member of CDG and Health Promotion Manager, West Wimmera Health Service

To support the implementation of the Plan the following activities have been determined:

- The Plan will be publicly available and shared widely.
- The Community Drivers Group will meet quarterly to drive implementation.
- Create a Community Participation Network (CP Network) to collaborate and share ideas, lessons learnt and resources about what supports thriving participation.
- Progress towards the vision and six pillars will be reviewed every two to three years and will include a focus on identifying new opportunities/actions and lessons learnt to support thriving community participation in the region.

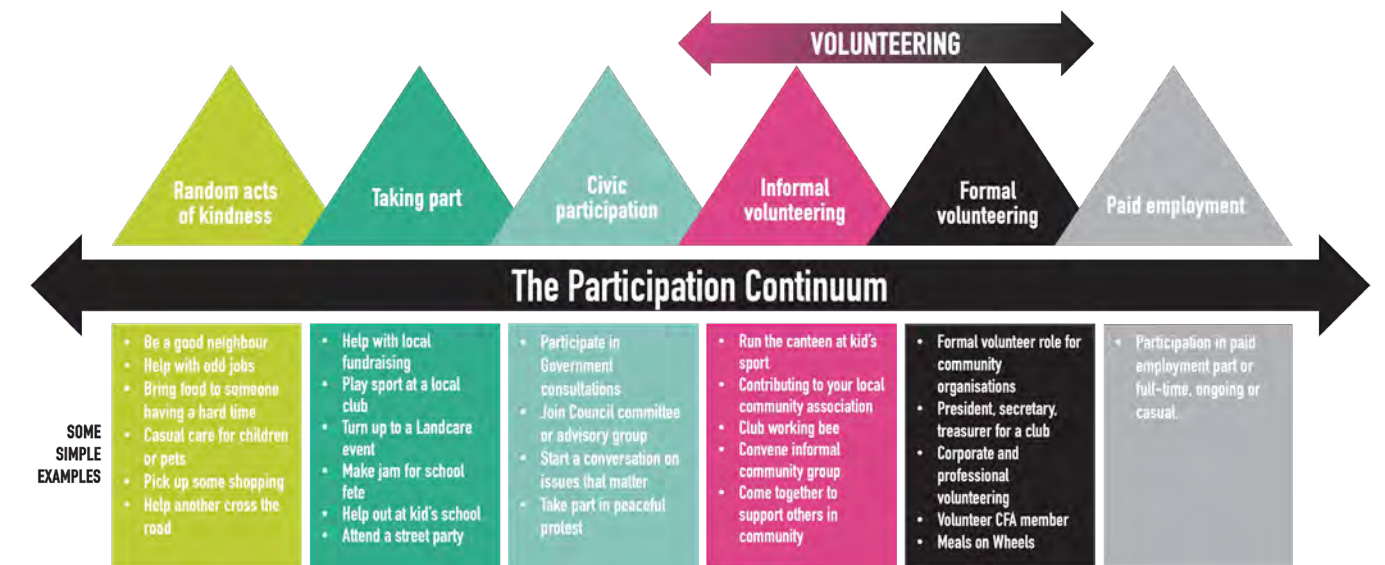


Figure 1 Participation Continuum

ACRONYMS

CDG – Community Drivers Group

CFA – Country Fire Authority

CP Network – Community Participation Network

HA Society – Horsham Agricultural Society

JSA – Jobs and Skills Australia

LGA – Local Government Area (Note: Wimmera Southern Mallee has five LGAs also known as municipalities including Hindmarsh Shire, Horsham Rural City Council [HRCC], Northern Grampians Shire, West Wimmera Shire, Yarriambiack Shire)

U3A – University of the Third Age

VIOs – Volunteer involving organisations

WRSA – Wimmera Regional Sports Assembly

WSMD – Wimmera Southern Mallee Development

WSMLLEN – Wimmera Southern Mallee Local Learning and Employment Network

WWHS – West Wimmera Health Service

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Grateful thanks go to all the community members and organisations that have contributed to the development of this Plan. They include:

- **Over 30 community members who attended the visioning workshop** including Leeanne Lindorff (CfP and Federation University), Carolyn Sonogo (HRCC), Robyn Gulline (Mayor, HRCC), Bernie O'Shannessy (board member, CfP), Penny Flynn (HRCC councillor), Vanessa O'Loughlin (WSMLLEN), Sandra Bamkin, Cheryl Linke (Red Cross), Jake Wiffen (WWHS), Hamid Ghadori (WWHS), Alicia Drew (HRCC), Caroline Price and Wendy Preece (Horsham Town Hall), David Berry and Matthew Jolly (WRSA), Cathy Tischler (Federation University), Faye Smith, Gavin Howard (HRCC), Gail Horsted (CFA), Andrea Cross (HA Society), Kaye Londrigan (Catholic Care), Ann Potter (HRCC), Amanda Munn (West Wimmera Shire), Kola Kennedy, Robbie Millar, Sokan Sat and Marieke Dam (CfP).
- **In-depth interviews** with Wendy Preece (Horsham Town Hall), Vanessa O'Loughlin (WSMLLEN), Kellie McMaster (Grampians Health), Robyn Lardner (Rotary Club Horsham East), Anubha Jalla Das (Oasis Wimmera), Penny Flynn (Councillor, HRCC), Annie Hobby (Landcare facilitator), Andrea Cross (HA Society), David Berry (Wimmera Southern Mallee Regional Sports Assembly).
- **Members of the Community Drivers Group:** Annie Hobby (Landcare facilitator), Dorothy McLaren (WWHS), Amanda Munn (West Wimmera Shire Council), David Berry (Wimmera Southern Mallee Regional Sports Assembly), Andrea Cross (HA Society), Leeanne Lindorff (Federation University), Jake Wiffen and Alana Storey (WWHS), Melissa Morris (Women's Health Grampians), Alicia Drew (HRCC), Laiba Maqbool, Danielle Watts, Jarrod Khan, Marieke Dam and Robbie Millar (CfP).

The Plan



This *Regional participation action plan* aims to align the community behind a shared vision and priority areas for collective action to support thriving community participation.

Through interviews and workshops, the community articulated many areas that need to be addressed to support thriving community participation. These have been summarised into six pillars for the Plan.

THE SIX KEY PILLARS

Each pillar includes:

- a definition
- the communities' vision for the future
- challenges
- general ideas that can positively contribute to progress
- examples of local initiatives
- specific actions the community has identified as important.



PILLAR 1: PLACES TO PARTICIPATE

DEFINITION

A thriving community needs access to physical and other 'places' where people can participate. This might include libraries, sporting facilities, health centres, community halls, learning spaces, online community groups, meeting rooms, gardens, or outdoor places like parks, riverbanks and ovals.

OUR VISION FOR THE FUTURE

In the near future, there are abundant spaces (both in person and online) that can be used for community participation that are shared, inclusive, available, accessible, safe, welcoming and known by everyone.

Progress under this pillar will see people coming together and organisations maximising and sharing resources to manage costs and logistics associated with places to participate. It will facilitate a sustainable model of indoor and outdoor spaces that volunteers and participants can access and benefit from.



CHALLENGES

- A low level of awareness of the facilities available in the community.
- Availability and access requirements of indoor and outdoor spaces are not readily known to some potential users and can be difficult to navigate.
- An easily accessible shared platform or system to facilitate scheduling and access is likely complex to develop.
- The costs and administrative requirements (e.g. insurances, food and drink handling licenses) associated with accessing and using physical spaces act as barriers.
- Some facilities are outdated or no longer fit-for-purpose.
- Accessibility can be limited for community members with diverse needs including physical, cultural, geographical and transport, so not all venues may be appropriate for the needs of the potential users.

Things that can positively contribute to progress

- Mapping of indoor and outdoor spaces to create awareness of facilities, availability and to facilitate bookings.
- Strong coordination and planning across the five local councils (as key owners/managers of community facilities) to facilitate access to and full utilisation of high quality places to participate.
- Removing or decreasing cost and administrative barriers associated with utilising space (e.g. costs, insurance, license requirements including by larger/better resourced organisations auspicing the financial and administrative requirements for smaller community participation initiatives).
- Making facilities more welcoming, safe and accessible to all members of the community regardless of age, gender, ability, sexual orientation, religious or cultural background.
- Optimising the use of underutilised or single-use spaces.
- Organisations and communities sharing event resources (e.g. furniture, audio and sound equipment, marquees, portable payment facilities).

LOCAL EXAMPLES

Case study: Development of multi-use courts to support increased participation

Wimmera Regional Sports Assembly asked local Karen community members how they'd like to participate and discovered they love 'cane ball'. They then collaborated with Hindmarsh Shire to adapt a disused tennis court making it multi use to enable both volleyball and cane ball to be played outdoors in a dedicated space. Use of the tennis club's facilities has increased, and the local Karen community members are regularly playing cane ball and volleyball, sharing their love of the game with other locals.

Example: Parks and playgrounds as places that inspire participation and attract visitors

Stakeholders highlighted Lake Pertobe in Warrnambool as a great example of a natural space supporting community participation and attracting visitors to the region. It is a unique park, playground and regional attraction, which connects Warrnambool's city centre to the foreshore. It is a place which inspires Warrnambool's residents and visitors to gather, play and enjoy the natural environment.

Table 1.1 Actions – Places to participate

Actions	Who should lead	Who should support	Timeframe	Priority
Maintain and publicise up-to-date accessible maps/directory of community facilities, outdoor spaces and non-council owned facilities with features including availability and accessibility.	LGAs	Other non-council venue owners	1–2 years	High
Maximise participation in community facilities and outdoor spaces through collective planning and by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • designing user-friendly processes for accessing the spaces • designing for multi-use • repurposing existing facilities (e.g. showgrounds for park run, dog kennel club facility, Maydale reserve redevelopment). 	LGAs and other venue owners	All venue users	3–5 years	Medium
Explore blanket insurance coverage to cater for all users.	LGAs and State Government	All venue owners	1–2 years	High
Improve the design of new and existing facilities to be inclusive of all groups through strong community engagement and planning. For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sensory spaces for neurodiverse people • diversify riverside facilities to include infrastructure for young people 	LGAs and other venue owners	State Government and user groups	3–5 years	High
Develop strategy to customised spaces in Wimmera for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • teenagers • children (0–10 years) 	LGAs		2–4 years	Medium
Expedite State Government approval processes (e.g. to get solar panels)	State Government	LGAs	1–2 years	Medium
Apply for the Showgrounds Maze Grant	HA Society	TBC	3–5 years	High
Establish more Park Runs (e.g. Edenhope and Kaniva)	WRSA	User group	1–2 years	High

PILLAR 2: PARTICIPATION FOR EVERYONE

DEFINITION

A thriving community embraces diversity in all its forms to create a welcoming and inclusive environment to facilitate people coming together to participate, celebrate their diversity and have shared experiences.

OUR VISION FOR THE FUTURE

A community where people of all backgrounds can come together in a safe and inclusive environment to participate in community activities. A community where people can access opportunities that align with their interests and background while also having the opportunity to share with others in the community in ways that build understanding, connections and social cohesion.



CHALLENGES

- A lack of awareness around how to shape participation opportunities to meet the diverse needs of different cohorts.
- Inaccurate and biased perceptions about some groups can inhibit people's willingness to engage them.
- Some participation opportunities may inherently exclude certain groups of people (e.g. age, physical capabilities, gender).
- A lack of trust or entrenched racist views held by some individuals, groups or organisations.
- Potential burnout in small communities when the 'same' people lead or support participatory activities.
- Decline in volunteering and limited succession planning for new and younger participation leaders.
- Disconnect between building regulations and what some users require from facilities (e.g. female friendly facilities).
- Lack of awareness of the safety considerations of outdoor spaces.

Things that can positively contribute to progress

- Initiatives to increase organisational understanding of diverse groups, their participation needs and preferences.
- Actively outreach to specific groups to welcome them and help them feel comfortable in the community.
- Ask people/groups who face barriers to participation about their needs and experiences to remove unconscious bias.
- Implement cohort-specific communication and engagement strategies and tactics.
- Support activities that create a welcoming and inclusive community where everyone feels they can participate and foster a community culture of acceptance and respect.
- Practical 'how to' training and resources on creating inclusive participation opportunities to meet the needs of the diverse cohorts while also bringing different groups together to share and learn about each other.
- Harness the new ways of thinking and doing from different cultures and groups in the region.
- Capture the interest of new people/groups with time to volunteer (e.g. a strategic and targeted approach for increasing participation of older or retired people).

LOCAL EXAMPLES

Case study: Pomonal Community Resilience Group

Pomonal is finding a way to recover from bushfires in 2024 in part thanks to a local association that long before February's fire had a specific resilience plan in place.

About eight years ago, the Pomonal Progress Association organised the Association into small districts. The idea was that in town, you got to know 50 people. It led to a street-by-street directory in each district, updated annually, which allowed people – if they were willing – to be connected with their neighbours, so they could be alerted in an emergency. And importantly, after the emergency had passed, when those in need could be matched with those who could give support.

Case study: Sharing meals for building community connectedness

Laharum community used their community hall over summer to share a community meal, build social connections and network. Community members paid a contribution to assist with costs.

Case study: Event planning for inclusive participation

Organisers of Horsham Show have been incorporating a 'sensory tent' into their event design so that people with sensory needs and neurodivergent participants have a quieter space to go amidst the busy show where they can relax and engage in calm activities. This was particularly appreciated by families with neurodivergent children.

Table 1.2 Actions – Participation for everyone

Actions	Who should lead	Who should support	Timeframe	Priority
Remove barriers and design for better access and inclusion especially for groups facing multiple barriers. E.g. by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • offering childcare/play spaces for children • creating sensory spaces for neurodivergent people • creating safe spaces and connecting marginalised groups to build the community and a sense of belonging. 	LGAs, CDG and CfP	All organisations, groups and community	1–5 years	High
Co-design and consult with all groups (particularly marginalised groups) regarding how they want to participate and develop guidance to share with others to better design for their participation.	LGAs	CfP	Ongoing	High
Develop training/education that supports cultures of inclusion including on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • hosting and making participation accessible and inclusive • cultural competency training (ensuring it is not tokenistic) • how to develop and implement Reconciliation Action Plans • inclusive, engaging and accessible communication (strategies, tactics, tools including social media 101). 	CfP, universities and content specialists	Funders	1–2 years	High
Design accessible, inclusive and appropriate communication materials.	All organisations	CfP	Ongoing	High
Develop and share a checklist of accessible spaces/facilities (e.g. accessible toilet, baby change facilities, childcare) linked to facilities map/directory.	LGAs	Other venue owners	1–2 years	Medium
Fund initiatives that develop a culture of inclusivity and acceptance at the community level.	LGAs and other funders	State Government	Ongoing	High

Actions	Who should lead	Who should support	Timeframe	Priority
Actively share lessons and good practice around inclusive participation including across/between councils, community organisations and groups.	LGAs and CDG	CDG, CfP and universities	3-5 years	Medium
Actively promote diversity within organisational/event leadership including by supporting people who face barriers or are less represented to take on leadership roles.	All organisations, boards and staff	All organisations, boards and staff	3-5 years	High
Create targeted opportunities for young people to take on roles in the community (e.g. young professionals' network or leadership program to empower young people to take lead/take action).	HRCC youth team	Youth organisations and funders	3-5 years	Medium



PILLAR 3: WORKING TOGETHER

DEFINITION

A thriving community requires formal and informal leaders who can collaborate to create ideas, address challenges to participation and deliver value and mutual benefit to all community members.

OUR VISION FOR THE FUTURE

Passionate, forward-thinking leaders and members of the community come together with a shared vision for creating a community with thriving participation.

Community organisations effectively collaborate, share resources and focus on the collective good to achieve the vision of the participation plan while meeting the needs and values of the varying community stakeholders.

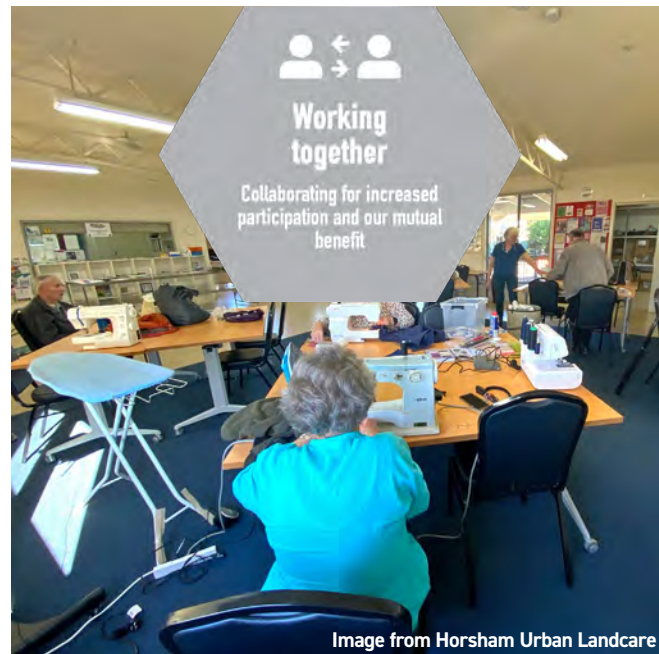


Image from Horsham Urban Landcare

CHALLENGES

- Active people are often time-poor and have multiple commitments across different networks.
- Funding limitations can make people/organisations 'territorial' over activities, resources or volunteers which can inhibit collaboration.
- Each organisation contributing to this Plan will have their own agendas that may/may not align with aspects of the Plan.
- Facilitating collaboration across organisations, groups and networks isn't easy.
- This Plan will need long-term buy-in to be sustainable over 10 years.

Things that can positively contribute to progress

- Connecting active people in ways that make effective use of their time, serve multiple purposes and build connections across the community (e.g. collective planning).
- Sharing assets and resources across organisations/groups.
- Funding impact focused collaborations (e.g. across organisations, groups and networks).
- Organisations being outward-looking, open to doing things differently and focusing on the shared community vision and benefit.
- Breaking down barriers and promoting collaboration between different groups in the community (e.g. intergenerational initiatives).
- Structured communication and information sharing between key stakeholders to drive collaboration to achieve this Plan.
- Leveraging the knowledge, skills and networks of specialists and those able to lead, educate or mentor.



LOCAL EXAMPLE

Case study: A collaborative partnership supports to continuation of Meals of Wheels service

In 2022 many local councils stepped back from aged care services, including the management of some of the Meals on Wheels (MoW) services.

A local community health organisation who was successful in obtaining the MoW contract for the Horsham Region contracted CfP to take on managing of the MoW volunteers for the program.

CfP (the local experts in volunteer management) onboarded and inducted the MoW volunteers transitioning to the new program, including updating their police checks.

CfP coordinated all the MoW volunteers for the 7 different meal delivery runs each day. This contracted arrangement increased CfP's volunteer pool to over 400 volunteers.

This innovative collaboration between stakeholders ensured the community health service could focus on their role as aged care providers, while CfP focused on their leadership in volunteer management. This collaboration around a shared goal ensured the continuation of a valued MoW service for the region's elderly residents.

Table 1.3 Actions – Working together

Actions	Who should lead	Who should support	Timeframe	Priority
Establish a lead organisation (backbone) and build strong community support including by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> empowering a diverse and active Community Drivers Group (CDG) to drive implementation of the Plan, advocate to powerbrokers and build community support supporting regular CDG meetings, communication and information sharing. 	CDG and CfP	LGAs and funders	1st year	High
Establish and grow a Community Participation Network (CP Network) that shares ideas, lessons learnt and resources about what supports thriving participation whilst also building collaboration between communities and organisations. This inclusive network will regularly ask, 'Who is not yet at the table? And who needs to be?' The network will also identify participation initiatives that have worked well and how they can be replicated to reduce volunteer strain and burnout in other areas.	CDG	CfP, LGAs and funders	1st year	High
Continue to identify and partner with key organisations who play an important role in supporting thriving participation (e.g. Wimmera Southern Mallee Development [WSMD], neighbourhood houses and others).	CDG and CfP	WSMD, neighbourhood houses and others	1st year and ongoing	High
Identify and share widely ideas, resources and lessons on what works well in supporting thriving participation.	CDG	CfP, community and researchers	1–2 years and ongoing	High
Work with councils to embed a participation mindset in their work and contribute to thriving participation including by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> exploring what participation would look like in council Health and Wellbeing Plans exploring how existing council initiatives can bolster participation across the region (e.g. 'Town Hall' meetings with a participation focus) improving planning permits/processes to increase participation. 	CDG and CfP	LGAs	1–2 years	Medium
Develop and share an events calendar for the whole region.	CP Network	CfP	1–2 years	Medium

PILLAR 4: INVESTING IN PARTICIPATION

DEFINITION

Communities require investment in the physical, economic and social infrastructure to enable thriving community participation including investment in buildings, outdoor spaces, transport, employment, social supports, programs and services.

OUR VISION FOR THE FUTURE

Abundant investment that supports thriving community participation because its value is truly recognised. Government, commercial and non-profit advocates investing in building a thriving community which values and fosters active participation.



Image from West Wimmera Shire

CHALLENGES

- Advocating to government on areas of transport, employment and economic growth is complex and requires resources and technical skills.
- Varying perspectives on what is required and appropriate between politicians, government and other stakeholders can result in inaction and limited progress.
- Some of the investments needed to drive meaningful change are large and can take many years to come to fruition (approval and development).
- Managing shared funding for a community can be complex.

Things that can positively contribute to progress

- Advocating to key political, business and social decision-makers to support the liveability and attractiveness of the region.
- Leveraging community powerbrokers to influence decision-making.
- Bringing together government and industry (including outside the region) to work together to identify opportunities for employment and economic growth.
- Building transport infrastructure that will support local participation.
- Building a longer-term employment and social infrastructure that will support young people and families moving to the region.
- Collaborate with groups on funding to support reduced duplication, share resources and achieve mutual outcomes.
- Increase childcare opportunities in the region to enables families to settle and work in the community.



Image from Grampians Health

LOCAL EXAMPLE

Case study: Collaborative planning and joint funding maximises Harmony Day celebrations

To celebrate Harmony Day 2024 Wimmera Development Association (WDA) and its Settlement Program collaborated with local stakeholders, including CfP, to develop a wide range of diversity celebrations throughout the region. They collaborated on a joint funding bid to ensure all stakeholders were successful in accessing some funding.

CfP organised a Harmony Day celebration with their English Language classes, teachers and students, which included speeches, dances, music and a beautiful spread of cultural food.

WDA and its stakeholders also organised a major Harmony Day event in the Horsham Town Hall, where diverse cultures were celebrated and highlighted in an amazingly colourful show. CfP was involved in the choreography and development of the fashion show. The joint funding enabled the staffing and resourcing of a successful collaboration and a great event.

Table 1.4 Actions – Investing in participation

Actions	Who should lead	Who should support	Timeframe	Priority
Collaborate with groups on funding to support key initiatives in this Plan and achieve the shared vision/mutual outcomes including by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • building partnerships or consortiums • joint advocacy • managing shared funding. 	CDG	CfP, WRSA, neighbourhood houses and LGAs	1–2 years and ongoing	High
Stocktake available funding opportunities to support people/groups to participate and share widely.	CfP	Volunteering Victoria	1st year	High
Promote local philanthropy and community investment in initiatives that contribute to the vision in this Plan including by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • establishing a community fund • collaborations with local philanthropists • building skills in crowd funding. 	Local funders including Rotary Clubs	CDG and CfP	1–2 years and ongoing	Medium
Identify and promote top strategies/tips for improving the efficiency and use of existing assets and resources across the Community Participation Network. To include how to adjust/better align existing resources (including funds) to create additional benefits.	CDG	CfP, LGAs and funders	1–2 years and ongoing	Medium
Advocate to identify opportunities for enhanced participation through employment and economic growth.	CDG and CP Network	JSAs and Volunteering Victoria	Ongoing	Medium
Co-design with local community ways to promote investment opportunities to potential funders.	CDG	Community		High
Report on place-based investment in key public volunteer/participation opportunities and use this for promotion and advocacy.	CfP	LGAs		High

PILLAR 5: PROMOTING PARTICIPATION

DEFINITION

Thriving community participation requires a strategic and targeted approach to promoting opportunities that meet people where they are in life and supports people to find and navigate opportunities for participation.

OUR VISION FOR THE FUTURE

Highly visible promotion of opportunities to participate. A wide appreciation of the value of participating and support for all members of the community to participate.



CHALLENGES Things that can positively contribute to progress

- The rate of volunteering is declining.
- People are increasingly time poor and current approaches are typically designed around organisational/task needs rather than the interests, needs and availability of individuals.
- Some organisations don't have the skills and resources to effectively engage and support inclusive participation.
- Promoting participation with the community is complex and challenging to do effectively, inclusively and reach all groups. It will require technical skills, resources and a wide range of communication channels.
- Resources to promote participation are scarce.
- Active community members are 'overused' and at risk of burnout, and contingency plans to recruit and engage new community members in wider participation opportunities requires time, effort and funds.

- Better understanding the specific participation drivers of modes of participation for different cohorts and incentivise participation (e.g. showgrounds offer free camping in return for 2 days of volunteering).
- Initiatives that engage and empower young people to participate and built citizenship, including embedding the importance of community participation into early education initiatives with schools.
- Greater flexibility in the design and structure of participation opportunities to adapt to the interests, needs and availability of individuals.
- Ensuring that people have the support and resources they need to volunteer or participate (e.g. transport, supervision, recruitment checks).
- Training and resources to support inclusive participation.
- Well-resourced, diverse communication and engagement strategies tailored to the needs and preferences of different segments of the community.

LOCAL EXAMPLE

Case study: Targeted local event promoting participation

University of the Third Age (U3A) organised a seniors expo in Horsham that drew many older community members and supported them to explore the wide-ranging opportunities for participation in the region. This collaborative event involved many stakeholders who support community participation.

Federation University has held similar expo type events targeting students to showcase participation opportunities and pathways.

Table 1.5 Actions – Promoting participation

Actions	Who should lead	Who should support	Timeframe	Priority
<p>Develop a succinct participation promotion strategy in collaboration with the CDG and CP Network (inclusive of the actions identified in this Plan) to identify the key messages, innovative strategies and communication media/channels that will promote participation. Ideas to explore in the strategy include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • monthly article in local paper • place-based approaches to engaging communities in shaping participation • invite media to help build a campaign around community participation • dedicated social media hub/channels on all things participation. 	CDG and CfP	CP Network and regional media organisations	Ongoing	High
<p>Promote participation and how to get involved in line with the Participation Promotion Strategy. Amplify efforts through the CP Network (to be created) and engage business around corporate participation (e.g. explore a campaign highlighting benefits of volunteering for employers/employees).</p>	CDG and CfP	CP Network, regional media organisations, Chamber of Commerce, local businesses and West VIC Business Network	Ongoing	High
<p>Build skills and capacity of people and organisations across the CP Network in communication, engagement and inclusive participation (refer to Inclusive Participation Pillar for specific topics).</p>	CfP and LGAs	Communication specialists and universities	Ongoing – training every year	Medium
<p>Deliver community education, development and health promotion that is inclusive and has adaptive ways to increase participation.</p>	Health services	Individual organisations, CfP and LGAs	Short-term	High
<p>Identify better ways to connect people with participation opportunities and needs.</p>	CDG	CfP, LGAs, neighbourhood houses, WRSA, local houses and health services	1–3 years	High
<p>Develop a bi-annual regional Participation Festival/Expo to include a celebration of participation champions – people that build communities and contribute to thriving participation – with awards framed around the six pillars.</p>	CfP	CDG, CP Network and funders	Ongoing bi-annual	High
<p>Engage the education system to identify strategies for building a community participation ethos and citizenship through primary and high schools.</p>	CDG and CfP	Schools, Department of Education and WSMLLEN	1–3 years	High

PILLAR 6: SPARKING INDIVIDUAL PARTICIPATION

DEFINITION

A thriving community starts with everyone taking their own steps towards participating in their community. Each individual will have their own interests, needs, barriers and enablers of their participation. It is critical to tap people's interest, remove barriers and ignite the spark that will motivate them taking the first steps.

OUR VISION FOR THE FUTURE

A volunteering and participation culture where people feel motivated and empowered to take those very first steps to participate, to reach out to others, to organise events and encourage others. Implementation of this Plan will take a whole-of-community approach and everyone can play a role in bringing it to life.



CHALLENGES

- Loneliness is a real issue for many across our region and can contribute to poorer health, wellbeing and lower participation rates.
- Excessive administrative requirements to getting involved.
- Mental health issues, feelings of disconnection or lack of safety.
- Physical barriers related to individual mobility.
- External barriers related to their physical location, distance and lack of transport.
- Family dependents/caring responsibilities.
- Social, cultural or economic circumstances.

Things that can positively contribute to progress

- Initiatives that go to where people are and support them to engage and participate.
- Initiatives that are flexible (e.g. in time commitment, location, face to face versus online) and decrease participation barriers.
- Finding people's passions and motivations.
- Conversations and research that identifies barriers for different groups and that lead to well-designed solutions to overcome barriers.
- Initiatives that build community resilience and proactively build connections between neighbours.
- Initiatives that support people to learn something new.
- Work to remove/reduce the administrative barriers.

LOCAL EXAMPLE

Case study: The power of an invitation – Kaniva Football Club

A few years ago, the Kanvia Football Club faced the massive task to host a grand final event with minimal volunteers. They developed a flyer calling for support and inviting community members to volunteer on the day which they delivered to every house in town. The Club had a great response from the town with lots of people volunteering for jobs and it was a successful event. People just needed to be invited to get involved.

Table 1.2 Actions – Places to participate

Actions	Who should lead	Who should support	Timeframe	Priority
Develop research collaborations around what is motivating/interesting to different groups, their specific participation drivers and ways to leverage this.	CDG and CfP	LGAs, universities, progress associations and health services	2–5 years	Medium
Map and either connect or bring together all the websites/places with information about participation opportunities into a better-connected whole so people can more easily find information that will spark their participation.	CDG and CfP	HRCC (Visit Horsham), neighbourhood houses and Seek Volunteer	1–2 years	High
Innovate and trial different ways of sparking participation then share what works across the CP Network. Initial ideas include:	CP Network	CDG and CfP	Ongoing	High



Resources



The following resources can support organisations, groups and individuals to take action to progress towards the vision in this Plan. This is an initial list and can be developed over the life of this Plan.

PLACES TO PARTICIPATE

- The [My Community Platform online resource](#) and app is a directory and a tool to connect Australians to vital community services and organisations. [It provides details of community centres, halls and regional facilities](#) in the region and can be accessed free of charge.
- Local councils manage and hire places to participate. Details of public spaces for hire can be found online through council websites, e.g. [Horsham Rural City Council public places to hire](#).

INCLUSIVE PARTICIPATION

- [Volunteer West tool kit to support multicultural volunteers](#) – this is a culturally and linguistically diverse inclusivity kit for Volunteer Managers and VIOs to help them support multicultural volunteers. It includes resources and tips for creating inclusive environments and cultural awareness.
- [Standards developed by Welcoming Australia's initiative](#), Welcoming Clubs, to help sporting clubs build welcoming and inclusive places.
- [Accessibility Australia](#) guidance on how to improve accessibility in your organisation for people living with disability.
- [Volunteering Victoria](#) guidance on building inclusive volunteer programs that are accessible to diverse communities.

WORKING TOGETHER

- [Collaboration for Impact](#) have information, resources and learning opportunities that support collaboration.
- [Justice Connect](#) explain some of the different ways organisations can work together, from informal collaborations to amalgamations or merger and have an [auspicing guide](#).
- The Victorian Council of Social Service have produced a [Partnership Practice Guide](#).

PROMOTING PARTICIPATION

- [Seek Volunteer](#) is an online resource to advertise and find the volunteer opportunities.
- [My community directory online resource](#) can help you find local volunteering opportunities.
- [Centre for Participation](#) for participation events, news, learning opportunities and resources for the Wimmera Southern Mallee region.
- [Volunteering Australia's online resource hub](#) has wide-ranging resources including on topics such as volunteer support, development and recognition, managing the mental health and wellbeing of volunteers, reengaging volunteers and recruiting younger volunteers.

INVESTING IN PARTICIPATION

- For examples of initiatives that promote local community driven philanthropy and investment check out [The Awesome Foundation](#) and crowdfunding websites like [GoFundMe](#).
- [Wimmera Southern Mallee Development](#) is the peak economic development organisation for the region that works with the community and governments to attract new investment, further develop existing business and promote the Wimmera's sustainable development opportunities. They provide a vital link between industry and government in advocating for and attracting new development to the region.
- [GrantConnect](#) provides centralised publication of forecast and current Australian Government grant opportunities and grants awarded.

SPARKING INDIVIDUAL PARTICIPATION

- People can learn something new online or through organisations including [neighbourhood houses](#), the [Local Learning and Employment Network](#), the [CfP](#) and others.
- Volunteering Australia has resources to increase flexibility including [guides to support virtual volunteering](#) and people [volunteering from home](#).



> COMMUNITY > VOLUNTEERING > LEARNING > PARTNERSHIPS

centreforparticipation.org.au