



Victorian Environment
FRIENDS NETWORK

Thrive

A VEFN how-to-guide
For volunteers by volunteers



The Victorian Environment Friends Network is proud to acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples as the Traditional Custodians of the Country on which we live and work.

We value and respect their deep and continued spiritual and cultural connections to the land, waters and seas, and pay our respects to Ancestors and Elders past and present.



Introduction

The Victorian Environment Friends Network (VEFN) is a not-for-profit, member-based organisation advocating and promoting environmental volunteering through Environment Groups in Victoria.

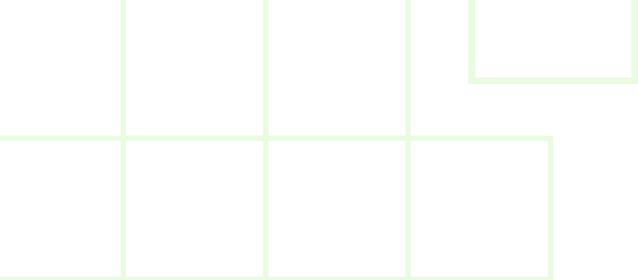
We represent Friends Groups, including individual environmental volunteers as well as associated groups and agencies, and support their on-ground conservation efforts.

Friend Groups are as varied as the landscapes they work in, from urban environments to coastlines, riverbanks, and bushland settings. Friends Groups may work with a variety of management authorities such as DEECA, Local Councils, Parks Victoria, Water Authorities, or represent other groups caring for nature such as Field Naturalists or Gardens for Wildlife Victoria.

We provide a strong and united voice for the environmental volunteers and the valuable work they do. We empower, promote, support and connect individual groups in the many regions of Victoria, through events, workshops, our website and key initiatives.

We represent over 150+ Friends Groups and Networks across Victoria with a reach of approximately 6,500 individual environmental volunteers and associated groups and agencies.





How to use this resource

The information in this resource is presented in two ways:

- stage of development, representing where the group is at in its evolution, and
- category of task, representing three main areas of organisation for your group.

Stage of development

An environment group will have various stages of evolution and complexity. In this resource we have presented the advice in three stages:

- **Seed:** the early stages when you are just starting out
- **Grow:** to gain strength and expand your actions and influence
- **Thrive:** to reach your full potential

Category of task

Each Friends group or initiative will have key actions around the issue that brought them together, whether that is a single species or a natural area, such as a green space or a waterway (i.e. an ecosystem).

These actions are the Core Business of your group; the reason your group exists. These actions are likely to be in three main areas: restoration, education, advocacy.

In addition, there will be administration or management tasks that you need to do to manage your group. These tasks will vary depending on whether your group has a legally recognised structure (e.g. an incorporated association).

You will also need to support and enable your group and your core actions through functional and effective information-communication technology (ICT) (e.g. a website, software, online teleconferencing, digital file storage) and marketing (e.g. social media profiles, branding).

These three areas, or pillars, and the workstreams in the pillars are further described below. This **Act-Manage-Enable** system is used throughout the Thrive resource.

ACT

- **Restore:** directly act to improve the habitat of a species or a broader ecosystem (e.g. a waterway) e.g. planned projects to protect and conserve your species or ecosystem, improve habitat (e.g. plantings, nest boxes, logs, rocks), clean up activities (e.g. add and maintain litter traps, targeted rubbish collection)
- **Educate:** improve knowledge and understanding of the species or ecosystem e.g. communications (newsletters, social media posts, information sheets), information sessions (seminars, webinars), workshops
- **Advocate:** advocate for the species or ecosystem in diverse forums and with various stakeholders e.g. position statements, networking and lobbying, campaigns, submissions to consultations

MANAGE

- **Lead:** direct and guide the people and the organisation (President & Vice President) e.g. integrity of the organisation, strategic planning for the group, membership growth, membership engagement (mentoring, succession planning, communication), inclusion and diversity, stakeholder relationships
- **Govern:** ensure the group is efficient, compliant and organised (Secretary) e.g. organisational policies and procedures, compliance, risk assessment and management, document and record keeping
- **Finance:** manage the financial responsibilities of the group (Treasurer) e.g. secure funding, accounting, financial reporting and compliance

ENABLE

- **ICT:** ensure Information-communication technology (ICT) is fit-for-purpose and functional. e.g. tools for communication (email, teleconferencing), document creation (e.g. Google docs, MS 365), record keeping, website, social media tools
- **Marketing:** develop strategies to 'sell' or market your group and your mission. e.g. develop your brand, develop content for the website and social media platforms, outreach & fundraising events

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THRIVE

Local Authorities and Land Managers

Working with land managers effectively

When your group first starts out it can be tricky to navigate the maze of laws, regulations and governing authorities, but don't be put off by the red tape! Once you find the right people in the relevant organisations, building a good relationship with them can be hugely beneficial to your group.

Find the authority and people:

As a first step, working out who the relevant land managers are for your chosen site/s is crucially important. The main land managers in Victoria are:

- Local Councils
- Catchment Management Authorities and Melbourne Water
- Parks Victoria
- Committees of Management
- Traditional Owner Land Management Boards

If you're unsure about who the relevant land manager is for any chosen site, it's best to first contact your local council and they can direct you to the right authorities. You'll need to get permission from the relevant land manager/s before undertaking any restoration works such as planting and weeding. In many instances, especially along waterways, your Friends Group will need to work with multiple land managers, such as your Catchment Management Authority for riverbanks, and the local Council for reserves and paths etc.

Build the relationship:

Each land manager will have different ways of working with Friends groups and will have different requirements. The best thing you can do is to work on forming a productive and respectful relationship with the relevant land management officers. Be willing to learn and listen from their expert staff and be patient.

It can be frustrating when things take lengthy periods of time, but ultimately if you want to build a trusting relationship, you'll need to be patient and persistent but also adaptable. The people in these jobs are often busy and juggling multiple stakeholders and regulations so things cannot always turn out the way we hope. A persistent, polite approach will do wonders for your relationships with land managers.

Find out about the site:

Find out from the land managers everything you can about a history of the site/s you are working on, in many cases the land manager will have an annual works plan for your site or at least for the surrounding area. Ask them what the priorities and long-term goals are of the site and talk to them about what sort of tasks your group could do.

Once you have been working on the site for a while, you'll have a good idea of what tasks need doing and then you can start to get creative with putting forward your own ideas for the site. Most land managers are restricted by time and very tight operational budgets so they welcome new ideas and input from Friends groups.

The main thing to keep in mind with any new idea is the site preparation and on-going maintenance costs. This will always fall back on the land manager if the Friends group dissolves or can no longer maintain the site, which is why land managers are sometimes hesitant to approve new works outside of existing operational budgets.

While each land manager will have a different system of how you record your groups' activities, it's important that you follow these procedures and keep the land managers abreast of your activities and events.

It's vital that you follow all relevant OH&S requirements by the governing authority. These are in place to protect your group and your members from injury and harm.

It's also important to land managers that your group is run transparently and effectively, and they may from time to time ask to see documentation for this. Local authorities should help you navigate these requirements, so if you're unsure of anything, just ask.

Keeping a productive and ongoing relationship with your land manager will open up many opportunities for your group such as being invited to work on special projects and receiving support via grants.

Traditional Custodians

Your group can develop meaningful partnerships with Traditional Custodians and contribute positively to environmental conservation efforts while respecting First Nations Cultures and heritage.

Respect: Begin all interactions with recognition and respect for the Traditional Custodians of the land. Acknowledge their ongoing connection to the lands and waters and the importance of their cultural heritage.

Cultural sensitivity training: Ensure all members of the volunteering group undergo cultural sensitivity training before engaging with Traditional Custodians. This could include learning about the cultural protocols, history, and customs of the community you are working with.

Build trust and relationships: Take the time to build relationships based on trust, respect, and mutual understanding with Traditional Custodians. This may involve initial meetings to discuss intentions, goals, and ways of working together.

Listen and learn: Approach interactions with an open mind and a willingness to listen and learn from Traditional Custodians. Respect their knowledge, wisdom, and perspectives.

Seek permission: Always seek permission from Traditional Custodians before working on their land. Respect any restrictions or protocols they may have in place regarding access or activities.

Collaboration: Involve Traditional Custodians in project planning, decision-making, and implementation. Ensure their input is valued and integrated into projects.

Environmental stewardship: Work collaboratively with Traditional Custodians to protect, conserve, and restore the natural environment. Respect First Nations ecological knowledge and incorporate it into environmental management practices.

Idea: Your local MP's office should be able to give you Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island flags to display at events. Add an Acknowledgement of Country to your website and email.

Cultural Heritage Protection: Take proactive measures to protect and preserve cultural heritage sites and artifacts that may be present on the land.

Follow Traditional Custodians' guidance on respectful behaviour around sacred sites and cultural objects.

Effective communication: Maintain clear and respectful communication with Traditional Custodians throughout the duration of the project. Keep them informed of progress, changes, and any potential impacts on their land or cultural heritage.

Leave no trace: Practice environmental stewardship by minimizing your group's impact on the land and leaving it in the same or better condition than you found it. Dispose of waste responsibly and adhere to any cultural protocols for land care.

Gratitude and recognition: Express gratitude to Traditional Custodians for their knowledge, guidance, and partnership in environmental conservation efforts. Acknowledge their contributions publicly and ensure they are recognised for their role in project success.

Continuous reflection and improvement: Regularly reflect on your group's interactions with Traditional Custodians and seek feedback on ways to improve your approach. Adapt your practices based on lessons learned and evolving relationships.

Useful links:

- [Victoria's Registered Aboriginal Parties map](#)
- [Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council](#)
- [Acknowledgement of Country and Welcome to Country](#)
- [Annual Days of Significance](#)

This information was compiled with generous consultation from
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Nomuckerlener Indigenous Training, Consulting and Mentoring.

Website: www.indigenoustraining.org

Kickstart a Group

By Kimberley Boswell
The Forever Agenda

Getting started

Each year more a third of Australians volunteer their time to the causes they care for. In 2019 that equated to 596.2 million hours contributed through community groups and non-profit organisations. Contributing your volunteer time to an organisation or group as opposed to going it alone, amplifies your impact and generates a larger return on investment to the cause for your time.

Environmental volunteering groups can be formed around location (e.g your local park or nature reserve), topic (e.g habitat restoration), or campaign (e.g nest box installation)

Importantly, anyone can start a Friends group. Groups are simply made up of people who have a common purpose to restore, enhance and protect the environments in their community. If you are ready to get started on forming your new environmental volunteering group, here are few useful tips on how to get started:

1. Check for existing groups

There are thousands of environmental volunteering groups across Australia and more than 600 Friends groups that already exist in Victoria, so before you get started and kick off your new group, be sure to check what groups already exist in your region.

Contact your local council, or you can search for a group on the [VEFN website](#). You may discover that a group already exists in your local reserve or area. It is also incredibly valuable to find out who else is operating in your area and reach out to ensure you are linking in with existing groups and contributing to coordinated local efforts. This can make it easier to gain momentum and build relationships with the land manager.

2. Start fleshing out your ideas

Getting some initial thoughts down on paper will assist you to communicate your ideas to others and get them involved. It also helps to have a foundation from which to speak to local authorities such as local government or Parks Vic. It can be a tricky line to discover how much planning you should do before getting others involved. On one hand, it's important to get your thoughts in order to help you clearly communicate and persuade others to come along on the journey. On the other hand, it is important to not get too attached to the details, as it is vital to engage people and allow others to input and feel a part of the group and its formation.

The Community Group Canvas is a template that will help you think through your initial ideas. Prior to a community meeting, the key areas to think through your Problem Statement (the environmental issue you are trying to solve) and the Our Big Why (your reason for coming together) as these will assist you to communicate the need to your audience and involve Partners (as this will assist you with understanding who else to invite).

3. Gather support and assemble a core group

Reach out to your community broadly to garner support for your new group. Assembling a group of individuals to guide the group in its initial stages has many advantages including:

Credibility

When your group is diverse and representative of your community, it is more likely that the group will get off the ground and have enthusiastic support. Look to involve different community organisations, people with different interests and cultural backgrounds, Traditional Owners, local government and government agencies like natural resource management agencies and catchment management authorities.

More ideas

While it can be more difficult to take on board the many ideas of others, the end product will always be more interesting and effective than if you had approached it alone.

Opportunity to educate the public about your issue or reserve

The more involvement you get from the community in the initial stages, the more advocates you will have spreading the word.

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Membership & support

Each of the people you get involved will know hundreds of other people, and the connections you make in these early stages will make a huge difference to how quickly you can get your group off the ground.

Gather relevant experience

It is important to engage a group that includes the relevant stakeholders and key supporters as well as people with specific knowledge in the issue.

One of the best ways to kick off a new group is to hold a community meeting. Invite people to attend and find the balance of social, informative and creative. Present your planning template and gather the input of others. Using post it notes to add ideas to the planning template can be an effective way to capture input and be able to move things around easily. Treat it like a brainstorm session, where all ideas are captured and then refined by a steering committee or your core group at a later stage.

An alternative to a community meeting could be using social media (Facebook groups work well for this), existing local networks, and surveys to gather input and establish interest.

4. To formalise or not to formalise

When it comes to formalising your group and attending to legalities, there are many options to consider at varying degrees of complexity, including deciding on a legal structure, electing a committee of management or executive committee, insurance requirements, Occupational Health and Safety, formalising membership processes, setting up a bank account or obtaining an ABN.

These issues broadly fall under the governance of your group and they are important aspects that need to be decided and addressed. There are many benefits to formalising aspects of your group, however not all are essential and particularly in the early stages you may wish to keep it fairly simple.

In the very first stages you may wish to elect a committee who can gradually assess next steps as they become important for things like gaining funding, insurance and being able to work effectively with authorities.

Note: Recent ATO and ACNC updates require environmental not-for-profit groups to hold ACNC registration for ongoing charity status and tax-exempt eligibility, reflecting new annual reporting and compliance standard

Incorporation

By Kimberley Boswell
The Forever Agenda

It is vital that committee members clearly understand what kind of ship you are steering. Community groups can choose how to structure themselves but there are implications for which direction you choose.

- You may be incorporated or unincorporated
- If incorporated you will have chosen a legal structure
- You may have the status of a registered charity
- And you may also have some tax exemptions and endorsements

The more complex your structure the more regulation, reporting and operational requirements.

Incorporation

Incorporation creates a legal entity that is separate from the individual members. The process of Incorporation formalises the group by registering with the Government.

This carries with it reporting and regulation requirements, including the need to have an Annual General Meeting (AGM). Incorporation gives legal protection to members and access to a broader range of insurance, tax exemptions and funding options. If you are incorporated, you will choose a legal structure and there are 3 key things all committee members need to understand about the legal structure of the group you are leading;

1. Who is the regulator?
2. What is the law or laws you are governed by
3. Your governing document

It is your responsibility as a committee or board member to know these key pieces of information about your organisation. If you don't know this information, check with your Secretary, or head to your regulators website to search for any listings your group may have. In most cases here in Victoria:

Regulator Consumer Affairs Victoria
Law Associations Incorporation Reform Act (2012 Vic)
Governing Document Rules of Association / Constitution

Unincorporated groups

An unincorporated group is an informal group that comes together for a shared purpose. The majority of Friends Groups will be unincorporated. You may have money, rules or a code of conduct but you have not registered with the government and create a separate entity.

Unincorporated groups can achieve big things, they are nimble and able to easily respond to community needs, interests and passions without the rigour and red tape. However, challenges may arise with accessing insurance or funding and individual volunteers can be held liable for any the debts of the group incurs.

Auspicing

To auspice means to provide support, sponsorship or guidance.

Sometimes an informal and unincorporated group might seek to be auspiced if they need to easily meet grant funding or insurance requirements. An auspice agreement is a legally binding contract that can work a bit like a subcontract. where for example, the auspicing organisation enters into the contract with the funding body, to deliver a project and the group being auspiced then agrees to deliver the project on behalf of the organisation that holds the contact.

Auspicing provides a way for unincorporated groups to access grant funding to deliver projects. Some Local Governments will support their Friends Groups with auspicing.

The Forever Agenda has created a set of 6 governance animations to support community group members to wrap their head around governance requirements for their groups.

To access these resources for Friends Groups for free, head to: [The Forever Agenda](#)

At purchase , enter in the coupon code VEFN0405 to cancel the costs and you will be able to watch the full suite of governance videos.

OHS and Insurance

Ensuring the safety and well-being of volunteers is paramount for any environmental volunteer group. Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) policies and adequate insurance coverage are essential components in maintaining a secure and protected volunteering environment. This document outlines key considerations and guidelines to help manage OHS and insurance effectively.

Occupational Health and Safety (OHS)

- Conduct regular risk assessments to identify potential hazards in volunteer activities.
- Determine the likelihood and severity of identified risks.
- Establish measures to mitigate or eliminate risks.
- Provide comprehensive training on safety procedures, use of equipment, and emergency response.
- Ensure volunteers receive ongoing training updates as necessary.
- Supply appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) such as gloves, safety glasses, and high-visibility clothing.
- Ensure all tools and equipment are in good working condition and suitable for the tasks.
- Develop and communicate a clear emergency response plan, including contact details for emergency services.
- Maintain accessible first aid kits and ensure some volunteers are trained in basic first aid.
- Encourage volunteers to take regular breaks to avoid fatigue.
- Provide access to water and encourage healthy snacks/meals during activities.
- Establish a system for reporting accidents, injuries, or near misses.
- Regularly review safety procedures and make improvements based on feedback and incident reports.



Ideas and tips:

Laminate a safety checklist for your event sign in folder. Consider including imagery or translations in a few key languages.

Useful Links:

Volunteering Victoria - [Health and Safety](#)
South Gippsland Landcare - [Group Resources](#)

Insurance Coverage

OHS policies and insurance coverages provide a safety net against potential risks and liabilities, ensuring your group can continue its important work without facing financial instability due to accidents, injuries, or unforeseen incidents.

Coverage should:

- Protect the organisation against claims of negligence resulting in injury or property damage to third parties.
- Provide adequate coverage limits for your activities. Cover medical expenses, disability, or death resulting from accidents during volunteer activities.
- Verify that all typical volunteer activities are included in the policy.
- Insure valuable equipment and property used in volunteer activities against theft, damage, or loss.
- Protect against claims arising from professional advice or services provided by volunteers.

Be sure to check:

- For exclusions and conditions to ensure comprehensive coverage.
- Ensure limits are sufficient to cover potential claims.

By prioritising Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) and securing appropriate insurance coverage, your environmental volunteer group can create a safe and protected environment for your volunteers.

These measures not only safeguard the well-being of volunteers but also enhance the group's credibility and operational resilience.

Regular reviews and updates to OHS policies and insurance coverages are essential to adapting to evolving risks and ensuring continuous protection.

Idea: In your event folder have printouts of all key safety documents: risk assessments, incident report forms, emergency procedures, safety checklists, child safety policy and procedures.

Useful links: [Volunteering Victoria - Insurance and liability](#)
[DEECA - Risk and Insurance](#)



Volunteer Recruitment

By Kimberley Boswell
The Forever Agenda



Volunteer recruitment can seem like a mammoth task and often groups report feeling frustrated at the amount of effort and disappointment associated with recruiting new volunteers. This disappointment stacked over time can lead to negativity in the culture of a group, or worse still, volunteer burnout. Fortunately, it often takes just a few tweaks, a bit of planning on the front end and a handful more ideas in your back pocket to turn the tide and have a consistent flow of perfectly matched and enthusiastic volunteers heading your way.

The 5A method of Volunteer Recruitment

The 5A method has been developed and refined over 20 years of working with volunteer and fundraising teams. It is a planned and targeted approach to recruitment that has been responsible for recruiting 1000s of volunteers, even in scenarios where groups were feeling like no one was interested. It has taken groups from the brink of being shut down to thriving community groups that are once again achieving their goals. It is a simple set of 5 easy steps.

A1 - Activity

What are the actual roles/tasks/activities you are looking to fill? Get super specific about the gaps that exist in your organisation and fill actual needs, as opposed to just broadly recruiting people “to help”. People want to know what they need to do and what type of commitment is involved in order to know if it is a good fit for them.

If you have a strategic plan, look there to guide you on how many people you need, with what skills and when. Once you know what your gaps are and what your clear purpose for recruiting is, only then can you know where to start!

A2 - Audience

Once you have a clear idea of what you are recruiting for and the detail behind it, then consider the types of people who might be likely to do that job. This will help you to target your recruitment efforts into the right places. For example:

Activity / task / role we need?

What will they do

Who might be the likely audience?

Activity / task / role we need?	What will they do	Who might be the likely audience?
Secretary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take minutes • Keep records • Write newsletter 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retired admin person • Business administration student • Business owner
Plant 2000 tube stock	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plant the seedlings • Water them in • Add stakes and guards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workplace volunteering program • Student group • Local families
Film stories for social media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capture footage at events • Edit footage ready for socials • Post to social media 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Video enthusiast • Film student • Work experience student

A3 - Ask

Make it as individual as possible, your aim is to have one on one conversations. Frame things in terms of what will they give & what will they gain? Volunteering is a mutually beneficial activity. How we ask makes a huge difference to the answer



A4 - Action

New recruits should get involved and take meaningful action right away. What you will assign them to? Washing the dishes at an event may be an easy assignment for a new volunteer but it is not necessarily meaningful enough to make them feel like their contribution was valuable and inspire them to return.

It is important that the first action is memorable and leaves them with a feeling of achievement. First impressions count and they last. Think about how to involve and incorporate new folks into the group. Just saying welcome is rarely enough, help them to feel really involved and integrated and you will wind up with a lasting effect.

A5 - Allies

When we think about the long term involvement of volunteers in our group, it can be a powerful shift to move from thinking about volunteer retention strategies and instead focusing in a space of creating allies. The involvement of an ally may shift and change over time through activities such as:

- Volunteering
- Being involved in school programs
- Financial contributions
- Gifts in kind
- Advocate
- Promote
- Recommend

When we think about lifetime involvement we can see how the needs, interests and constraints of our lives change over time. As an example, a young family may not have much time to volunteer but they might be really happy to support financially.

If we can offer different ways for folks to get involved in our group, we can expand our reach, amplify our reputation and have long term stability.

For more information head to www.theforeveragenda.com.au

Other options for Volunteer Recruitment

By Kimberley Boswell
The Forever Agenda

HALF OF OUR VOLUNTEERS COME FROM OUR VOLUNTEERS

Data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics taken in 2019 indicated that 51.1% of volunteers came to their volunteer role because someone they knew was already involved. We know that of all the ways to find volunteers, our existing volunteers are the simplest and most common pathway, so how can we make the most of this?

The key is to let your existing volunteers know that you need new volunteers and to keep it front of mind for them. One of the key ways to make this happen is to ensure you are asking them to help you. If you have a role you are looking to fill, be sure to tell your membership and ask if they know of anyone who might be suited.

Incentifying volunteer referrals can be a powerful way to tap into this space. Offer a coffee for two at the local coffee shop or even cash rewards for sourcing potential volunteers. The incentive itself is not what makes the difference in increasing your numbers, but more the act of offering an incentive that elevates the importance of it in your allies' minds.

Prioritising the creation of a great culture with a fun, positive, solutions focused group will result in your volunteers naturally wanting to bring others along. People like to be involved with positive, happy environments that are making a difference. You could give existing volunteers a one pager of key messages for talking about your group and asking others along in order to make it easy for them to know what to say.

CORPORATE VOLUNTEERING

The latest statistics from Volunteering Australia indicate that 70% of businesses now have some kind of employee volunteering program. Employee volunteer programs are often versatile, offering opportunities to either engage large numbers of people for event days or specialists to deliver distinct projects.

Head over to our [Corporate Volunteering](#) page for more info

CONSISTENT PRESENCE FOR CONSISTENT RECRUITMENT

One of the best volunteer recruitment strategies your group can have is consistent and long term visible community presence. While newspapers, signage, radio, TV and other more traditional outreach methods can still be hugely successful, the digital age has brought with it unique opportunities through social media, email and text messages. With a little effort and some thoughtful strategy, you can have a consistent presence that creates authority, credibility, social proof and keeps local volunteering at the forefront of people's minds.

Many people now use Facebook in the same way we once used the Yellow Pages. Having a Facebook page is a great way to make new contacts and have meaningful conversations with your community. Email is still king. A consistent newsletter emailed out to your membership will keep you front of mind and provide credibility through consistency. The not for profit space has the best email open rates of any industry. Consider using a platform like MailChimp to host your newsletter and database. Having signage at worksites will help bring the presence of your group and its success' to the forefront of your community.

NETWORKING

Networking is "the action or process of interacting with others to exchange information and develop professional or social contacts". Many people go about life networking naturally, over time you meet people who will introduce you to other people who will then introduce you to others. Along the way, you may find folks who are a great match for volunteering with your group. The shift happens when you start to think about networking intentionally, and taking opportunities to ask people to join as they arise, rather than letting them slip by.

STALLS AND STANDS

A great way to have conversations with your local community and find people interested in volunteering is with a stall at the local market or shopping centre. Often organisers have a set number of spaces free or at heavily discounted rates for community groups.

Make your stall look great with pull up banners and posters. Consider having before and after photos of worksites or areas that your group has transformed printed in A3 colour so that people can clearly see the impacts of the work you are doing.

Ask people to take action right away, not necessarily to commit to volunteering but even to join your mailing list or register for an event.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media offers us the opportunity to cast our net widely looking for new volunteers and also to find and reach out to individuals and have one-on-one conversations. One of the most powerful aspects of social media is its ability to allow us to tell stories. Deciding to give your time to a cause is an emotional decision and storytelling is a way to make emotional connections with people. Build your following on social media through consistent posts and engagement with followers.

Enlist your existing volunteers to spread the word by sharing their stories, sharing your messages and leaving a recommendation on your page. Don't forget to utilise videos and photos to ensure your message has the ultimate share ability. Use Facebook events to spread the word and get automated reminders in people's personal feeds. Facebook advertising allows you to target a very specific audience at a very low cost. This can make it easy to find volunteers in your specific area or with very specific skillsets.

VOLUNTEER SUPPORT SERVICES

Volunteer Resource Centres are federally funded to provide services to support community groups and nonprofits to deliver their vital work in our community. Often, these locally based services have a database of people looking for volunteer roles and all it takes is to get your organisation registered in order to start receiving referrals of potential volunteers. Contact Volunteering Victoria to find your local Volunteer Resource Centre.

VOLUNTEER MATCHING SERVICES

There are many great online services that offer organisations and volunteers a facilitated avenue to connect.

Check out:

www.govolunteer.com.au

www.seekvolunteer.com.au

www.vollie.com.au



Child Safety

When working with children it is crucial to prioritise child safety and adhere to certain guidelines and regulations. Here are some general rules and considerations:

- **Working with Children Check (WWCC):** All volunteers who will be working with children must undergo a Working with Children Check. This check is mandatory for anyone involved in child-related work in Victoria.
- **Child protection policy:** Develop a child protection policy for your group. This policy should outline procedures for ensuring the safety and well-being of children involved in your activities, as well as guidelines for responding to any concerns or incidents related to child safety.
- **Supervision:** Ensure that there is adequate supervision of children during all activities and events. Maintain appropriate adult-to-child ratios based on the age and needs of the children involved. Remind event attendees - their child their responsibility!
- **Training:** Provide training for volunteers on child safety, including identifying signs of abuse or neglect, appropriate boundaries, and how to respond to disclosures from children.
- **Code of conduct:** Establish a code of conduct for volunteers, outlining expectations for behavior when interacting with children. This should include guidelines for appropriate language, physical contact, and online communication.
- **Risk assessment:** Conduct thorough risk assessments for all activities to identify and minimise potential hazards to children's safety. This includes assessing risks related to the environment, equipment, and any other factors that could pose a threat.

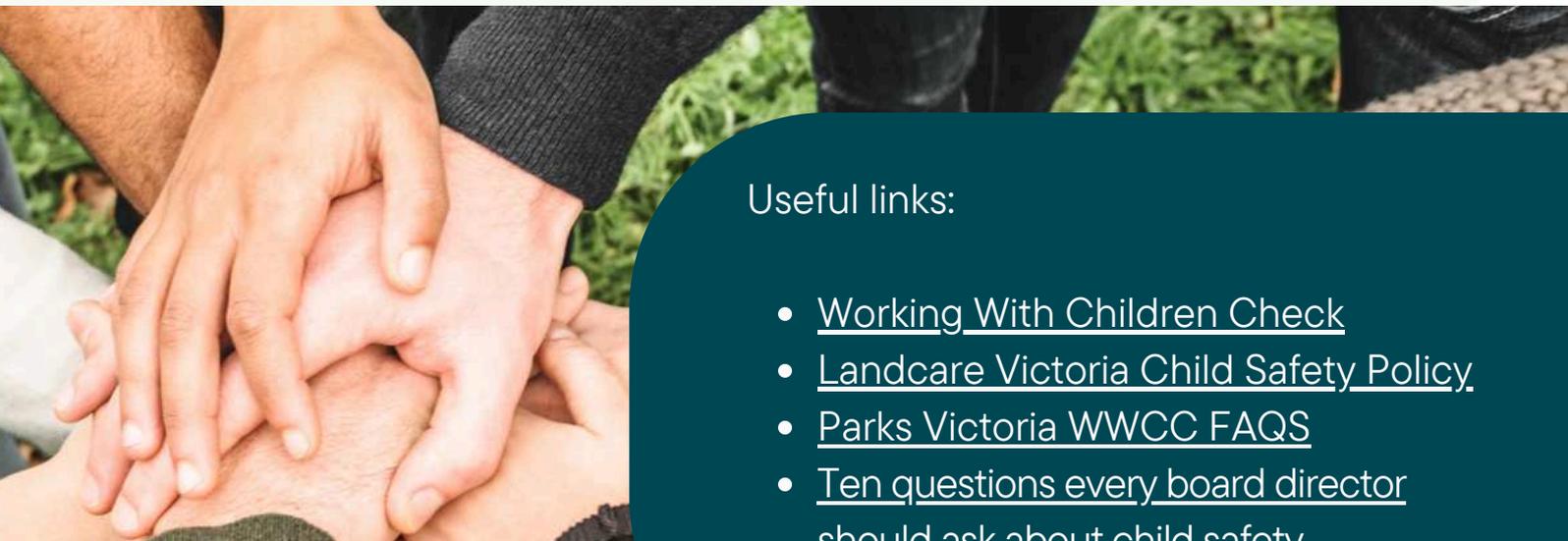
- **Emergency procedures:** Have clear procedures in place for responding to emergencies or incidents involving children, including protocols for contacting emergency services and notifying parents or guardians.
- **Communication with parents/guardians:** Maintain open communication with parents or guardians, providing them with information about upcoming activities, any risks involved, and how their children will be supervised.
- **Inclusive practices:** Ensure that your volunteer group is inclusive and accessible to all children, regardless of their abilities or backgrounds. Take steps to accommodate any special needs or requirements.
- **Reporting:** Establish procedures for reporting any concerns or incidents related to child safety to the appropriate authorities, such as the Department of Health and Human Services or Victoria Police.

Ideas and tips:

Laminate a child safety checklist for events and keep in your event sign in folder.

Always check with parent/guardians when taking photos of children.

If a volunteer has a WWCC for work, they will need to update it to add your volunteering group. That way you will be notified with any changes in their status.



Useful links:

- [Working With Children Check](#)
- [Landcare Victoria Child Safety Policy](#)
- [Parks Victoria WWCC FAQs](#)
- [Ten questions every board director should ask about child safety](#)

Grants

Securing funding through grants is a vital lifeline for Friends Of groups, empowering them to sustain and expand their environmental efforts. Here is some advice on how to craft grant applications that clearly articulate your group's vision, impact, and need for support.

Clarify the grant issue

- Seek agreement within your group on the issue that needs funding
- Allocate a project leader for the grant application

Research grant opportunities

- Refer resources below for relevant grants
- Check opening/closing dates

Check the eligibility requirements

- Check if you have an ABN ([Australian Business Number](#)) is required for conducting financial transactions.
- Check if your group needs to be an [Incorporated](#) entity
- Check if your organisation is required to be registered with the ACNC ([Australian Charity & Not-for-profits Commission](#))
- Check if you need DGR ([Deductible Gift Recipient](#)) Status from the Australian Tax Office.

Read the grant requirements

- Does the grant information inform about their funding priorities?
- Make sure you can meet any conditions or requirements within the grant timelines.
- Contact the grant provider for more information and clarification if needed.

Define your project

- What is the scope of the issue you are addressing and how will your project contribute to solving or mitigating the issue?
- List the specific outcomes your project will accomplish and how they align with the grant's priorities.

Create a project plan

- Describe all activities in detail and how they will achieve the project's objectives.
- Set out how you will meet the grant's objectives on time and within your budget.

Prepare a budget

- List all anticipated costs such as equipment, materials and other expenses.
- Explain why each expense is necessary for the completion of your project.

Submit your application

- Ensure details including all mandatory fields have the correct information.
- Ensure supporting and mandatory documents are attached.

Await assessment

- Follow-up on your application at a reasonable timeframe.
- Accept feedback (if unsuccessful)
- Implement your project (if successful) and ensure all objectives are complete and reporting requirements and acquittal documents are submitted back on time.

Ideas and tips:

Auspice: If your group is unable match the grant's eligibility requirements, consider approaching an incorporated organisation or agency with DGR status, such as the VEFN or a local NFP, to auspice your application. The auspicings organisation can apply and receive grant funding (if successful), on your group's behalf.

Elevator pitch: Create a short and snappy version of your project in one sentence to help sell it in your grant application.

Budget templates: Seek online grant resources for budget layouts in tables and Excel.

Resources:

Funding Centre: [Writing a grant application](#)

The Grants Hub - [Resources](#)

Philanthropy Australia - [How to seek funding](#)

Our Community - [Not-for-profit resources](#)

Bendigo Bank - [Community Grants](#)

Landcare Australia - [Grants](#)

Melbourne Water - [Liveable Communities](#), [Liveable Waterways](#)

Australian Government - [GrantConnect](#)

Vic Gov - [Grants and programs](#)

Debby Maziarz - [Grant writing workshops](#)

Event Management

Running a planting day can be a rewarding experience that benefits the environment and brings communities and your Friends Group together. Whether you're hosting a small gathering of local volunteers or a large-scale event, here is a step-by-step guide to organise a successful planting event:

Coordinating a Planting Day

Planning

- **Objectives:** Determine the goals of the event. Are you aiming to plant a certain number of plants, beautify a specific area, or educate participants about environmental conservation?
- **Location:** Select a suitable site for planting based on factors like soil quality, sunlight, and accessibility. Obtain permission from the landowner or relevant authorities if necessary.
- **Date and time:** Decide on a date and time that works for volunteers and ensures optimal planting conditions for the trees, shrubs or grasses destined for habitat.
- **Recruit:** Reach out to potential volunteers through social media, community organisations, schools, and local businesses. Clearly communicate the event details, including date, time, location, and what volunteers should bring.
- **Supplies:** Arrange for all necessary supplies such as plants, shovels, gloves, watering cans or hoses, mulch, and any safety equipment.
- **Safety:** Conduct a risk assessment of the site and prepare a safety plan. Ensure volunteers are aware of potential hazards and provide guidance on safe planting practices.

Idea:

Provide meaningful roles for your core volunteers to give them a sense of purpose. E.g. Event Coordinator, Volunteer Coordinator, Planting Supervisor, Children's Activity Leader, Educational Facilitator etc

Preparation

- **Site preparation:** Prepare the planting site by clearing weeds and debris, if needed. Ensure holes are pre-dug to accommodate the size and species of plant being planted.
- **Supplies distribution:** Organise the supplies and distribute them at the site on the day of the event. Assign responsibilities for managing supplies throughout the day.
- **Welcome and instructions:** Set up a registration area where volunteers can sign in and receive orientation about the planting process, safety guidelines, and the importance of the project.
- **Signage:** You may need to set up signage with flags or arrows, guiding volunteers to where the planting will take place.

Planting Day

- **Volunteer briefing:** Gather all volunteers for a brief orientation. Explain the goals of the event, demonstrate proper planting techniques (including depth and spacing), and distribute tools and trees. You may wish to provide an Acknowledgement to Country for the land you are caring for or if a large event consider engaging a First Nations Elder to perform a Welcome to Country and Smoking Ceremony.
- **Assign teams:** Divide volunteers into teams if the planting area is large. Assign team leaders to oversee planting operations and ensure each team has adequate guidance.
- **Planting:** Begin planting according to the prepared holes and spacing guidelines. Encourage volunteers to work together, ensuring each plant is planted securely and correctly.
- **Mulching and watering:** After planting, add a layer of mulch around the base to retain moisture and suppress weeds. Water each new plant thoroughly to help establish its roots. Be careful not to mulch or weed mat over existing native or introduced vegetation that might be supporting indigenous flora or fauna, particularly threatened species that could be using that habitat.

Ideas: Consider providing some supporting activities for children. Waterbug detectives, nature treasure hunt, facepainting, nature craft station, chalk drawing etc. The plant pots are always a hit with children. They can make all sorts of shapes with them and are great for fun photos.

Post-Event

- **Celebration and recognition:** Celebrate the accomplishments of the day with a closing ceremony or gathering. Recognise and express gratitude to volunteers, sponsors, and partners who contributed to the success of the event. Try to get a group shot of everyone gathered together.

Ideas: A green army loves a big feed! For a small event it could be as simple as tea, coffee and biscuits. For a large event have a think about who your volunteers are and try to cater accordingly e.g taking any religious, dietary requirements into consideration. Maybe a local business can support you with catering.

- **Follow-Up:** Follow up with volunteers and stakeholders to thank them for their participation and share the impact of the tree planting. Encourage ongoing involvement in environmental initiatives.
- **Evaluation:** Evaluate the event's success based on the number of trees planted, participant feedback, and any lessons learned for future events.
- **Documentation:** Document the event with photos and testimonials to use for future promotions, reports, or funding applications.

By following these steps, you can organise a meaningful planting day that engages volunteers, promotes environmental stewardship, and contributes to a greener community.

Note:

It is increasingly being understood that many reptiles, some frogs, invertebrates and small plants, and fewer birds and mammals infrequently or are largely unable to use areas that have been densely planted with trees and/or shrubs. Reasons can include needing to bask in the sun, warmer habitat being unfavourable for the Amphibian Chytrid Fungus, and specialising in living among low-growing grassy or herbaceous vegetation.

Consider doing more specialised plantings in some areas (e.g. creating "wildflower meadows" or widely spaced woodland dominated by grasses and low groundcovers), and ensure that you are not likely to shade out habitat for ground-dwelling plants and animals, particularly if they are threatened.

Organising a Nature Walk

A Nature Walk is a great way to unplug from the hustle and bustle of daily life, reduce stress, improve mood, and enhance overall well-being, gain a deeper appreciation of the environment and much more. It is an inclusive activity that welcomes all ages and fitness levels

Here's a step-by-step guide to help you plan a memorable nature walk around your Friend Group area.

Choose a location

- **Locations:** Look for interesting places within your Friends Group's area suitable for the group's fitness level and interests.
- **Accessibility:** Ensure the location is accessible for all participants. Check for parking availability, restrooms, and any necessary permissions.

Set a date and time

- **Season and weather:** Choose a date that aligns with the season and weather conditions suitable for outdoor activities.
- **Conflicts:** Avoid major holidays or events that might affect attendance or availability of the location.

Plan the route and activities

- **Route:** Familiarise yourself with the trails or paths in the chosen location. Plan a route that suits the group's pace and interests (e.g., birdwatching, plant identification).
- **Points of interest:** Note any significant landmarks, viewpoints, or natural features along the route.
- **Activities:** Plan activities such as guided discussions, nature photography sessions, or mini workshops on topics like plant identification or wildlife tracking.
- **Risks:** Walk the route and note any potential dangers such as unstable ground, trip hazards, prickly vegetation etc. Make the route as safe as possible beforehand within reason.

Prepare supplies and equipment

- **Supplies:** Bring basics like water, snacks, first aid kit, and a map of the area.
- **Equipment:** Depending on planned activities, consider binoculars, magnifying glasses, field guides, and cameras.

Invite participants

- **Invitations:** Notify potential participants well in advance, providing details on meeting point, time, duration, and any special instructions (e.g., appropriate clothing, footwear).
- **Attendance:** Request RSVPs to estimate the number of participants and ensure everyone receives necessary updates.

Coordinate logistics

- **Transportation:** If necessary, coordinate carpooling or provide directions.
- **Roles:** Designate roles such as a leader/guide, a sweep (to ensure no one gets left behind), and a photographer if desired.

Conduct the Nature Walk

- **Welcome:** Introductions and overview of the day's activities. Check that participants are prepared for what you have planned (footwear, weather preparation)
- **Acknowledge Country:** You may wish to acknowledge Country and First Nations Peoples.
- **Safety:** Warn of any known hazards that might be encountered.
- **Itinerary:** Lead the group along the designated route, stopping at points of interest to share information and facilitate activities.
- **Engagement:** Encourage participants to ask questions, share observations, and interact with the natural environment.
- **Monitor:** Check in with your participants to find out if they are enjoying the walk or need extra assistance.

Useful Links:

Reconciliation Australia - [Acknowledgement of Country](#).

Victoria Walks - [Welcome Walks](#)

Conclude and reflect

- **Wrap-Up:** Gather the group at the end point to recap the day's highlights and thank everyone for participating.
- **Promote:** Invite participants to become more involved in your Friends Group.
- **Feedback:** Ask for feedback on the experience to improve future outings.
- **Resources:** Provide additional resources or information related to what they learned or observed during the walk.

By following these steps, you can organise a successful and enjoyable nature walk that participants will help them connect and care for your Friend Group's area.

Useful link: Trail Hiking - [Benefits of Hiking](#)

Tips:

Add some citizen science into your nature walk by recording your special sightings along the way on [iNaturalist!](#)

Remember a few participant's names and use them on the walk.
Keeps your participants focused and well behaved!
(Carol Challis - Nature Tour Guide)

Social Media

Your group may already be experiencing excellent on-ground turnout through word-of-mouth or an engaging newsletter, which is fantastic. However, it's worth considering whether you could reach an even wider audience?

Having a presence on social media can be highly beneficial for an environmental volunteer group. Here's why:

- **Awareness and outreach:** Provides a powerful way to raise awareness about environmental issues and your group's initiatives. You can reach a wide audience – potential volunteers, donors, and community members.
- **Community building:** Enables you to build a community. You can engage with followers, share updates, and enable discussions about relevant topics, creating a sense of belonging and solidarity among your audience.
- **Promotion:** Promote your on-ground engagement activities such as planting events, clean-up drives, or educational workshops. By sharing event details and updates on social platforms, you can attract more participants and generate enthusiasm for your activities.
- **Networking and collaboration:** Opportunities to connect with other environmental organisations and stakeholders. Building relationships through social platforms can lead to collaborations and partnerships.

Tips for Managing Social Media Presence:

- Regular posting schedule to keep your audience engaged and informed.
- Use high-quality images, videos, and graphics to capture attention and convey your message effectively.
- Respond to comments, messages, and mentions promptly to build a sense of community and build relationships with followers.
- Use relevant hashtags to increase visibility and reach on each platform, but avoid overusing them. #lessismore
- Share content across multiple platforms but tailor it to suit the audience.
- Monitor analytics and insights provided by each platform to track the performance and adjust your strategy accordingly.

Determining which social media platforms to use for an environmental volunteering group depends on your target audience, content strategy, and resources available. Here are some popular platforms and tips for utilising them effectively:



Facebook:

- Wide demographic range; popular among adults.
- Share event updates, volunteer opportunities, educational articles, and photos/videos of activities.
- Create a Facebook group for community discussions and create a sense of belonging among members.



Instagram:

- Predominantly younger demographic, especially millennials and Gen Z.
- Post visually appealing photos and short videos of volunteer activities, nature scenes, and behind-the-scenes moments.
- Utilise Instagram Stories for real-time updates, polls, and Q&A sessions to interact with followers.



Twitter:

- Broad demographic; popular among news seekers and activists.
- Share timely updates, news articles, relevant hashtags, and engage in conversations with other environmental organizations and activists.
- Use Twitter chats to facilitate discussions around environmental topics and connect with like-minded individuals.



LinkedIn:

- Professionals, businesses, and organizations interested in corporate social responsibility (CSR) and sustainability.
- Share industry insights, success stories, and volunteer opportunities tailored to professionals interested in environmental causes.
- Connect with businesses for potential corporate sponsorships and partnerships.



TikTok:

- Predominantly Gen Z and younger millennials.
- Create engaging and creative short-form videos showcasing volunteer activities, environmental tips, and challenges.
- Participate in trending challenges

Don't feel you have to do it all! Prioritise platforms where your target audience is most active and focus on content that resonates with them. Regularly evaluate your social media strategy to identify areas for improvement and adapt to changes in audience behavior and platform algorithms.

Useful link: [Not-for-profits embracing AI](#)

Websites

Having a website offers numerous advantages for any organisation. It increases visibility and reach, helping to attract potential members, volunteers, and donors. It facilitates easy communication and information sharing while also providing an ideal platform to showcase impact, success stories, and testimonials.

A website allows for the promotion of events, projects, and fundraising initiatives, supporting credibility with grant givers and organisations by clearly presenting your group's activities. Additionally, it provides an accessible way to share your group's information through both words and images.

Indicative website content

Websites usually show information that covers:

- Who you are.
- What do you do.
- Where and when do you do your activities, including photos and a map.
- How to become a member.
- How to contact you

A website can consist of just one page or multiple pages with menus and links to further information. Websites are usually run by a website company that "hosts" your website (see below). Have a look at some websites of other environment groups and see how they have arranged their menus and information.

Buzzwords

When you are new to having a website, here are some new web-related names that are worth knowing about:

- **Domain Name** – This is web-address of your website. It is usually a short name or initials of your group's full name. E.g. for a group called say "Friends of All Beautiful Creatures" example domain names could be "BeautifulCreatures.com" or just its initials "FOABC.org.au". You get to suggest your domain name, but within some rules which will be explained to you by the website company.
- **Web Hosting** – This is what a website company does for you. It runs your website and file storage on the company's computers.
- **WordPress** – is the name of a very popular website software system. It delivers your webpages to internet users and has tools to edit the appearance and content within the website.

Practicalities

How:

Creating an initial website requires web skills and experience. Typically, you would pay a web company to set up the website for you, working with you to design a layout that suits your needs.

The web company will answer questions and give you some web training materials for your members to learn how to add words, photos and extra webpages to your website.

When the website is running, the next steps are adding and editing extra content such as your group's information and pictures. You can decide to either engage the web company to do this (with some cost) or to do it yourself.

Ask your members if anyone has some WordPress experience, or website experience, or some computing experience and are willing to learn how to use the website editor. You can also contact your neighbouring groups to ask them if they have someone who can help you through the learning phase.

Start with simple static information and photos, and later explore more options.

Costs:

There are 4 costs to be aware of:

- A once-only cost to create a basic website with some initial content. You can add more content yourself later. Allow say \$200-\$400.
- A yearly cost, called "Web Hosting cost" to run your website and its file storage on the company's computers. Allow say \$100-\$300/year, depending on the company.
- A yearly cost to rent your "Domain name", your website name (e.g. "FoABC.org.au"). Allow say \$25-\$35 paid every 1 or 2 years.
- (Optional) If you engage the website company to update your content for you, there will be a cost.

All of these costs are usually paid to the website company.

Useful Links:

[How to create a non-profit website in 7 steps](#)

[Squarespace - create your own website](#)



Land Management Resources

Effective land management is crucial for preserving the natural environment and ensuring the sustainability of local ecosystems. For volunteers involved in land care activities, understanding the available resources and best practices is vital to making a positive impact.

Plan and prioritise

Before starting any land management activity, it's important to assess the area and develop a plan. Identify key issues such as invasive species, erosion, or loss of native vegetation, and prioritise tasks that will have the most significant impact.

Engage with the community

Successful land management often involves collaboration with local communities, Traditional Custodians, government agencies, and other environmental groups. Building relationships and sharing knowledge can enhance the effectiveness of your efforts.

Use appropriate tools and techniques

Ensure that volunteers are equipped with the right tools and training for the tasks at hand. For example, using the correct methods for weed control or erosion prevention is essential to avoid further damage to the environment.

Monitor and maintain

Land management is an ongoing process. Regular monitoring of the area and maintenance of improvements are necessary to sustain the benefits of your work. Keep records of your activities and adjust your strategies as needed.

Stay informed

The field of land management is constantly evolving with new research and techniques. Encourage volunteers to stay informed about the latest developments and to participate in training opportunities when available.

Ecological Vegetation Classes (EVCs)

EVC are a classification system used to describe the diverse types of native vegetation based on their structure, floristics, and environmental characteristics. EVCs are a crucial tool for land management, conservation planning, and biodiversity assessments.

Victoria is home to a wide variety of EVCs, reflecting the state's diverse landscapes, from coastal heathlands and grasslands to alpine woodlands and wet forests. Each EVC is identified by a specific code and name, describing its dominant vegetation type and environmental context.

Key Features of EVCs

- EVCs are classified based on the structure of the vegetation (e.g., forest, woodland, grassland) and the dominant plant species present. This helps in understanding the ecological processes and relationships within each class.
- The distribution of EVCs is influenced by factors such as soil type, climate, topography, and water availability. Each EVC has a unique ecological role and supports specific flora and fauna.
- EVCs are assessed for their conservation status, ranging from endangered to least concern, depending on factors like habitat loss, degradation, and the presence of threatened species.

Examples of EVCs in Victoria:

Plains Grassland (EVC 132_62)

Heathy Woodland (EVC 48)

Riparian Forest (EVC 18)

Useful links:

[Bioregions and EVCs](#)

[NatureKit](#)



Here are some useful land management resources that are particularly relevant to volunteering in Victoria:

[Victorian Landcare Gateway](#)

This site provides resources, tools, and information for Landcare groups and environmental volunteers across Victoria.

[Parks Victoria - Volunteering Manual](#)

A resource for those involved in managing parks and natural reserves, with guidelines and tips for sustainable land management practices.

[Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action \(DEECA\) - Resources Hub](#)

[DEECA - Conserving Threatened Species](#)

[DEECA - Catchment Management Framework](#)

This page offers a wide range of biodiversity and land management tools, guides, and information crucial for environmental groups.

[Trust for Nature - Resources for Landowners](#)

Trust for Nature provides practical resources for those working in conservation and land management, particularly on private lands.

[Victorian Catchment Management Authorities \(CMA\) - Resources](#)

This site has links to various resources and tools provided by the Catchment Management Authorities, which are crucial for sustainable land management and conservation efforts.

[Connecting Country - Resources](#)

A wide range of useful links on topics from Aboriginal Cultural Heritage to Revegetation for Climate Change Adaptation.

Advocacy and Campaigning

By Dr Nadine Richings

WHY: the purpose of advocacy

- The purpose of advocacy is to raise awareness and influence decisions to promote and support positive change around specific issues.
- For your group or initiative this means advocating for the issue that brought you together, whether that is a single species or a natural area, such as a green space or a waterway.
- The species or natural area that you advocate for does not exist in isolation. It is part of the natural world, and is therefore connected to, and influenced by, many factors.
- So ideally, your advocacy work should be broader than just the species or natural area that you focus on. All environmental issues can be considered, including biodiversity, climate change and pollution (water, air, soil, noise, light).

WHAT are the main advocacy actions

- Position Statements: develop a set of position statements that outline your stance on key issues and guide you in all other advocacy actions
- Networking & Lobbying: foster effective relationships with key stakeholders and decision-makers
- Representation: advocate for positive change through roles on boards, committees and panels in varied organisations
- Campaigns: create and run campaigns on specific issues
- Documents & reports: advocate for your Friends group/initiative and your species or natural area using documents that outline key positions and recommendations

HOW do we advocate

People Skills & Attributes

Diverse and varied skills, attributes and experiences are needed for advocacy. Finding your strengths and the strengths of your members is essential to build a competent team for successful advocacy. Everyone has skills, attributes and experience that can be directed to advocacy - you just need to identify them! See the section below for more details - Know your advocacy superpowers.

The Actions

The big picture, 3-step explanation of how to advocate is:

1. Define the problem
2. Develop the solution, destination or outcome
3. Determine the path to take the problem to the solution (called the Change Pathway or Theory of Change)

The **solution** will include actions from the list mentioned above under How do we advocate, so here is more detail about each of those actions.



Position Statements

- This is the first critical stage of advocacy because these position statements will define and describe the change you want to see.
- They will outline key stances and recommendations that are the foundation and narrative of all other advocacy actions to raise awareness, influence decisions and promote positive change.
- Position statements may be very specific and local, directly addressing the goals of your Friends group and the species or natural area that you focus on.
- Position statements may address a broader issue that is detrimental to your cause, e.g climate change, pollution, urban development.

Networking and Lobbying

Effective advocacy requires you to build positive relationships with key stakeholders and decision-makers. Some may call this stakeholder liaison.

What can you do?

- Identify individuals and organisations who have an interest or are impacted, or have influence
- Build your own network by creating relationships, especially in your Local Community
- Have conversations; raise issues; pose change (use your Position Statements)

Representation

Throughout society, citizens of diverse expertise and backgrounds are assembled to advise on strategic directions, policy and decision-making. These formal groups include boards, committees and advisory groups and they are powerful opportunities to have influence and make change. These include:

- Community advisory groups in LGAs,
- Community advisory groups and committees, in organisations such as hospitals, schools and sports clubs.

What can you do?

- Look for opportunities, especially in the Local Community,
- Encourage members and supporters of your Friends group or initiative to apply to join these boards, committees and advisory groups
- Build relationships with the members of any boards, committees and advisory groups that you identify as having the potential to drive positive change

Campaigns

A campaign is a project with strategic actions to address a specific issue and achieve key outcomes. Campaigns can be created in various areas, e.g. marketing campaign, election campaign.

An advocacy campaign aims to make critical changes in policy and/or action to achieve positive outcomes for a specific issue of interest. In your case the issue of interest is the species or natural area that your Friends group or initiative is focussed on, and more broadly the environment.

What can you do?

1. The Issue: understand the issue, the legal framework around it and the existing powers and interests that keeps it in place;
2. The Change: define the sequence of changes that will lead to the desired outcome and identify the actions needed (i.e. Change Pathway, Theory of Change)
3. The Liaison: build a network and relationships with the key stakeholders, who may include politicians and political parties, advocacy groups, community leaders, and others, and convince them of your identified issue and proposed change.

Documents and Reports

Written documents and reports that advocate for the environment, species and the specific changes you want to see can be powerful lobbying tools. Your position statements will be central to your reports and the included recommendations.

What can you do?

Examples of possible documents and reports are:

- submissions to public consultations (government and independent)
- planning objections to councils
- briefing notes and reports about key issues to MPs, government departments, Councillors and Council Officers, and other stakeholders.
- Response to decisions, e.g. state government and LGA decisions

WHO should advocate

- Your Friends Group/or initiative can formerly advocate
- You can encourage your members and supporters to advocate
- You can encourage your community to advocate
- Encouraging members, supports and the community to advocate is raising awareness about issues and is an essential advocacy action within a campaign

WHERE do we advocate

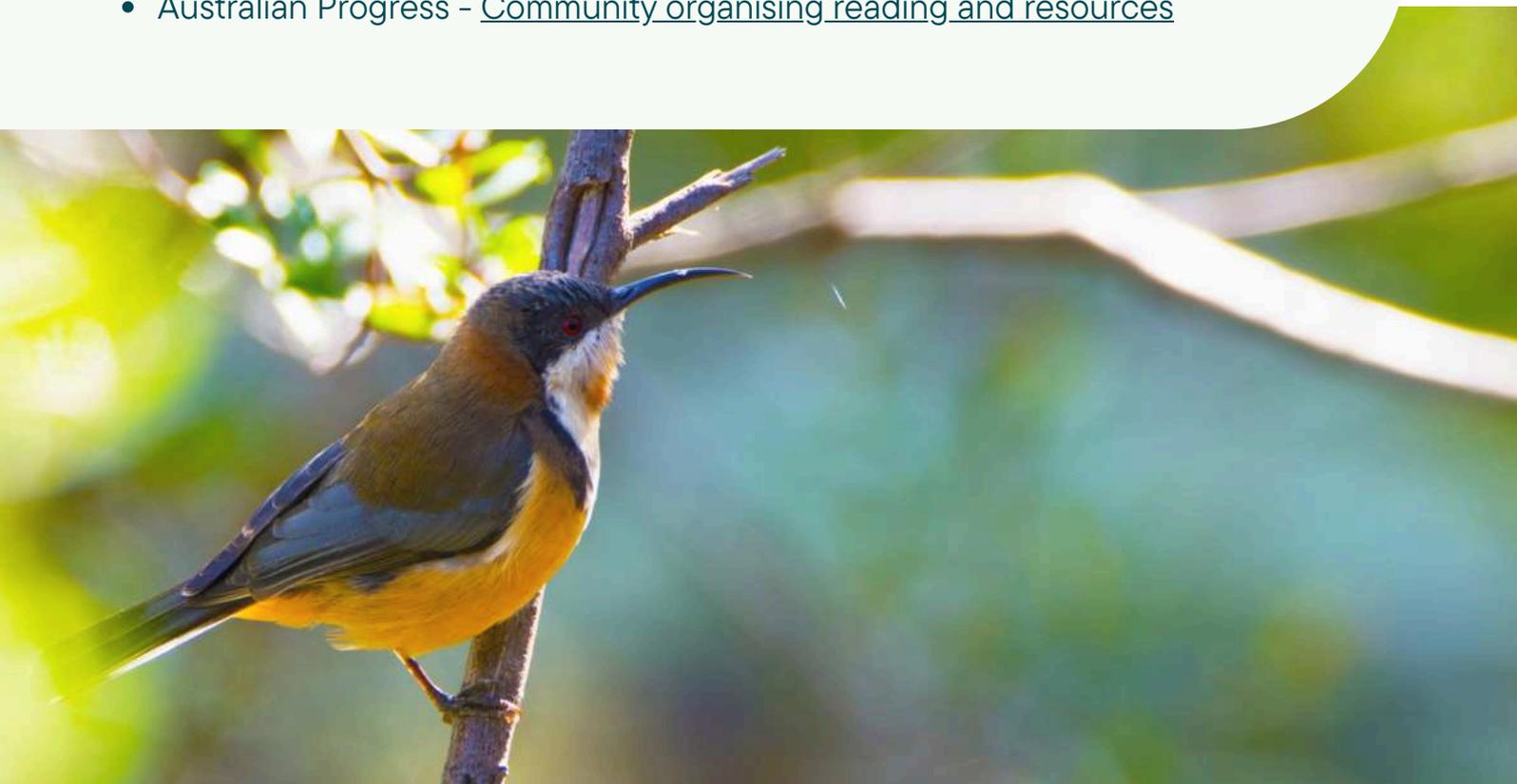
- Everywhere: you are always an advocate in everything you do and say, with all of the choices you make. So be mindful and aware as you make personal choices and choices within your Friends group or initiative.
- In your local community and local government area (council or shire) there are many opportunities to advocate, e.g. make a submission to an LGA public consultation, hold an information session, present at a Council Meeting
- At state and federal level: you can develop relationships with Victorian and Federal MPs, and make submissions to Victorian and Federal consultations

WHEN do we advocate

- Always: you are always an advocate in everything you do and say, with all of the choices you make. For example, if you have an event, such as a planting day, how do you supply drinks for attendees to minimise the impact of your event on the environment?
 - Idea:
 - Carry water in large refillable containers
 - Request people to bring their own water bottles
 - Have some reusable cups for people who did not bring their own water bottles
- The timing of some actions is controlled by other entities and you need to plan accordingly, e.g. public consultations, government elections.
- The timing of other actions is under your control, e.g. targeted campaigns and reports

Advocacy resources

- Open Society Foundations - [An Introductory Guide to Successful Advocacy](#)
- Australian Progress - [Community organising reading and resources](#)



Governance and Policy

To start, a group/organisation needs to be clear about its purpose, that is, what it is setting out to achieve and the major ways in which it will do so. This is often called a mission. A group may also have a vision: its aspirations for what the future would look like if it is successful

Governance refers to the systems and processes by which a group runs to help achieve its mission and strategic objectives and meet its legal obligations. These structures, processes and relationships are:

- Unique to the group / organisation and
- Dynamic (they can change over time, and may need to).

All members of a group, including the board, committees, members, and employees, have an important role to play in achieving and maintaining good governance.

Governance Obligations

Governance obligations are typically concerned with:

Strategic leadership and delivering appropriate outcomes, e.g.

- Meeting or exceeding stakeholder expectations
- Improving the group's value to the community
- Ensuring that the group is working well.

Compliance and accountability, eg

- Complying with applicable legal requirements
- Ensuring that appropriate responsibilities and delegations are in place and adhered to
- Complying with mandatory policies and the like
- Meeting contractual obligations
- Identifying and managing legal, financial, operational and reputational risks

Some governance obligations are imposed externally (for example, by the Australian Taxation Office, OHS); others are generated internally (such as voluntarily adopted codes of conduct and group policies).

Many of the basic governance requirements are set out in a group's Rules. There are 'model' rule templates available for unincorporated associations with charitable purposes.

All incorporated not-for-profit organisations must by law have a constitution (also sometimes known as their rules, or articles of incorporation, or articles of association). These rules form part of the governance framework. There are also templates and model rules available for incorporated associations.

Roles and Responsibilities

There should be clarity about the roles and responsibilities of the Board or Governing Committee members and Officers of a group. It is best for these to be documented and reviewed regularly. These may be included in a group's Rules and/or separately.

Where a group has working subgroups or Committees, their purpose, role and delegated responsibilities should be set out in a Terms of Reference.

Useful links:

- [VEFN Governance Principles](#)
- [Model Rules for an Incorporated Association](#)
- [ACNC Constitution template for a Charitable Company](#)
- [ACNC Rules for an Unincorporated Association template](#)
- [Justice Connect - Not for Profit Law - Position roles in an Incorporated Association](#)
- [Institute of Community Directors](#)

Policies

Policies set out guidelines for how a group will conduct its operations and set a tone as well as principles for how it operates. Policies are fundamental to a good governance framework. They provide more detail beyond the overarching rules contained in a group's rules / constitution. Policies should address a group's governance obligations and help it to manage its legal, financial, operational and reputational risks.

Good policies will include the purpose of the policy, who it applies to, why it is being used and how it will be applied in broad terms. Procedures may be included in a policy or added separately when more detail is required.

The types of policies a group will probably need include:

- Governance Principles ([VEFN Governance Principles example](#))
- Code of Conduct (we recommend including behavioural guidelines, child-safe guidelines, and dealing with bullying and sexual harassment here or as separate policies) ([Landcare Victoria Code of Conduct](#))
- Privacy
- Volunteer and Member roles
- Health and Safety ([VEFN Work Health and Safety Policy](#))
- Inclusion and Diversity
- Media
- Finances and Donations
- Advocacy

Useful link: Institute of Community Directors: [Policy Bank](#)

By Kimberley Boswell
The Forever Agenda

Strategic Planning

- Community groups with strategic plans in place are less likely to experience conflict than those that don't.
- Many community groups are run solely or mostly by volunteers, having a clear plan will ensure you are able to truly honor and make the most of the precious time that people give to your organisation.
- Having a good strategic plan is an asset for your group. It will assist you with marketing yourself, recruitment of volunteers, gaining funding, communicating with key partners and stakeholders.

Strategic planning is helpful for day to day decision making and keeps the group on track, working collectively towards your purpose. Even if you are a very informal group, going through a strategic planning process can be helpful in gathering collective agreement around who you are and what you do.

Your strategic plan, essentially becomes your roadmap to success and ensures you are able to truly honour the precious time, energy and effort contributed by your volunteers.

Having a good strategic plan is an asset for your group. It will assist you with marketing yourself, recruitment of volunteers, gaining funding, communicating with key partners and stakeholders. While it can sound so formal, it really can be a fun and social process that a group goes through together, to agree and document two important areas:

1. **Identity:** who we are, what we stand for and what we are working towards.
2. **Action Plan:** the actions we will take to get there, who will do them and when.

Our Identity:

This is your foundation and it covers

- **Vision** Your vision statement should be an audacious dream of a future reality based on the work you do.
- **Mission** This is the what you do, how you do it, why you do it and who you do it for synthesised down into precise statement of purpose, that describes the essence of the organisation in words your people can remember you by.
- **Values** Values are deeply held convictions, and underlying assumptions that guide your conduct and establish what you stand for.
- **Priorities** High level issues framed in the positive. Solution focused not problem focused. Your priorities are your top 3-6 areas that you focus on. These might be things like weed removal, habitat restoration, saving the pygmy possum.

For some groups this will be enough guidance, especially if you have agreed work plans with your council or land manager that you are working against. For some groups, however, it can be beneficial to have a more detailed action plan that outlines the detail of the actions

- **Action Plan** The detail of how you will deliver upon your priorities
- **Strategies** What initiatives will you run in order to have an impact on your priorities.
- **Actions** The actual actions and projects you will take to deliver on your strategies.
- **Accountability** Factors such as who will do it, by when, how much will it cost and importantly, how will we know if we have succeeded?

It can be really helpful to bring in an independent facilitator to guide your decision making, however this can be expensive so you might look for another solution such as a digital guided process such as that found in [Community Leaders Academy](#) or just have a go yourself using the outline above.

- Knowing where you are trying to go (your vision)
- How you are going to go about it (your mission)
- and why you are doing what you are doing (your values)
- are the glue that holds a group together.
- You preserve these elements while your priorities, strategies and actions may change and flow with the market /landscape / politics of the time.
- You may modify your vision, mission or values over time but the intent stays the same and gives you clarity when making decisions that impact your future.

A strategic plan should live and breathe as part of your organisation, as opposed to being a document that sits on the shelf. Once you have a draft plan:

Test the plan

Tap into the collective wisdom of the group in order to refine the draft plan. Use google docs as a way of collaborating and taking comments from committee and membership. The more input, the more buy in from your group (which ultimately leads to more people feeling involved and wanting to contribute to delivering on the plan).

Follow the plan

The first part is a public document (vision, mission, values, history etc) that can be used to recruit volunteers, induct new committee members, communicate with stakeholders, engage the public, share with funding bodies.

The action plan is an internal document to guide what you actually do. Use the plan as a way to be proactive about seeking funding rather than reactive to funding bodies.

- Use it as the map to achieving your vision.
- Design up your final plan into a document that looks great and represents your group. Use logos, photos and colour. Include contact details.
- Communicate the plan:
- Post it on your Facebook page. Upload it to your website.
- Send out with your newsletter.
- Print as a poster and pop up on notice boards etc.
- This is a succinct description of who you are, what you do and what you stand for.
- Bring the plan to life
- Keep it present in your organisation and refer to it often.
- Use it as an agenda for committee meetings to track how you are going and ensure deadlines are met.

Discuss the groups performance against the plan at AGM or yearly celebration. Set formal review dates for every 5 years and assess progress throughout the year.

Succession

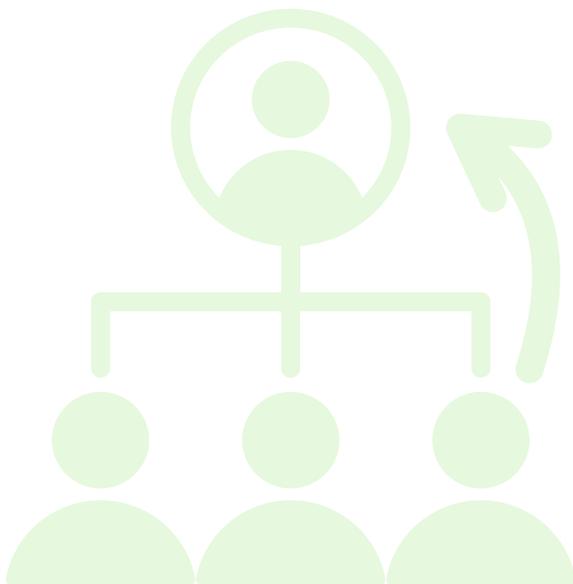
Succession planning is crucial for the continuity and sustainability of any group. You want people to be able to carry on your groups good work way into the future.

Here are some tips:

- **Identify key roles:** Start by identifying critical positions within the group. This includes not only executive positions but also key program managers, fundraisers, and technical experts.
- **Develop talent:** Invest in developing leadership skills and knowledge within your existing team. Offer training programs, mentorship opportunities, and cross-functional experiences to groom potential successors.
- **Processes and procedures:** Ensure that job roles, responsibilities, and processes are well-documented. This will make the transition smoother and minimise disruption when a key team member leaves.
- **Succession plan:** Develop a succession plan that outlines how key roles will be filled in case of sudden departures or planned retirements. Include criteria for identifying potential successors and a timeline for preparing them for their role.
- **Identify external talent:** Network and keep a lookout for potential candidates who could bring fresh perspectives and skills to your group.
- **Committee succession planning:** Ensure that your committee is engaged in succession planning. Identify potential committee members with the necessary skills, experience, and passion for your group's mission.
- **Regularly review:** Review your succession plans regularly to ensure they remain relevant and effective. As your group evolves, so too should your succession strategies.

- **Encourage knowledge sharing:** Develop a culture of knowledge sharing within your group. Encourage team members to document their expertise and share best practices with their colleagues.
- **Promote diversity and inclusion:** When identifying potential successors, strive for diversity and inclusion. This ensures that your group benefits from a wide range of perspectives and experiences.
- **Communicate transparently:** Keep volunteers, and stakeholders informed about succession planning efforts. Transparent communication builds trust and ensures everyone is prepared for potential leadership transitions.

Aim to implement these tips and your group can establish a robust succession planning process that ensures continuity and effectiveness in pursuing its mission.



Ideas: Consider using a file sharing service (e.g. Sharepoint, Dropbox or Google Drive) for key volunteers or committee members to access documents.

You could also have new role candidates "shadow" existing roles to learn the ropes.

Useful links:

[Volunteer Resources by Community Vision](#)

[Volunteer Succession Planning by Galaxy Digital](#)

[What is Governance by The Forever Agenda](#)

Member Satisfaction

Volunteering brings joy!

Research shows that even a few hours of volunteering can improve mood and happiness. Sustained volunteering is linked to better mental health, improved sleep, and overall well-being. The altruistic feelings associated with volunteering can even help you live longer.

Environmental volunteering benefits the community and offers a chance to enjoy and protect our natural environment. Volunteers gain satisfaction from making a meaningful contribution, learn new skills, and meet like-minded people.

We are lucky that there are so many positives to environmental volunteering - there are still ways to make it even better and help keep your green army happy and engaged.

The following page has a few tips on how to add to a positive and rewarding experience for your amazing volunteers.

You don't have to do everything all at once.

It is easy to forget that you are a volunteer too and you can burn yourself out trying to meet the needs of your group. Check in with yourself as to whether you are happy and engaged as well. You deserve to be!

Useful links:

- [Key facts about volunteering in Australia by Volunteering Australia](#)
- [Environmental volunteering research report by Environment Victoria](#)
- [Communications toolkit by DEECA](#)
- [Volunteering Gateway](#)

Member Satisfaction Checklist:

- Offer clear and achievable goals. Clearly outline what is expected from volunteers, including their specific tasks and the impact of their work.
- Keep volunteers informed about the progress of the projects they are involved in and how their contributions are making a difference.
- Offer initial training to ensure volunteers feel confident in their roles and provide necessary tools, materials, and information to help them perform their tasks efficiently.
- Regularly thank volunteers for their time and efforts, both publicly and privately and host events or ceremonies to celebrate volunteers' contributions and achievements.
- Organise social events and team-building activities to develop a sense of community and belonging. Pair new volunteers with experienced ones to provide guidance and support.
- Allow volunteers to choose times and tasks that suit their schedules. Provide options for remote volunteering where applicable.
- Offer opportunities for volunteers to learn new skills or take on leadership roles. Help volunteers see how their experience can benefit their careers or personal growth.
- Ensure that the work environment is safe and conducive to productivity. Create a positive and inclusive culture where all volunteers feel valued and respected.
- Conduct surveys or feedback sessions to understand volunteers' experiences and areas for improvement. Show that you value their input by making necessary changes based on their suggestions.
- Ensure that volunteer work is meaningful and directly contributes to environmental goals. Regularly share the impact of their work on the environment and community.
- Offer experiences, such as special events, field trips.

Idea:

'Who's bringing the lemonade?'

Give new volunteers small tasks to do to help them feel involved.

Great idea: [Volunteering Australia - 101 ways to recognise your volunteers](#)

Diversity and Inclusion

Diversity and inclusion are at the forefront of Friends Groups' operations and activities, with a legal requirement that all opportunities be open to all volunteers. The State of Victoria's Disability Discrimination Act and the Federal Government's Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (DDA) mandate this inclusivity.

It is important to note that diversity encompasses cultural barriers and barriers to participation for inclusion reasons. These can include physical, sensory, access issues, hearing, sight, and cultural considerations within the group environment.

Each land agency, including Parks Victoria, has an application form on which volunteers can list their diversity and inclusion needs. Often, issues that are not immediately apparent can be communicated directly to the contact person, particularly those related to hearing, sight, or mobility. This enables the volunteer group to interact more effectively with the volunteer.

For example, a group of deaf gardeners communicated entirely via text messages on their mobile phones or tablets. By making the volunteers aware of each other's needs beforehand, they can still fully participate in the event.

It is also important to ask each volunteer registered for an activity what they would like to do. This helps build their confidence and ensures they feel supported by the group members on-site.

Volunteers can provide written or email correspondence to the group before attending or at the event, outlining their requirements. Under privacy laws, this information remains confidential to the group office bearers or the designated contact person.

Ideas:

- Consider displaying Pride flags
- Translating key info or a welcome message into different languages is easy these days with free design programs such as [CANVA](#),

Regular communication with volunteers is essential to ensure their needs are continually met and can be adjusted over time. Additionally, land managers should be contacted for their diversity and inclusion guidelines and relevant officers for assistance.

To further enhance diversity and inclusion, consider the following strategies:

- Provide training sessions for group members on diversity and inclusion to raise awareness and educate them.
- Ensure that spaces used for activities are accessible to people with disabilities. This includes providing ramps, accessible toilets, and signage.
- Use multiple communication methods including emails, text messages, flyers and social media. Ensure that information is available in accessible formats, such as large print or braille, Consider translating important information into other languages.
- Plan events and activities that are inclusive of all abilities and backgrounds. This might involve providing interpreters, ensuring venues are accessible, or offering activities that cater to different skill levels.
- Implement a system for volunteers to provide feedback on their experiences and suggest improvements for inclusion and accessibility.
- Partner with organisations that specialise in supporting people with disabilities, cultural groups, and other marginalised communities to enhance understanding and implementation of inclusive practices.
- Develop and regularly review policies on diversity and inclusion to ensure they are up-to-date and effective. Ensure that these policies are communicated to all members and volunteers.

Things to consider:

- Ethnic and racial groups
- Gender and sexual orientation
- Age groups
- Religious and spiritual beliefs
- Disability and health conditions
- Neurodiversity
- Socioeconomic status
- Cultural backgrounds
- Education and literacy
- Rural and urban communities
- Other marginalised groups

Useful links:

[Diversity Council Australia](#)

[LGBTIQ+ Volunteer inclusive practices guide](#)

[Remembering The Wild - Let's Make it Accessible](#)

[Institute of Community Directors - Neurodiversity help sheet](#)

Engaging Young People

By Callum Clarke (Urban Guerrillas) and Sophie Hart (Deakin Uni Student)

Young people are generally less commonly seen in environmental friends groups across Victoria. Increasing the presence of young people requires input and understanding from both older and younger people in the community.

We have discussed the following ways to understand and improve the relationship between young people and environmental volunteering in order to improve our natural world and build age-diverse communities across the country. The most positive change and progress is underpinned by an understanding and respect for generations past, present and future with actions that respect community and environment equally.

Practical strategies

There are generational differences to be mindful of when introducing young people to a group, such as differing views, values, language, and but it's important to focus on your similarities and common ground! Caring for the Earth is something that all living things share, so keep this in mind when you are in a group space!

Inclusion and diversity

Diversity in backgrounds and ages opens the door to new ideas and dynamic and creative solutions to environmental challenges! Be open to new ideas that may challenge your pre-existing notions, this is an opportunity to grow! Increase your awareness of issues/barriers young people face and how you might be able to help.

Respect and understanding

Try to listen to young people, they have valuable perspectives, and chances are if you listen to them, they will listen to you!

Social media, digital campaigns, fundraisers

Creating buzz around events or actions that young people can take may help them to take the first step into volunteering, even bringing friends along too. Organise events around key dates (World Environment Day, Earth Day)

Accessibility

Have available different levels of participation to cater for different levels of experience. Not everyone is able to get down and weed for hours, but they can still contribute to your cause in impactful ways, such as through advocacy or simply by increasing participation!

Youth perspective

We want to feel like we're primarily there for social reasons and secondarily to work. This doesn't mean we're lazy or disinterested, the means to the same goal are just different. Same goal, different purpose.

We care about the environment greatly, so any additional reasons such as protecting threatened species through friends group work is important. We're transient because we're busy with a quickly changing life. Whether that's study, work or moving out of home, our lives and ability to help may change greatly or suddenly for better or worse. We still want to help as much as we can with what energy we have.

We are passionate for environmental issues that also intersect with other aspects of our lives, such as politics and social justice. It can be difficult managing our time and energy across all of the causes we care for.

Ecological catastrophes unfolding across the world to which we feel powerless to change, can take a toll on our mental health. We can experience overwhelm, eco anxiety/grief, and sometimes we get burnt out.



Young people offer:

- Offer insightful, diverse perspectives and creative solutions to the table
- Passionate and driven
- Can boost online reach through social media campaigns and posts
- Connections to current or emerging environmental talent or research via institutions and networking outside council/direct lines of friends groups

Empowering young people to volunteer and stick around

What elevates a group of volunteers from strangers to a community is the quality of social connection, inclusivity and enjoyment experienced. Sometimes a young person may come to your volunteering event, seem like they are having a good time, and then you never see or hear from them again!

Young volunteers want to feel like their efforts are being recognised and that they are making positive change. Celebrating achievements, cultivating a safe space and getting to know your volunteers personally are key to establishing enduring connections:

- Low barriers to entry, simple tasks that introduce them to the overall structure/tasks
- Respect diversity and celebrate it, it will bring people into the group that may feel left out or lonely and create a community!
- Ensure the social elements of your work stand out, so making sure that there's a bbq or snacks and tea. Even heading out to the pub after a planting may be a fun idea for 18+ volunteers.
- Celebrate the wins of your group on whatever channels you can - Facebook, Instagram, or on posters near your site. Make everyone who has anything to do with your group feel like they are a champion of your area.
- Engage in respectful conversations with young people, ask questions and be willing to have your views challenged.
- Understand moments of difficulty in young people and encourage them back into action when they are ready to re-engage. You can check in and encourage them to participate, but avoid setting ultimatums or deadlines in this situation.

How can young people empower or improve established groups?

With the catastrophic effects of climate change wreaking havoc on most aspects of life, young people are navigating a world of issues that feel more complex and bewildering than ever before. Young people are adaptive and resilient in nature, holding on to hope even in the face of mass ecological disasters, extreme weather events, political instability and social injustice.

Young people are resourceful, utilising tools of technology to promote campaigns and digital connectedness on a global scale. If we can facilitate intergenerational discourse between young people and older generations, we can combine the skills, unique perspectives and experiences to evoke meaningful change in the environment!

Establishing a Youth Environmental Group

Creating a Friends group can seem daunting, you might think you need to already have an established network and need to know a lot about environmentalism, but that's not the case at all. Everyone is welcome in a Friends group, whether you have lots of knowledge or are completely new to the scene.

We all have different reasons for why we are here and that's okay! Maybe you are looking for an opportunity to spend more time in nature, or perhaps it compliments your studies or maybe you are just looking to meet some like-minded folk!

Networking

As young people trying to get involved or friends groups seeking younger members, it can be hard to find a network of like-minded people to engage comfortably.

Even if it doesn't always feel like it, we are all a part of a community. Some networks are hidden, like the strangers you recognise at the supermarket and some are obvious, such as the sports team you chose to be in.

From our day jobs to local neighbourhoods, we are constantly interacting and teaming up with different kinds of people to meet common goals. So, if you are planning to establish a Friends group, you probably have more contacts than you think!

Here are some groups you could consider approaching when starting a Friends group:

- Uni/tafe cohorts (staff or students)
- Existing Friends groups nearby
- Other local environmental or volunteer groups
- Community noticeboards at supermarkets, libraries and other public areas
- Family and friends
- Social media
- Engage with other groups' calendars or events sharing capabilities
- Engaging youth in an established group
- Engage youth at adjacent events such as dog walking groups, iNaturalist blitz days.

Look to engage universities and tafes. They may be able to introduce students to certain elements of their study via the work friends groups do such as plant ID, planting or environmental quality reporting.

Barriers to entry

Volunteering is not always a simple thing to engage in mentally, emotionally or physically. It is often a source of anxiety or self-doubt in younger people as they are still working out many things in their quickly evolving lives.

Here are some common thoughts and misconceptions of younger volunteers as we enter this space and potential ways to address these thoughts:

“I don’t know where to start and don’t know anyone in existing friends groups”

Most friends of groups are formed on the basis of social connection, so thinking of them as a meetup or opportunity to connect is an easy win. Also, bring a friend along to your first few events to ensure you feel safe and have a social fallback.

“I don't have any skills like tree planting or gardening so I won't be useful”

On-ground “hard” skills are much less important than soft skills such as communication, networking, admin, finance and social media. Everyone has something positive to bring along, or you’ll be welcomed in and taught what you want to learn.

Think of friends groups as an opportunity to improve skills and add them to your resume! You may even be able to wrangle some official training through council or grants in certain situations.

“Friends of groups are all older people, I won't be welcomed in”

Most friends of groups are desperate to have younger generations come through. You’ll be welcomed in with open arms. Most friends groups are a force for good and a community of tenacious people looking to improve the environment. This means they are made up of a diverse age group of people who were and are heavily involved in environmental change.

“I’m too busy and will let people down when I’m burnt out”

It’s important to appreciate the input that people (young or old) can make rather than the input you expect they should make. When you give someone time to work through a tough time, they may come out as one of your greatest assets on the other side if you treat them with respect, gratitude and kindness.

Setting simple tasks initially will help to ease the load on a younger person. Things such as attending monthly meetings, shadowing others in tasks or being support for others is a great way to engage and create a sense of belonging.

Example Youth Volunteer Group: Urban Guerrillas

Run primarily by young university students and professionals, UG started in 2022 as a small team of people wanting to improve small areas of the Kooyongkoot (Gardiner's Creek) and has now become a wide-ranging group with several locations and assists friends groups across greater Melbourne.

Some of the amazing things that UG are able to achieve as a young volunteer group relate to our tenacity, passion and enthusiasm for each other and the environment.

Some examples of our unique strengths include:

- Creating buzz around events, educational workshops and social gatherings which create an organically wide network of professionals, community members and friends groups. This is done via consistent communication and social media strategies.
- Big turnouts at most of our events, allowing us to complete large amounts of work even if our core team is small on-site. Managing several sites across different councils, building up relationships not only with community, but councils, institutions and stakeholders in each area such as Deakin University in Burwood.
- Connecting with professionals who are able to elevate our projects beyond just planting/maintenance. These include university-grade research at our sites, use of EVCs and ecologists to strategise, citizen scientists conducting regular surveys and engagement with the council or other friends groups to push for new ways to connect community to the environment.
- Nurturing and celebrating neurodivergence and any level of diversity in our group, playing to each individual's culture, strengths and interests rather than trying to force people into tasks which they may not enjoy or be comfortable with.
- Raising funds/resources organically through donations in free ticketed events, some paid workshops which require professional input, fundraiser concerts and utilising local businesses for relevant/ethical donation to advertising transactions.

Some key challenges have related to seasonal resourcing and volunteer turnover. Often linked to:

- Busy university periods such as April/May and Sept/Oct causing resourcing issues and burnout.
- Ongoing life, professional or mental health stressors outside volunteering leading to turnover or gaps in key team members.
- The tension between holiday periods as breaks or opportunities to progress with more hours to spend on improving the group.
- General teething issues with building up structure and admin such as layouts of tasks and roles or communication networks.

There are so many benefits to young people in environmental volunteer groups. Not only are young people the future of ecology, but they are also the ones that inherit the legacy of our actions today. Spending the energy to engage with young people or being an engaged young person in a volunteer group lends itself to many advantages for all parties and the greater community.

Most of all, it's a way to enjoy each other's company whilst doing something great for the world.

Corporate Volunteering

Corporate involvement can provide a steady stream of dedicated volunteers, ensuring the sustainability of long-term projects.

By engaging corporate volunteers, organisations can also create a culture of environmental responsibility within companies, promoting broader societal change.

Additionally, such collaborations often lead to increased visibility and support for environmental causes, leveraging the corporate network to reach a wider audience and potentially secure additional funding and partnerships.

Attracting corporate volunteering:

- Clearly outline the environmental benefits of your event also including brand exposure, corporate social responsibility impact, and alignment with the company's values.
- Offer various benefits e.g. media coverage, social media, logo placement etc.
- Identify businesses that prioritise environmental sustainability or community involvement and tailor your pitch to appeal to their interests.
- In the beginning - contact companies with whom your group or its members have existing connections to increase the likelihood of involvement. Things will snowball from there once you publicise successful corporate volunteering days - corporate groups will often seek you out.
- Be flexible and willing to customise events to the group's preferences and objectives.
- Provide examples of previous events or projects your group has organised and the positive outcomes achieved to demonstrate your track record. Those before/after photos will come in handy here!
- Be persistent in following up with potential sponsors. Personalised follow-up emails or calls can help maintain interest and close deals.

Planning the event:

- Define the purpose of the event. Is it for environmental conservation, team building, or community engagement?
- Choose a location that aligns with your objectives and has the necessary permissions for planned activities.
- Ensure you have all the tools and materials required such as plants, shovels, gloves, survey equipment, nesting boxes etc. Ensure first aid kits are up to date and do a risk assessment.
- Offer training and safety demos to ensure participants are well-prepared.
- Plan transportation, parking, and facilities such as restrooms and refreshments.

During and after the event:

- Create a sense of camaraderie and purpose among participants through team-building activities or educational sessions about the environment.
- Take photos and videos throughout the event to document the impact of the corporate sponsorship and share on social media or with sponsors afterward.
- Acknowledge the contributions of sponsors with thank-you letters, certificates of appreciation, tagging on social media or other gestures of gratitude. Keep in touch with the corporate group for future opportunities. A well tended relationship can last many years and achieve great things!

Ideas: Some groups charge for corporate days and some don't - simply welcoming the labour-force. You can charge per head, the costs of the materials/catering/porta-loo, a suggested donation - whatever works.

Search for corporate volunteer registers - eg [Landcare](#), [Fifteen Trees](#), or through your local council. Local Business Associations are a great resource and often looking for ways to contribute. A google maps search might show businesses in your vicinity that you can approach for support.

The Power of the Image

The adage of "a picture speaks a thousand words" is true. Imagery plays a pivotal role for environmental groups in conveying messages effectively. Great visuals have the power to evoke emotions, spark interest, and drive action.

We've all been guilty of taking blurry photos with someone's thumb repeatedly popping up in the corner. While these photos do reflect the charming reality of field work - possibly juggling mud, weather, gloves - it is worth taking the time to learn how to take the best photo you can. Even phone cameras these days are fantastic for your day to day photography.

Some helpful tips:

- Grab a "story shot" of the site or a staged moment during the event to set the scene. Eg plants, tools, volunteers ready to go, flags flying, a curious Willie Wagtail.
- Capture the excitement with candid action shots. Experiment using burst mode.
- Gather everyone for group shots - highlighting the stars of the event. Take multiple shots to make sure everyone is looking their best. Try using some props like tools or plants. A joke to get everyone laughing helps.
- Create emotional connections with close-up shots, remembering to ask permission first. Seek out a diverse range of people.
- Take wide shots to encompass the entire event, experimenting with panoramic settings for a landscape view. Drone shots are useful too.
- Before and after shots are one of the most powerful tools in your imagery toolbox. They can be used to share with the public, for applying for grants, newspaper articles, your website and promotional literature.
- Encourage different members of your team to take photos. Maybe a child might have an interesting POV.
- Try to enlist an amateur or professional photographer to your cause. Even if just for big events.

Your unique perspective will shine through in the images you share.

Useful links:

- [5 tips to get the best wildflower photo](#)
- [How to use a smartphone for nature photography](#)
- [Tips for better macro photography on your phone](#)

Citizen Science

The benefits of citizen science

By David De Angelis

The collection of citizen science data, when well-planned and implemented, can result in multiple benefits for those involved as well as the focus of the study. This can include learning and enjoyment for individuals collecting the data, making a meaningful contribution to scientific research beyond the initial data collection, and having the results influence on-ground actions.

The usefulness of citizen science data is, however, dependent on how it is collected. If you design your own project, ensure the project design is scientifically robust before data collection begins. While coming up with a scientifically sound project design can be difficult for lay members of the community, some practising, retired and upcoming academics are happy to provide advice when approached.

Also or instead, consult one or more recognised experts on the species, aspect of local biodiversity or physical environment that you are investigating. They can help to review or provide additional advice on an appropriate study design, including the best methods to collect the data.



More specifically, to maximise the application and getting enjoyment out of your citizen science involvement:

- Depending on your group's preference, workload and resources, look for ways to engage in existing citizen science projects or platforms. Avoid taking on more than you might be in a position to.

Examples:

Apps and websites where you can submit biodiversity observations including photos and wildlife call recordings, such as Aussie Bird Count, FeralScan, platypusSPOT, TurtleSAT, FrogID, Melbourne Water's Frog Census, Moth Tracker, Fungimap, and projects in iNaturalist.

Several organisations also invite citizen scientists to help them collect ecological data in the field, including The Field Naturalists Club of Victoria, Victorian National Parks Association (NatureWatch and ReefWatch) and Science for All.

Canvass universities for opportunities to participate in research, local councils for citizen science events, and state government agencies such as Parks Victoria (through ParkConnect).

- If you develop your own project, clearly define your objectives (questions) before deciding on a final method or methods for data collection.

Example:

Does your project aim to investigate how much groundcover the White-footed Dunnart prefers, how many White-footed Dunnarts might remain in your area of interest, or whether White-footed Dunnarts are likely to remain in the area at all? The survey methods are likely to vary slightly or a lot depending.

- Aim to design and implement a user (citizen)-friendly method of data collection, although making sure that that the method is still scientifically robust enough to meet the project's objectives.

Examples:

Depending on how involved the survey methods are and how easily accessible the sites are, you might not have enough volunteers to effectively survey more than a small handful of locations or survey points.

For example, setting out remote acoustic recorders or cameras will need volunteers to listen to sounds files and look through photos respectively, if not with the help of artificial intelligence software. Depending on how many recorders or cameras the group sets out, are there enough people willing and able to help process the data afterwards?

- Survey methods need to consider the ecological requirements of your subject, including the preferred habitat structure and most appropriate season (weather and time of year) to survey for it.

Example:

Some flora species (e.g. several orchids and grassland specialists) are more easily detectable after fire, as their seeds may be triggered to germinate by fire or benefit from the reduction in competing plant cover. However, there will obviously be some lag in regrowth after fire. Surveys for such species are best timed taking this into account.

Latham's Snipe mainly arrives in Victoria in September and most birds leave in or after January, so local surveys are best done between those months.

Many frog species are also very specific with the times of year they call at (e.g. the locally introduced Eastern Dwarf Tree Frog is most effectively surveyed for when it calls from September to March, and mainly later in spring and summer), so determine this first.

- Consider any requirements (including the cost of applying) for animal ethics and research permit approvals.

Examples:

· Will you be surveying on land managed by Parks Victoria, physically trapping vertebrate animals, or using baited remote (trail or game) cameras on public or private land?

If so, you may need one or more of a Parks Victoria access agreement, animal ethics approval, and research permit under the Wildlife Act 1975 and/or Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988.

- Make sure you avoid or as much as possible, minimise, potential impacts to the habitat and populations of threatened species you are surveying for or might come across incidentally. This includes from transmitting diseases between sites (e.g. Amphibian Chytrid Fungus and Cinnamon Fungus), and trampling vegetation. Also avoid publicly disclosing the locations of threatened species.

Useful links:

- [SWIFFT citizen science page.](#)
- [Australian Citizen Science Association project finder.](#)
- [DEECA's citizen science page.](#)



Understanding politics, election cycles and governments

By Dr Nadine Richings

Outline

- **Politics and Advocacy**
- **What is politics?**
Political ideologies
- **Political systems and governments in Australia**
3-tiered government
Responsibility for the Natural Environment
Chambers and Elected Representatives
Governments and Government Staff
- **Election Cycles**

Politics and Advocacy

Everything on this planet, including the natural environment, is impacted by human societies and human activity.

The way that people do everything is facilitated and supported through decision-making systems such as parliaments, governments, institutions and organisations, and through policies including legislation, regulations, codes of practice, standards and guidelines.

So, access to everything, including healthcare, education, infrastructure, and the natural environment is through political decisions and policy. Some ways in which the natural environment is impacted by human actions includes, fishing, hiking, camping, agriculture, forestry and logging, and planning and development.

Key things to understand to advocate effectively and successfully for species and the natural environment include:

- **WHY:** you need a working knowledge of politics, governments and election cycles.
- **WHAT:** know what level of government is responsible for which environmental decision
- **HOW:** learn how to use the responsibilities of each level of government for positive change
- **WHERE:** know which jurisdiction has environmental responsibilities for the area or species for which you advocate
- **WHO:** get to know the elected representatives, government department staff and Council Officers
- **WHEN:** be aware of the election cycles so you can act at the right time for optimal effect

What is politics?

In the broadest sense, politics is the way humans organise themselves and manage human societies and civilisations. We can consider four major areas of decision-making in politics and human societies:

- The social environment: education, health, welfare, governance, law and order, culture, arts, equity, diversity and inclusion
- The built environment: planning, development, transport, food systems and infrastructure
- The economic environment: productivity, consumption, salary and wages, investments, spending, funding, taxes
- The natural environment: biodiversity, ecosystems, water, air, soil, land, climate and weather

Political opinions and ideologies are varied and exist on a spectrum. One common system used to describe political ideologies is the Left-Right political spectrum.

Generally, those labelled 'left leaning' are progressive and favour an expanded role of government. They have an interest in environmental stewardship, including tackling the climate emergency, and are focused on social issues such as, universal healthcare, education accessibility, income equality, labour rights, equality and inclusion, immigration empathy and international diplomacy.

While those labelled 'right leaning' are conservative and favour limited government with fewer regulations. They generally have less concern for the environment and climate action. They are likely to endorse a free-market economic system, lower taxes, reduced government regulation in industry (deregulation), strong military and defence systems, tough law enforcement, traditional values and individualism.

People with opinions and ideologies between these two poles are centrist or moderate.

According to ABC Vote Compass, based on 30 questions for the 2022 Federal Elections, major political parties in Australia were mapped using the left-right economic appraisal and the progressive-conservative social appraisal (see Figure 1).



Figure 1: Political ideology mapping of major Australian political parties based on targeted questions at the time of the 2022 federal elections.

Source: ABC Vote Compass

Other systems to appraise political ideologies assess major policy issues. In the 2019 federal elections, smartvote Australia was used to map political parties against six major policy issues: three traditionally leftist issues (environmental protection, inclusivity, welfare state) and three traditionally rightist issues (economic liberalism, law & order, traditionalism). The mapping of three major political parties is shown in Figure 2

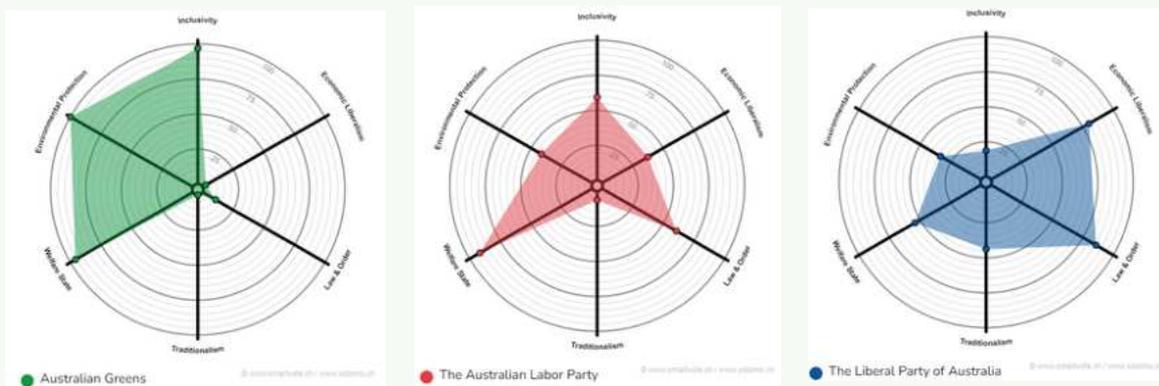


Figure 2:

Political ideology mapping of major Australian political parties based on targeted questions at the time of the 2019 federal elections. Source: Smartvote Australia

Political systems and governments in Australia

Australia has a 3-tiered system of government:

- Australian Government (also called the national, federal, or commonwealth Government).
- State and territory governments.
- Local government areas (LGAs); city and shire councils, of which there are more than 500 across Australia

Responsibility for the Natural Environment

Environmental responsibilities are outlined in the Heads of agreement on Commonwealth and State roles and responsibilities for the Environment.

National responsibility is largely focused on matters of national environmental significance (MNES).

Most other environmental responsibilities generally lie with states and territories, and they delegate some responsibilities to LGAs. LGA responsibilities are focussed on planning schemes and approvals, local parks, and some responsibility for water management, coastal management and the management of the effects of sea level rises, vegetation control, waste management, and air quality and noise.

Chambers and Elected Representatives

Australian, state and territory parliaments are bicameral, consisting of two houses or chambers (except for Queensland Parliament which is unicameral).

There are 39 federal electorates (voting areas) in Victoria, each with an elected Member of Parliament (MP) in the House of Representatives (lower chamber), and 12 Senate positions for Victoria in the Australian Senate (upper chamber) of the Australian Parliament.

There are 88 state electorates in Victoria, each with an elected MP in the Legislative Assembly (lower chamber) of the Victorian Parliament. There are 8 state regions in Victoria, each with 5 elected MPs in the Legislative Council (upper chamber) of the Victorian Parliament, giving a total of 40 MPs in the upper chamber.

Most LGAs are divided into areas called wards, and a specific number of elected representatives (Councillors) represent each ward - most LGAs have single-member wards, some have multi-member wards. Some LGAs are not divided to wards. The collective of all Councillors form the Council Chamber.

So, in summary, there are more than 20 elected representatives who represent you and the issues that matter to you!

- Federal Parliament: 1 House of Representatives MP; 12 Victorian Senators
- Victorian Parliament: 1 Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA); 5 Members of the Legislative Council (MLCs) for your region
- LGA: varies; varied number of wards and Councillors

Know your representatives at each level of government; consider building a relationship with them so you can discuss issues and advocate for change.

Governments and Government Staff

Once elected to parliament, the majority in the lower chamber form government to govern the country or state.

The majority is determined through membership of political parties, alliances between political parties (e.g. the coalition between the Liberal party and the National party) and informal agreements between political parties and other MPs.

The MPs who form government appoint a Prime Minister or Premier (usually determined before the election), and the Prime Minister or Premier appoints ministers to oversee portfolios, e.g. Environment, Health, and government departments with government staff.

In LGAs, the elected Councillors form the Council Chamber and create directives for their council. The directives are actioned through plans, strategies and programs developed and implemented by Council staff.

Know the key ministers and staff at each level of government (e.g. Environment Minister, Biodiversity Officer in your LGA); consider building a relationship with them so you can discuss issues and advocate for change.

Election Cycles

Each level of government has organised elections every three to four years, to elect political representatives. Federal Elections are roughly every three years, and the actual time is chosen by the incumbent Prime Minister. Victorian state elections and Victorian LGA elections are every four years in October-November, alternating, so one of the elections occurs every two years. So, there is always an election on the way!

Elections are critical and powerful times to advocate for the environment - for your species or natural area. Candidates are trying to get votes and are interested in sensitive and important issues in the area that they are wanting to represent. Meet with candidates, ask them questions, ask them to make commitments about the natural environment. Then hold them to their commitments if they are elected!

Tier of Government	Last Election	Upcoming Elections
Federal	May 2022	Early 2025, early 2028, early 2031
Victorian State	Nov 2022	Nov 2026, Nov 2030, Nov 2034
Victorian LGAs	Nov 2020	Nov 2024, Nov 2028, Nov 2032

Resources

Best Diplomat's page on "[Political ideologies](#)"

Polipedia's page on "[How Australian politics works](#)"

Australian Electoral Commission ([AEC](#))

Victorian Electoral Commission ([VEC](#))

[Know Your Council](#)

COAG 1997 Heads of agreement on Commonwealth and State roles and responsibilities for the Environment - [DCCEEW](#)



Researching Friends Groups

The first Friends Group, the Friends of the Organ Pipes in Keilor, was established in 1972 and remains very active today. Other groups were formed in the following years leading up to the State Conservation Strategy in 1982, supported by the Victorian National Parks Network. Since then, the number of environmental groups has continued to grow, with records of their activities available in both paper and electronic formats.

These materials are accessible in various locations, both offline and online, for those researching the history of the environment groups.

Offline resources, often a good starting point, include:

- Local knowledge from group members, the VEFN, council officers, library history officers, and VEFN award applications (available online and from nominating groups).
- Information enquiries for local contacts through the Victorian National Parks Network, DEECA [Volunteering Naturally](#) and Website, Environment Victoria, Land Agencies, and long-term group members.

Online resources include:

- Environment sites and history sites for most local governments.
- Emails to info@localgovernments
- Local history groups with online or museum archives.
- Parks Victoria, Coastcare, DEECA agencies, and Melbourne Water which have heritage officers to assist.
- Local members of Parliament and PROV grants (Public Record Office Victoria) for research and digitalisation of collections.

Early groups were formed by members passionate about environmental concerns before the internet era, and records are now available from various sources due to digital transfers. These sources include local historical groups and organisations, the Royal Historical Society of Victoria, the Public Record Office in North Melbourne, and local libraries with online historical connections and sites.

A recent addition is the History Room at the Frankston Library, supporting the Frankston Historical Society, which is over 50 years old. Many councils now have local history websites with extensive information complementing the environmental history of the area. Another valuable resource is the State Library of Victoria, offering fully digitalised records, some dating back to the 1950s and earlier. Joining the library is free.

As an example, information on the Edithvale-Seaford Wetlands and the Carrum Carrum Swamp is available on the Kingston Council Website and Melbourne Water, which also has a heritage section with comprehensive records.

Modern online storage provides a range of other options, including suggestions from tertiary libraries, which offer access to specialist knowledge and resources for graduates and others. Monash, La Trobe, and other regional institutions often provide online access for graduates.

Local Facebook pages, web pages, and government award lists are also valuable sources of information.

Melbourne Water, Parks Victoria, DEECA, and other land agencies maintain libraries of resources. Land agencies have files of old park notes, usually available online for reference for National Parks.



This is an evolving field that offers an opportunity for a group member to specialise in, as an alternative to on-ground activities.

Idea: Contact Margaret Hunter, an avid and experienced archivist, at the VEFN for any further assistance

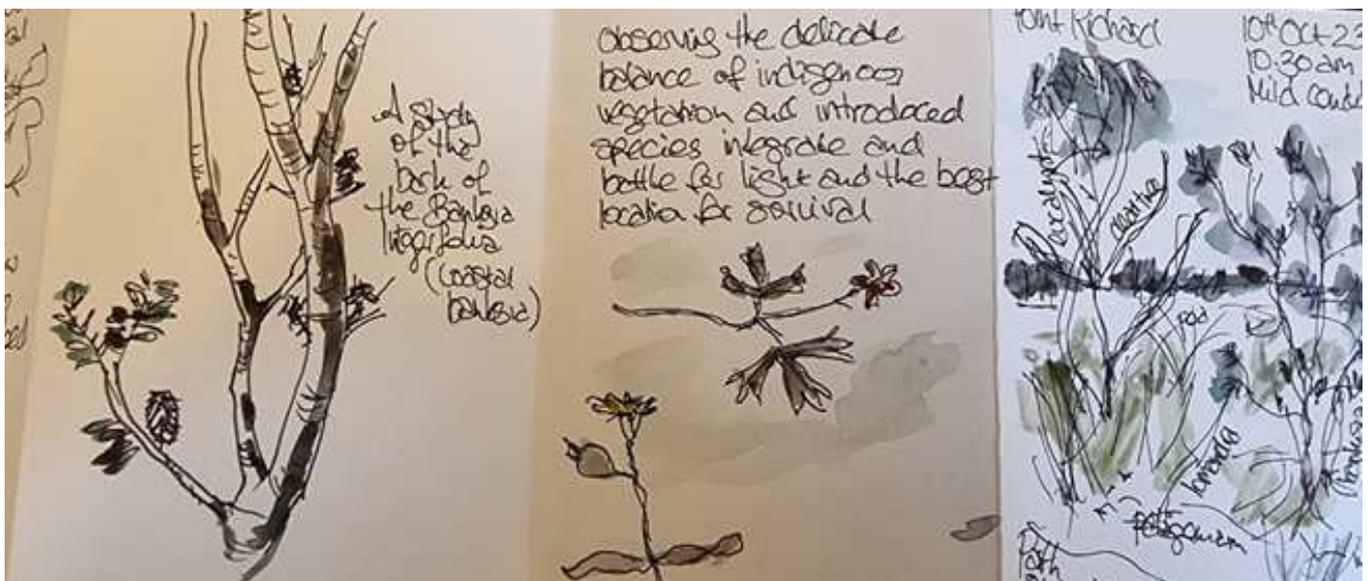
 margaret@vefn.org.au

Nature Journaling



What is Nature Journaling?

Nature journaling is the practice of observing and recording the natural world through writing, drawing, and other creative expressions. It encourages mindfulness and deepens one's connection to nature by capturing details about plants, animals, landscapes, and seasonal changes. This process often combines scientific observation with personal reflections, fostering a greater appreciation for the environment and enhancing observational skills.



Nature Journaling with the Friends of Point Richard

Why use Nature Journaling with your Revegetation Projects?

The practice of observing and recording your revegetation project provides a basis for collecting data about your project and the impact of your revegetation. It allows members of your group to create a meaningful connection and contribution which allows their own personal observations and inspirations to be captured.

A deeper understanding of the species and the challenges they face engages and inspires your group to restore, nurture and protect the revegetation area and the broader environment.

Technique 1: Maps over time

To get to know the revegetation area better, a map can be sketched freehand or from online mapping sources.

- Write a title and date for your map.
- Draw the boundaries of the area you wish to focus on
- Make a legend in a corner and decide how you'd like to show:

Contours and landforms

Water sources

Fences

Roads and tracks

Trees and shrubs

Other important features

- Work out where North is and mark it on your map using a compass or a device.
- Mark in on the map the main features based on the legend.

At this point, you may wish to keep this map as a base and trace/photocopy it to create specific maps for what you are focusing on. You may wish to keep track of the following: Weed locations, wildflower plantings, significant species sightings, walk notes, favourite places

Use your map to record the changes and effectiveness of your plantings, weed and erosion controls over time.

Technique 2: Before and After

If you are comfortable with quick sketching in the field, a nature journal page might capture the area about to be tackled for weed removal. Although a photo could be used to do this, a nature journal page allows for species identification and notes about how the revegetation project will be tackled. Your page might have the following:

- Title and metadata (Place, time, weather, conditions)
- A description of the revegetation goal
- A list of materials and equipment required
- An overview sketch of the area
- Detail drawings of target species

At the end of the revegetation or weed removal, another nature journal page may be created to show the same overview with notes about the work done, lessons learned and notes for the next revegetation project.

Technique 3: Species Focus

There may be a particular species that you'd like all your group to learn about. It might be a specific weed species that you are targeting. You can either write a nature journal in the field or at home with field guides.

You can use the prompts:

I Notice

- describe what the species looks like
- draw an overview of the plant, shrub or tree
- draw a close-up of its identifying features

I Wonder

- Write down questions that are inspired by the plant
- Why is it here?
- What does it need to grow?

It Reminds Me Of

- Consider your personal connection to the species.
- Have you seen it before somewhere else?
- Does it evoke memories or feelings?

Nature Journaling is a personal record that can form the basis of learning more about nature and how integral our connection is to it.

To learn more:

[John Muir Laws](#)

[Wild Wonder Conference](#)

[International Nature Journaling Week](#)



DGR Status

How to set up DGR status for your Friends Group

Setting up Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR) status for a not-for-profit (NFP) such as a Friends Group involves several steps and considerations. Here's a general guide to help you understand the process with some VEFN tips at the end:

Eligibility Check

Must have an Australian Business Number (ABN) 

Must have the characteristics of an environmental organisation 

- Registered as a charity with the Australian Charities & Not-for-profit Commission ([ACNC](#)) and be an incorporated association:
- Have the principal purpose of either:
The protection and enhancement of the natural environment or of a significant aspect of the natural environment, or
The provision of information or education, or the carrying on of research, about the natural environment or a significant aspect of the natural environment.
- Must have a policy of not acting as a conduit for funding other bodies/organisations or individuals.
- Must maintain a gift fund and have specific winding up and revocation clause.

Must be located in Australia 

Application Process

Select the application form appropriate to your circumstances 

- If your organisation is not a charity, you can apply for DGR status when applying to the [ACNC for charity registration](#).
- If your organisation has an ABN and is registered as a charity, you can apply directly to the ATO to be endorsed for DGR status.

Provide the following documentation 

- Constitution or governing documents of your organization.
- Financial statements.
- Detailed description of your organization's activities and how they align with charitable purposes

Submit application and all documentation and ensure a confirmation is received 

Await review and approval from the ATO. Follow up if necessary 

Ongoing Obligations

- Ensure your organisation complies with the requirements of being a DGR.
- Submit annual reports to the ATO including financial statements and how the funds have been used.

Tax Deductibility for Donors

Once your Friend Group has DGR status:

- Donors can claim tax deductions for donations of \$2 or more to your Friend Group.
- You must issue receipts that comply with [ATO guidelines for tax-deductible donations](#).

Tips:

- Seek advice from a legal professional with experience in taxation and not-for-profit law. We suggest Justice Connect or appropriate pro-bono legal representatives.
- Read the ATO requirements carefully and take advantage of all the resources and guidance where necessary.
- Establish contact with the ATO to check on progress.
- Maintain good supplies of patience and polite persistence.

Note: Recent ATO and [ACNC](#) updates require environmental not-for-profit groups to hold ACNC registration for ongoing charity status and tax-exempt eligibility, reflecting new annual reporting and compliance standard. Please go to the ACNC website for details

References:

- [ATO - Gifts to Environmental organisations.](#)
- [ACNC - Deductable gift recipients](#)
- [Justice Connect](#)



Avoiding Burnout

We all busy and it is easy to burn out with the never ending workload of being environmental legends!

You are important and so is your mental, emotional and physical health. Avoiding burnout in an environmental group requires a combination of self-care practices, effective team management strategies, and organisational support.

Here are some tips to help prevent burnout:

- **Realistic goals:** Avoid overcommitting by setting achievable goals for your organisation. This prevents team members from feeling overwhelmed and reduces the risk of burnout.
- **Prioritise tasks:** Help team members prioritise tasks by identifying the most important and urgent activities. This helps prevent them from feeling overwhelmed by an endless to-do list.
- **Balance:** Emphasise the importance of balance and encourage team members to take breaks, vacations, and time off when needed. Lead by example and demonstrate that it's okay to prioritise personal well-being.
- **Support:** Create a supportive and inclusive work environment where team members feel comfortable discussing their workload, concerns, and challenges. Encourage open communication and provide resources for mental health support if necessary.
- **Share responsibilities:** Distribute tasks and responsibilities evenly among team members to prevent one person from bearing too much workload. This promotes collaboration and ensures that no individual feels overwhelmed.

- **Professional development:** Provide opportunities for skill development and growth within the group. Investing in training programs and workshops can help team members feel valued and motivated, reducing the risk of burnout.
- **Celebrate:** Recognise and celebrate the accomplishments of your team regularly. Acknowledging their hard work and contributions boosts morale and motivation, reducing feelings of burnout.
- **Self-Care:** Educate team members about the importance of self-care and encourage them to prioritise activities that promote mental and physical well-being, such as exercise, meditation, and hobbies..
- **Boundaries:** Encourage team members to set boundaries around their work, including designated work hours and times when they are not available. Respect these boundaries to prevent overworking and burnout.
- **Workload:** Regularly assess the workload of your team members and make adjustments as needed to prevent burnout. This may involve reallocating tasks, asking for help from council, or outsourcing certain responsibilities.

By implementing these strategies, your group can create a supportive and sustainable work environment that reduces the risk of burnout among team members.



Idea: Maybe a local business might support your group by offering a nice lunch or massages for all.

Time to be good to yourselves.

Volunteers deserve it!

Branding

A simple brand style guide will establish a unified presence across all channels. It will help ensure that your message remains clear, compelling, and consistent, reinforcing your group's credibility and building trust with your audience.

A simple guide can outline:

- **Logo:** Provide guidelines on logo usage, variations, size, placement, and clear space requirements.
- **Color Palette:** Specify primary and secondary colors, including CMYK, RGB, and hexadecimal codes, along with guidelines for color usage and combinations.
- **Typography:** Select appropriate fonts for headings, body text, and other elements, and provide guidelines on font usage, sizes, and styles.
- **Imagery:** Determine the style, tone, and types of imagery that align with your brand, including photography, illustrations, and graphics.

Once you have your brand guide you can create accessible templates and resources for your team to use in communications and marketing, giving your group a professional edge.

Logos expanded:

A compelling logo not only visually represents your group's mission and values but also captures attention, evokes emotion, and enables instant recognition. It is the cornerstone of your brand identity.

When creating a logo remember to consider the values and themes specific to your group. Additionally, ensure that the design is versatile, scalable, and works well in various applications. If possible, consult with a graphic designer for a customised and professional touch to bring your vision to life.



Idea: Consider running a competition to design your logo and engage your community. You can always adapt a design you like.



Victorian Environment
FRIENDS NETWORK

We hope this document has been useful to all you hard working volunteers out there. Please do get in touch with any questions or suggestions.

Get in touch



The Victorian Environment Friends Network is hosted by the Victorian National Parks Association, Level 3, 60 Leicester St, Carlton 3053.



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