

Now you're a Councillor



A kit for newly
elected women
councillors
in local
government
and their
supporters

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A kit for newly elected women Councillors in local government and their supporters.

Written and researched by Leonie Morgan 2001, second edition 2002. Third edition updated and edited by Linda Bennett 2005.

This kit draws extensively on material generously provided by women who are current or former Councillors, and women who work within or with local governments. *Now You're a Councillor* is the companion volume to *A Gender Agenda* (Leonie Morgan and Sara Charlesworth 1998, Linda Bennett and Alice Aird 2002, 2005).

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We acknowledge the traditional owners of the land and their ancestors who have been custodians for thousands of years. You are likely to be reading this publication on land where indigenous people have performed many cultural traditions such as trading, ceremonial dance, initiation, renewal ritual and religious beliefs. We acknowledge and pay our respects to the people and to past and present Elders and give thanks for their custodianship of the land.

ENQUIRIES

The Women's Participation in Local Government Coalition (WPILGC) includes representatives of Australian Local Government Women's Association (ALGWA), Local Government Professionals (LGPro), Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV), Victorian Immigrant and Refugee Women's Coalition (VIRWC), Victorian Local Governance Association (VLGA), Victorian Women's Trust (VWT), Women's Electoral Lobby Victoria (WEL), Women's Planning Network (WPN), YWCA Victoria as well as individual women councillors and citizens.



WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION
IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT
COALITION
STRENGTHENING COMMUNITIES
THROUGH WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION



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Foreword

The Women's Participation in Local Government Coalition (WPILGC) is a cooperative non-party political endeavour, which works towards the equal participation of women and men in local governments in Victoria.

The Coalition includes representatives from Australian Local Government Women's Association (ALGWA), Local Government Professionals (LGPro), Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV), Victorian Immigrant and Refugee Women's Coalition (VIRWC), Victorian Local Governance Association (VLGA), Victorian Women's Trust, Women's Electoral Lobby (WEL), Women's Planning Network (WPN), and YWCA Vic, as well as individual women co-opted for their interest and expertise. Coalition members in the past have included the Stegley Foundation and Ladies of the City Action League (LOCAL).

The Coalition believes that greater participation of women in local governments will lead to better policy debate and decision-making, both within Councils and the wider community. More balanced gender representation, with equal numbers of women and men, can result in more diverse representation and advocacy for the needs and aspirations of all community members. Women bring particular experience to consultation, policy development and decision-making and their greater participation in these important processes will enhance good governance at a local level.

This kit is one of a number of major activities undertaken by the Coalition and its members since 1996. Since the printing of the first edition of this kit in 2001, significant progress has been made. In particular, there has been an increase of elected women from 22% in 1997 to 29% in 2004.

Previous initiatives have included:

- **200 by 2000 campaign 1999-2000.** This campaign aimed to facilitate and support local activities to encourage and assist women to run in the March 2000 local government elections. The campaign included 18 regional workshops, a state-wide mentoring program, a Women's Tally Room with linked website to enable women from around Australia to monitor the progress of women in the March 2000 poll.
- **Women's Power Workshop.** This was held in June 2000 for women Councillors, with Joan Kirner as the main presenter.
- **Campaign 2001.** A project officer planned and convened local workshops and networks for women interested in standing for local government election in 2001.
- **Centenary of Federation Women's Petition 2001.** The Coalition co-aided the Petition component of this highly successful project, where 72 municipalities convened and facilitated workshops to determine key issues for women in the future as part of Victoria's Centenary of Federation celebrations in 2001.
- **Strengthening Communities through Women's Participation Project 2001-2004.** Funded by the Victorian State Government, with support from the VLGA and the MAV, the project goals were to encourage increased numbers of women from diverse backgrounds to public leadership positions in local communities especially in relation to local government; to support women considering nominating as candidates in local government elections; to contribute to changes in public attitudes to the leadership of women; to foster and support local and regional networks which sustain women in community leadership positions; to build on the momentum of the Centenary of Federation Women's Petition 2001.
- **Women Get Elected 2005.** Funded by the Victorian Government in the lead up to the 2005 elections, this project enabled a successful component of the SCWP Project to again be offered to Victorian women. It involved training and support for volunteer facilitation teams to run local *Women Get Elected* workshops specially designed for potential women candidates, their supporters and any women interested in finding out more about local community leadership.

Current initiatives include:

- **The Victorian Local Government Women's Charter.** The Charter was formed in 1997 and updated in 2003. It identifies three principles on which good governance for inclusion is based. The three principles are equal representation, diversity and recognising and supporting the active citizenship of women.



- **A Gender Agenda 2005 (3rd edition).** This publication is a kit for women who want to stand for local government and those who want to assist others to stand. It includes information on how to run a campaign; practical hints for those who want to assist others to stand; and case studies describing how candidates and Councillors dealt with particular aspects of seeking to represent their communities.
- **Local Women's Action Plans.** A small project funded by the Office of Women's Policy (Victoria) to support the development of local networks for women in community leadership through action plans.
- **In a different way.** A small project funded by the Victorian Women's Trust to develop a discussion paper around the idea of transforming the culture of local politics so that it better reflects women's needs and hopes for themselves, their families and their communities.

Feedback from all the workshops held since 1999 and from individual women recently elected as Councillors, indicates an urgent need for information and practical hints for many women once they are elected to Council. Many talk about an incredibly steep learning curve, depending on their previous experience. Thus the development of a kit for newly elected Councillors.

Supporting newly elected Councillors, and in particular women Councillors, is vital to ensure that their contribution is sustainable. Our aim is to firmly entrench women in all consultative and decision-making structures. This kit will equip them with information, case studies and resources to give them the best possible start.

Councillor Angela Altair

Chair, Women's Participation in Local Government Coalition

Councillor Geoff Lake

President, Municipal Association of Victoria

Councillor Warren Maloney

President, Victorian Local Governance Association

Introduction

Development of the kit

The kit was developed in three stages. The first stage involved consultation with women who were experienced Councillors. This provided the opportunity to focus on the strategies and issues these women thought were important to becoming effective Councillors and to canvass potential case study opportunities.

The second stage involved the conduct of two focus groups of new and experienced Councillors. Participants were asked about the priority concerns for them and to comment on the relevance of the issues contained in a draft outline of the kit.

The third stage involved the development of the case study material for inclusion in the kit. The case studies were selected to provide practical, real life examples for new women Councillors, as well as contact points for further information.

In addition to the case studies, quotes from Councillors are used throughout the kit. The quotes are drawn from interviews and focus group discussion.

Many thanks to former Councillors who contributed to previous editions of *Now You're a Councillor*: Di Daffy (Corangamite), Laurice Newman (Hepburn), Tonya Stevens (Maribyrnong), the Hon. Glenys Romanes MLC (Moreland), Helen Hoppner (City of LaTrobe), Janina Gawler (former Rural City of Echuca).

The three key messages we have been offering to both women candidates and women Councillors over the last seven years are:

- **Expand your sphere of influence** — standing for election, supporting a candidate or becoming a Councillor are all fantastic ways of expanding your sphere of influence so that you can make a difference for what you care about.
- **Step-by-step** – practicing leadership, or indeed taking on anything new, is a step-by-step process which involves learning and some risk-taking rather than arriving as a perfectly prepared leader.

Making best use of the Kit

The kit is intended to provide practical information and assistance to new women Councillors. It focuses on practical hints and 'real life' case study information from current and former women Councillors and highlights the areas they think are important in becoming an effective Councillor. A list of resources for those wanting further information is included at the end of the kit.

The kit is supplemented by web resources. Exploring the webpage of the Women's Participation in Local Government Coalition will provide you with further resources, ideas and links which expand on those offered here.
<www.vlga.org.au/issues/women_gov.html>

Before you begin reading this kit, remember that:

- every Councillor and every community is different
- there are many ways of being an effective elected representative. The suggestions contained in this kit are just that – suggestions
- what has worked for others may or may not work for you.

- **Define your own success** — you are in the best position to define your success – don't let anyone else do it for you. Set your own goals and standards of success and write them down.

Our message is be true to yourself and work out ways to be the Councillor you want to be, not the one others want you to be.



1 Now you're a Councillor

*I came in armed with confidence and courage.
I wasn't afraid to say "I don't know".*

The campaign is over and you've been elected. After the celebration, what happens now?

What exactly does local government do and what will your role be as a Councillor?

The purpose and functions of local governments

Local governments, along with Federal, State and Territory governments, are one of the three spheres of government in Australia.

Local governments are elected to represent their local communities. They provide leadership for the good governance of their local communities. The roles listed in Part 1A of the Victorian Local Government Act (1989) include to:

- act as a representative government by taking into account the diverse needs of the local community in decision making
- provide leadership in establishing strategic objectives and monitoring their achievement
- manage resources in a responsible and accountable manner

Functions of Councils

The Local Government Act 1989 (Part 1A, section 3E) lists the following as functions of Councils in Victoria:

- advocate and promote proposals which are in the best interests of the local community
- plan for and provide services and facilities for the local community
- provide and maintain community infrastructure in the municipal district
- undertake strategic and land use planning for the municipal district
- raise revenue to enable Council to perform its functions
- make and enforce local laws
- exercise, perform and discharge the duties, functions and powers of Council under the Act(s)
- any other function relating to the peace, order and good government of the municipal district.

- advocate for the interests of the local community to other communities and governments
- act as a responsible partner in government
- foster community cohesion and encourage active participation in civic life.

By implication, local governments also provide:

- a focus for community identity and civic spirit
- appropriate services to meet community needs in an efficient and effective manner
- avenues to facilitate and coordinate local efforts and resources in pursuit of community goals.

Make sure you are familiar with the Act, especially Part 1A.

The role of local governments

When we looked for someone to discuss the role of local government we thought there was no one better than Dr Rosemary Kiss. Dr Kiss is an influential and active participant in the discussion and debate around the role of local government in Victoria. This is what Dr Kiss had to say:

Local governments – democracy in action

It is crucial for Councillors and local citizens to understand that the central task of local governments is to interpret and implement, with the greatest probity and to the best of their ability, the *Local Government Act* and other applicable legislation enacted by the relevant state parliament. As part of its funding structure and agency role, a local government also receives direction from the Commonwealth Government.

The need to work within a legislative framework and under the scrutiny of other spheres of government means a local government is not totally free to act within or on behalf of its constituency. Nevertheless local governments generally have a

wide range of responsibilities and associated powers. Local governments, acting together with local residents and groups, and collectively, including through their peak bodies, can help shape the views of other governments and bring about changes in policies and laws to improve the way a country defines itself.

In an earlier edition of *Now You're a Councillor*, I focused on the role of local government as the cornerstone of democracy. We may live in an era when global media bring to our daily attention the entanglements of nations in creating and sometimes solving international disasters. As a result, it may seem that presidents, prime ministers and other powerful figures and forces

dominate our cultural, social, political and economic environments, leaving us disempowered despite the claims of democracy, freedom and human or individual rights.

Such circumstances reinforce the need to regroup at the grass roots and to reclaim a sense of our individual and collective democratic responsibilities and capacities. Good local government can strengthen the sense of active, instead of passive belonging, which is essential to any country that claims to be a democracy.

**Dr Rosemary Kiss, Senior Fellow
Department of Political
Science, University of
Melbourne**

The importance of good governance

Democratic governance is concerned with establishing good practices and processes for community development which balance the key competing demands of local social, cultural, environmental and economic development, sustainability and equity.

Council governance differs from corporate governance in that it entails democratic accountability to an electorate of citizens who have a range of rights — legal, voting, political, civic and participatory. Council governance in setting overall community goals, policy

and funding priorities provides the core framework from which corporate management functions are derived.

Activities around governance will make up a large part of what you do as a Councillor. You will be involved in:

- civic leadership
- representation and advocacy
- inter-governmental negotiation
- marketing and communication
- decision making
- local policy and planning in regional and state contexts
- accountability and performance, and
- resources and assets management.

The Good Governance Guide

The *Good Governance Guide* was produced by the Good Governance Advisory Group in 2004, following on from the *Code of Good Governance* prepared by the Municipal Association of Victoria and the Victorian Local Governance Association in 1997. Members of the Good Governance Advisory Group include MAV, VLGA, LGPro, Local Government Division of Department for Victorian Communities and Councillors and officers from Victorian local governments.



The *Guide* focuses on the successful practice of good governance by local governments. Good governance relies on accountability, leadership, community responsiveness and relationships. “When local governments practise good governance their communities are more connected and engaged, better services are provided, and more effective use is made of resources.” (page 3, *Good Governance Guide*, 2004). The *Guide* describes the standards and principles for local governments which ensure the highest level of local governance and community leadership, along with some real scenarios.

The *Good Governance Guide* is essential reading for you from day one of being a Councillor. It will give you a sound framework for thinking about your role, and those of your Council colleagues.

But what exactly is good governance?

There are many definitions and types of “governance”. The *Good Governance Guide* defines governance as “the process of decision making and the process by which decisions are implemented (or not implemented) ... It includes the ways local governments engage with their communities in this process.” (p.6).

Good governance is:

- participatory
- consensus oriented
- accountable
- transparent
- responsive
- effective and efficient
- equitable and inclusive
- law abiding.

(*Good Governance Guide* 2004 page 6)

Local governments, like all governments, are complex and imperfect but essential. Human frailties and organisational problems bedevil all of our social and political endeavours. Yet, because local governments are truly the sphere of government closest to us, they should be the cornerstone of our society’s capacity to function democratically.

Dr. Rosemary Kiss (2001)

Well, how does it really feel on the ground now you’re finally there?

Here’s how one woman described her feelings when she was first elected.

Starting out with punch

I never expected to be elected. What a shock!

Local governments were always something I had been interested in – being a level of government most directly affecting people. As a journalist I used to cover local governments. When my children were toddlers I got involved in local issues, became president of the local kinder and experienced Council from a user’s perspective. I saw another side of Council when I became a community representative on an urban design framework. My friends rallied when I told them I was going to stand for Council and were keen that someone they knew was ‘having a go’.

There was a huge amount to learn in the first six months. Administration was extremely helpful. In the first year I worked between 30 and 50 hours a week on Council matters – my husband often asked, when were the 30-hour weeks?

My children were very young when I was first elected – six and nine. The time commitment was brought home to me by my six-year-old, when he stopped asking if I had a meeting that night, but asked instead, who’s babysitting?

One thing that experience teaches you is the ability to say no. I promised my family that if re-elected I wouldn’t work so many hours. I have kept that promise. I still have to juggle – but so does every family.

Is it worth it? Most definitely.



Councillor Coral Ross, City of Boroondara (2002–)

2 Hit the ground running ... but head towards where you want to go

When I was elected I thought thank goodness it's all over – but you start running straight away. At first, you feel you need to know everything, people expect you to be an instant expert – you're their Councillor and they expect you to do things!!!!

Getting up to speed quickly

I really felt like I was jumping in at the deep end. You don't get a breather. No one says "see you in a month".

Now you're there, you need to get up to speed really quickly, so how can you do this as fast as possible?

The first thing to do is to acknowledge that you don't know everything – everyone knows you're new to Council and in reality they won't expect you to know it all just yet. Ask questions about everything that you don't understand and keep asking till it is clear.

If you are from an under-represented group, your mere presence at the decision making table can make a big difference. Remember this when you are feeling overloaded. Get clear about your values, your intentions and your goals. Read the article "*Be the Councillor you want to be*" in the library of the Women's Participation in Local Government Coalition webpage www.vlga.org.au/issues/women_gov.html.

Make use of your networks

Straight after the election, the information I got from other Councillors and Council officers was so important.

Start off by asking around to find out as much information as you can yourself. One of your first tasks should be to find out the people who know what you need to know – use your networks, your mentors and all the people who helped you get elected and supported you along the way. Consult the 'experts' – other experienced Councillors, former Councillors and the Council staff will be great resources to draw upon.

Build up, maintain and retain your own file of background information – write things down, keep an address book of useful contacts and note down the things they can tell you about.

This information will be one of the most important things you can draw on in coming to grips with your role and responsibilities as a Councillor.

Meeting and greeting

The Council officers organised a grand tour of the area so we could understand the whole of the municipality.

In your first few days on Council you meet lots of people who will be important to you along the way. You probably already have well developed people skills, but you may feel as if you need to build on these. You are in a new role and a new organisational and political culture.

Professional development and training

Most Councils have an allocated budget for Councillor support, to enable elected officials to attend professional development or training courses. These provide an excellent opportunity to build your networks and develop new skills – make the most of them where you are able. Some Councils offer in-house training to new Councillors but there are a variety of other courses which could assist. The VLGA and MAV offer courses and conferences for Councillors and often for newly elected Councillors

continued on page 11



So how do you develop people skills?

- The most important thing is to show a genuine interest in what people have to say. Give them your full attention. Listen.
- Always establish and attempt to maintain eye contact and remember to smile.
- Try to remember names when introduced – there are many ‘tricks’ for doing this. But one way is to say the person’s name back to them straight after the introduction.
- Never stand or sit by yourself – go to the centre of the room – put out your hand and introduce yourself.
- Find out something about the organisations within your community prior to visits or meetings – ask the Council officers, look the organisations up on the Web or use your networks. It’s amazing how far just a little bit of information can take you and they’ll appreciate that you took the trouble.
- Get yourself an easy to read nametag and make sure to wear it.
- If you can’t go to a function — make sure you put in an apology.

A steep learning curve

The Councillor’s role can be all consuming if you want to effectively serve your electorate. We have all heard of Councillors attending a couple of statutory meetings a month, but this is not enough to effectively represent your community.

A Councillor’s job is certainly not like any 9 to 5 weekday job. To do it well requires you to be available on weekends and evenings, and prepared to catch up with your emails and reading at odd hours. There is no statutory requirement to put in a certain number of hours but it is vital that you are part of the community you represent. If you have a partner, it is important they are supportive and self sufficient, particularly in the culinary field.

It is important to realise that your municipality is comprised of a diverse range of people, interests and activities. To be an effective Councillor you need to have a broad range of interests and a willingness to move outside your ‘comfort zone’. You will be invited

to attend community functions for groups of which you have little knowledge and possibly even less interest. If you gravitate towards groups that you identify with you will be missing out on some wonderful experiences and the chance to broaden your knowledge.

It is also important to establish a good working relationship with Council officers and take advantage of their expertise. Don’t be afraid to ask questions or seek information and don’t be intimidated by their depth of knowledge.

Get to know your fellow Councillors – their backgrounds, interests and areas of expertise. Seek their advice and ask for their support. Accept and respect each Councillor’s individuality – a diverse Council provides a much stronger representation. In an ideal world you should be pooling all your resources to ensure your residents have the best possible representation.

It is important to be aware of a Councillor’s enormous responsibilities – looking after an annual budget often in excess of \$100 million and making decisions for over 100,000 residents. It is not the forum for resolving a single local issue but for providing good governance to a whole municipality on a wide range of issues.

To be an effective Councillor requires a great deal of time, commitment and enthusiasm. It can be a thankless task at times. But it can also be a most rewarding experience.



Councillor Sharon Ellis,
City of Whitehorse (2003–)

and Mayors. The State government may run workshops and seminars to accompany legislative change or the introduction of a new program, which can also be useful.

All these things take time and effort of course, but what should the priorities be in the first few days? This kit is filled with good advice from experienced Councillors.

Practice the ‘tricks of the trade’

It’s such a big learning curve, but then again, there are lots of opportunities to learn.

There are many ‘tricks of the trade’. While the specifics will be different for each community

and each Council, one way to find out about them quickly is to ask someone you can trust, such as another Councillor or an ex-Councillor. This will bring you up to speed quickly and will help you as you embark upon your journey as a Councillor.

Here’s how one Councillor summed up the tricks of her trade:

Some Practical Tips

- Take all the Councillors you haven’t met out for a coffee, one at a time, and get to know how they think, their style of communicating, their issues. Keep the communication lines open by starting on the right note.
- An absolute essential is a separate phone line at home with an answering machine. Constituents will ring you at all sorts of crazy hours. Ring them back a.s.a.p. Most constituents rarely ring their Councillor, so prompt attention to their concerns is important. As a rule keep phone calls to a maximum of 15 minutes, as most issues should be able to be communicated within this time.
- Set up an office space at a location most suitable for you. It could be at Council or at home! Get a filing cabinet and organise your information well. Do not hesitate to obtain a Council provided fax machine, business cards with photo, and computer (not all Councils are fully online for Councillors yet but if yours is, make sure you learn how to use this marvellous tool. An opportunity not to be missed!)
- Decide to drink much less wine at Council dinners and functions. More than a glass and your mind loses its edge. This lessens your chances of regretting something said or done. All Councillors gain weight during their first term. Be aware!
- You are now a public figure in your local community. Like it or not the old track-suit bottoms worn to the local shops do not cut the right image.
- Be scrupulously honest in expense claims.
- Always be civil and polite. Never put another Councillor down no matter how tempting. Sound off frustration privately. This gains respect.
- Build relationships with fellow Councillors, CEO, executive officers.
- Be a team player. Others will respect you for it.
- Remember why you became a Councillor and hold onto your ideals.
- Learn the meeting procedures. Put in the time, effort, and take any opportunity to learn how to make use of these to your advantage. It’s at Council

meetings where your decisions and views count the most.

- Do the homework to be decisive. One needs to be informed and to know the law.
- Work with the media. If you have been contacted for comment, you may need time to get more information or consider the request. If so, end the call politely. Think. Ring back even if it’s in 5 minutes. Give considered answers and comments always.
- Always wear your name tag whenever you are being a Councillor. People who ought to know who you are will never be embarrassed and neither will you, as you will be recognised.



Martina Hayes, Councillor, City of Boroondara (1999–2002)



You will also need your “tools of trade”

As well as learning some of the tricks or skills described on the previous page, you will need some “tools of trade”. Are any of the following provided by your Council? If not, make some enquiries about how they could be:

- access to Council vehicles, a car allowance or petrol reimbursement
- professional development, conference allowances, travel allowances
- mobile phone, home phone, internet access
- carers allowance
- computers or fax machines, electronic diaries
- support for communication with your community.

The MAV and the VLGA both have recommendations about provision of “tools of trade”, and the VLGA has a specific *Tools of Trade Project*. Councillors should not be asked to underwrite the financial costs of being an elected Councillor. (*What Price Democracy?*, 2005, VLGA). Contact both the MAV and the VLGA to find out more.

Get organised

You'll need to be super organised – here's some tips for ensuring you're on track.

- Make up a 'to do' list at the beginning of each week and review it as you go, ticking things off as you do them.
- Keep an appointments diary – it might be a good idea to write things down in pencil, so you can easily and neatly change things as your plans change.
- Keep a notebook where you write down notes of all the meetings you go to – with a date at the top of each page and a new page for each meeting – you will then have a record of the tasks that are to be done and who has said they'd do these tasks.
- Organise a filing system – keep individual files for each issue you're involved in and keep copies of letters, notes, telephone discussions and notices in the file according to date order.
- Keep a record (in your files) of any written contact you have with a constituent. If there's a complaint don't put the file away till you've dealt with it and keep details on what you've done, keeping the constituent informed about what you've done for them.
- Remember that keeping a record of your finances is also very important – including a car logbook and all other car expenses – these may be able to be claimed as a tax deduction.
- If your Council provides Councillors with electronic diaries, these can be an effective organising tool – learn how to use them and make good use of them.

Keeping track of it all

I write it all down – at least then I know who said what to who and what I agreed to do.

You'll be meeting lots of people and attending many meetings and at times it may be difficult to even remember where you were last week, let alone where you need to be tomorrow.

With all these meetings you'll be attending and all the information you'll be storing away for future use – a filing system will come in very handy.

Here's some tricks from one Councillor on how she keeps organised and on track.

Time management and keeping it together

One of the main challenges for new Councillors is striking a balance between 24-hour a day availability to your constituents and being totally unapproachable. There is a happy medium and you need to find it early in the job.

Good time management means pacing yourself and monitoring your workload to avoid overwhelming your energy levels. Consider dropping some prior community commitments you may have, to free up Council work time.

Being prepared for meetings is crucial, so allocate time to read and thoroughly understand raised issues. This may require getting together with other Councillors to request staff to present reports and complex information in an easily digestible way.

PRACTICAL TIPS

- Make hard-copy folders correspond to electronic folders, with the same titles and similar contents, for example governance and procedure documents, Council plans and annual reports. File

hard-copy agendas and minutes in chronological order, and regularly save electronic versions to re-writable CDs to free up computer memory.

- Download your brain wherever possible. Write lists and put everything in your diary. Don't use scraps of paper. An A4, day-to-a-page diary is invaluable for recording 'things to do' and appointment details. Make sure your diary can accommodate business cards, calendar, calculator, notebook and a map of your municipality.
- Carry a folder of strictly current items – invitations that need replies (always reply, even if you can't attend), letters that need action, emerging issues for Council's attention.
- When taking meeting notes, create an 'actions' column. It will make meetings less overwhelming and save you trying to recall details.
- Check your email daily. Delete obsolete emails, saving all useful email addresses.
- To avoid being overwhelmed by documents, allocate a

regular weekly time for filing.

- Establish a comprehensive contacts folder, including community groups, Council staff, authorities (state and federal government representatives, water authorities, health services).
- Help constituents with information but encourage them to find out themselves in the future, by showing them how to negotiate the information maze. This can build positive self-sufficiency in your community.
- And most important of all, set aside times when you are not available, for example meals times and your children's special sporting events.



Councillor Lysette Ashford, Pyrenees Shire (2001-)



Former Councillor Johanna Van Klaveren advises as follows:

It's important to be organised

I kept a portable filing system of four document wallets of different colours in my bag at all times, holding the most important documents and information. The categories for these wallets were:

- Invites — contains invitations and committee agendas
- Planning — contains information on strategic & statutory planning
- Constituents — resident and community group information
- Council — other important information such as newsletter drafts, grant information, personal notes on goals & priorities, thoughts on certain issues, communication with the governance administrator and Chief Executive Officer.

Also, I always carried a notebook with detachable sheets.



Johanna van Klaveren, Councillor, City of Kingston (2000–2003)

But don't be afraid to jump in at the deep end

I felt I was jumping in at the deep end. I was hesitant about what I was bringing from the perspective of having been home for 13 years. In hindsight that has probably been my greatest advantage.

It's all about letting go and not being afraid to jump in at the deep end. Everyone brings different skills and experiences to becoming an effective local government Councillor. Everyone also has

different expectations and views about what they need to know before they begin. Here's how one former Councillor looked back with hindsight about what she really needed to know.

What I really needed to know when I was first elected

COUNCILLOR INTRODUCTIONS

Getting to know those who have also been elected — their names, background, vision, experience, areas of interest etc. The weekend planning session we held early in our term worked well. It enabled us to spend time together and set a plan for the coming year. As Councillors spend years "together" a sound beginning with an informal getting to know you session is well worth the effort.

OFFICER INFORMATION Contact numbers, mobile phone number, email addresses, fax numbers. All are most important to an incoming Councillor. The success of your role depends on being able to make direct contact within the Executive team to action your requests. Therefore names, titles and contact details are a priority. The structure of the Executive and responsibilities of the Officers should also be provided to the Councillors from day one.

PLANNING ISSUES An extensive briefing in lay terms is most beneficial. A briefing on planning issues already before Council at the time of the election is of the

highest importance. Not only does a new Councillor have to catch up...they must be prepared to vote in the decision making process they have inherited.

MEETING PROCEDURES/LOCAL LAW This information is fundamental and should be provided to every Councillor. If a Councillor is not familiar with meeting procedure it can inhibit the effectiveness of debate and result in a lost opportunity on the floor of the Chamber. Role play in this area is most beneficial and refreshes the minds of even the most experienced Councillor.



Kaele Way, JP, National President Australian Local Government Women's Association Inc (2004–)

3 The nuts and bolts of it all

It all seems a bit confusing at first but ... there are people to help you.

There are some things that you will definitely need to know and be familiar with. These are the practical areas of a Council's operation, the 'nuts and bolts' that a newly elected Councillor will need to feel comfortable with if she is going to participate fully in the processes and decisions.

The first of these is meetings, including how to prepare for them and how to make sure you get the issues you want on to the agenda.

Meetings, meetings, meetings!

As a Councillor you'll be going to lots of meetings. These are important and you will need to be an active and assertive participant if you are going to contribute to decisions and outcomes, which ensure you can successfully deliver on your commitments to your community.

Some meetings will follow formal meeting procedures. Make sure you get training and support if you are not familiar with aspects such as moving motions, points of order and so on.

Good meetings are those that:

- **have a purpose — you should know why you're at the meeting and what you hope to get out of it**
- **are well attended by the people who need to be there, because they are held with plenty of notice and are held at times that suit all those who need to be there**
- **start and finish on time**
- **have written agendas, distributed before the meeting**
- **document their decisions and responsibility for action so that people know what they are expected to do**
- **are chaired politely, authoritatively and impartially and in accordance with an established set of procedures**
- **encourage genuine discussion and polite exchange of views and sharing of experiences**
- **do not include raised voices or in-jokes**
- **enable everyone to participate equally.**

Preparation for meetings

Council meetings are one of the most important parts of the Council operations as the decisions made by Councillors at formal Council meetings provide the direction and authority for the ongoing operation of the Council. Council meetings are governed by a Meeting Procedure Local Law. Find out what this is as soon as you are elected (or even before!)

It's important to be well informed and preparation for meetings is essential for you to be part of the decision and to join in the debate.

Prior to a meeting you should:

- read the agenda and all accompanying papers carefully. You might like to set aside a specific time before each meeting to read the agenda.
- allow time before the meeting to follow up any queries you might have
- contact the CEO or relevant Council staff to ask for background or further information on agenda items
- visit any sites which are subject to development applications
- sound out community opinion on issues to be discussed at the meeting.



Council meeting procedures

Some introductory training on meeting procedures is really useful, as you must be aware of the rules on motions and debates. Unless you do, you will get in and you will lose motions, even when you have support behind you.

Remember to be yourself and you'll be doing really well

The meetings you'll be attending will include formal Council meetings or Council committee meetings established by the Council.

Committee meetings may have formal delegated status – meaning the committee can make decisions for the Council or they may be advisory committees that provide recommendations to the Council.

The procedures for both Council and committee meetings and the establishment of such committees are governed by a Local Law. It is critical that all Councillors have a good working knowledge of the Council Meeting Procedure Local Law.

However, don't be too daunted! Ultimately it is the Council that decides:

- what kind of Local Law it will have to govern meetings; and
- what committees it will establish.

While all *Meeting Procedure Local Laws* model "formal meeting" practice it is up to you and your fellow Councillors to decide what goes in the Local Law.

You will receive a formal notification of all Council meetings. Notification should include the date, times, location,

and business of the meeting. The Local Law will govern the amount of notice you receive of each meeting.

The Council meeting agenda will include clear information in support of any proposed recommendation as well as a clear recommendations.

Most Councils will provide Councillors with an informal opportunity to discuss any issues with the Chief Executive Officer or relevant officers prior to the Council meeting.

If a Councillor disagrees with the recommended resolution in the Council agenda, it is necessary to follow the procedure set out in the Meeting Procedure Local Law for presenting an amended or alternative recommendation. This may have to be achieved by proposing a formal notice of motion.

If you have not received or had the opportunity to discuss any information or proposed recommendations contained in the Council agenda prior to the meeting, make sure you follow this up with the Chief Executive Officer. It is usually the CEO's job to put the Council agenda together.

If you have a chance, sit in on a couple of meetings, taking an agenda and the Meeting Procedure Local Law with you and you will soon follow proceedings.

The *Local Government Act* is a Councillor's bible. It sets out what is required for the governance of a municipal district and its people. It also establishes the authority and power of the Council. Ask your Council office or library for a copy of the Act.

And finally the most important things in any debate are to:

- participate
 - be issue centered
 - be well informed
 - be your self
- and you will be doing well.



Councillor Di Moore,
Shire of Yarra Ranges (1997–),
Mayor (2001)

There are strict requirements in relation to the procedures to be followed at Council and committee meetings. The *Local Government Act 1989* requires that each Council make local laws to govern the conduct of the Council at its formal Council and committee meetings (s.91). You should receive a copy of the Meeting Procedure Local Law for your Council.

If you have questions about these procedures, you could follow these up with an experienced Councillor or ex Councillor whom you trust and maybe trying a role play or two. You might also request the Chief Executive Officer to arrange some training for all Councillors on the content and operation of the Local Law.

Although Council meetings might seem often full of 'red tape' and formality, it is all easily understood if you take the time.

Working with the media

If you are keen to inform and involve the community in discussion of major issues facing Council and you're wanting to show to the widest possible audience that you are doing what you were voted in to do, then the local media will be a key resource.

Find out if there are any existing policies on Councillor relationships or communications with the media.

Local Government — a journalist's view

My own lessons in local government took years to learn, but chief among them was that the relationship between the media and local government is not as adversaries but partners. The keys to productive relationships between local government and the media today are – education, communication and understanding.

When journalists understand some of the social, political and economic evolution of local government, when they understand how communities work and the role of their own paper in their community, they begin to be better judges of what is really news and to write more informed reports.

When local Councils understand the role of the local paper, the social, political and economic history of local media and the importance of deadlines and access to informed sources, they begin to get better reports written about them. In short, both the reporters and the Councils begin to understand that this is a partnership not a re-enactment of the Cold War.

Understanding each other's roles and needs does not mean that, from then on every report is positive. Councils must understand that just as the Council is there to act on behalf of residents and ratepayers, the reporter is there to act on behalf of the reader.

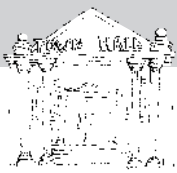
Communication between journalists and Councillors is made especially difficult by the fact that all Councillors, and Council officers in particular,

seem to speak another language. Let me illustrate this by referring to the 'Jargon Immunisation Program', where journalists learn that "a series of information sessions" are actually meetings, and that "the initial preferred location" means the previous site.

So what can you do to help your cause? A few words of advice:

- Learn and respect deadlines
- Understand that restricting information arouses suspicion. It is better to work with the journalist to inform him or her as fully as possible.
- Journalists would much rather speak to experts in their fields than PR people who cannot answer the questions that arise from their processed statements. Not allowing Councillors or officers to speak arouses suspicion and makes us think you don't trust your own staff and elected representatives.
- Don't tell us what's news — or worse still decide that our request is not really an important story and ignore it. Don't make us justify our requests.
- Don't let your egos or the need for political survival dictate how you respond to our requests.
- Don't issue statements instead of giving interviews.
- Write and talk in plain English.

Jane Cafarella has almost 30 years experience as a journalist/cartoonist. She conducts a consultancy in training programs for journalists and does freelance writing and drawing.



Here are some rules to remember when working with the media:

- Stay on top of the local news — what are the issues? listen, watch and learn
- Focus on the local news outlets — the local newspaper, radio and TV (in regional areas)
- Determine what medium is most influential — what is your local newspaper — direct most of your energy to that publication or media outlet
- Always return phone calls promptly
- Have a clear purpose for talking to a journalist. Prepare this before the meeting
- Try to anticipate the ‘angles’ the journalist may take
- Know what the newspaper’s deadlines are
- Be wary of making ‘not for publication’ and ‘off the record’ comments. Some advise that nothing is ever “off the record”.
- Be careful of joking with the journalist — a joke in print is not always as funny as it seemed when you said it
- Do not pass on rumours about your opponent or anyone else to journalists
- Be clear about the major points you wish to make — stick to these and do not get distracted
- Be concise and to the point
- Do not lie or bend the truth
- Do not make factual errors
- Do not be ashamed to say ‘I don’t know’
- Do not promise what you cannot deliver
- Do not assume the journalist is your best friend
- Do not be afraid to disagree with a journalist, explain why you do not agree
- Do not feel obliged to fill silences in a conversation with a journalist.

There is a section on media do’s, don’ts and hows in *A Gender Agenda* (2005). While you now have a different role and therefore a different relationship with the media, compared to when you were a candidate, the section in *A Gender Agenda* about working with the media is still applicable. Training in working with the media may be available through the MAV or VLGA.

Governing legislation

The role and functions of local governments are defined by the *Victorian Local Government Act 1989*. In addition to this, there are over 220 pieces of legislation and regulations which govern, provide guidance or impact on local government operations.

Acts of Parliament cover a range of Council roles and activities, including health and food, environmental planning, building, prostitution, public records, privacy, occupational health and safety, aboriginal lands, heritage, water catchment and protection – just to name a few! Make sure you get a briefing from the CEO about relevant legislation.

Council planning – an overview

I spoke out at the first planning meeting. It is important not to be afraid to ask questions and not to be afraid to look stupid.

Council Plans are mandated by the State and are for the life of the Council. Each newly elected Council has to the end of June (seven months after the election) to adopt a Council Plan. The plan exists for the life of the Council. Council Budgets over each successive year need to reflect the plan.

A Council normally plans in several major areas:

- a long term integrated whole municipality strategy known as a **Council Plan**
- an expression of community needs, aspirations and wants translated into a strategy, a **Community Plan**
- a framework for Council to consider land use and building development applications in the context of State government policy, a **land use plan**, known as a Municipal Strategic Statement (MSS)
- other major service areas in which Council plans may be created include public health and early childhood.

Under these broad headings, there are a number of elements. A **Council Plan** is a long term strategic plan which involves making decisions about long term community directions. It is a “whole municipality” plan taking into account present and future

social, economic, environmental factors and perhaps other aspects of community life such as cultural life. These decisions about future direction should then be reflected in long term budget decisions and be consistent with the other planning frameworks.

A **Community Plan** (sometimes reflected as a number of smaller local community plans) is an emerging response by Councils to the needs and aspirations of communities for having a greater say about their future. Community planning is usually characterised by a variety of community consultation and engagement processes. The needs, interests and aspirations expressed in the Community Plan can then be reflected in local decisions and service provision, and in how Council advocates on behalf of its community to other spheres of government. A crucial element is that Council undertakes authentic, ongoing conversations with its community to ensure citizens are actively engaged.

Ideally, **land use planning** is integrated with these other two planning spheres, in the context of State legislation. A Council develops a local land use planning policy framework which consists of a Municipal Strategic Statement (MSS) and Local Planning Policies (LPP).

Municipal Public Health Plans and **Municipal Early Years Plans** are other planning and consultation exercises undertaken by Councils. Every kind of local government planning opens up a fascinating and complex world — the following section is an introduction to land use planning only. Whatever kind of planning

What about land use planning?

The *Victorian Planning and Environment Act 1987* provides the fundamentals for land use planning. Councillors and planners need to consider what these objectives mean in the context of their local Council and Community Plans:

- to provide for the fair, orderly, economic and sustainable use of development of land
- to provide for the protection of natural and man-made resources and the maintenance of ecological processes and genetic diversity
- to secure a pleasant, efficient and safe working, living and recreational environment for Victorians and visitors to Victoria
- to conserve and enhance those buildings, areas or other places which are of scientific, aesthetic, architectural or historical interest, or otherwise of special cultural value
- to protect public utilities and other assets and enable the orderly provision and co-ordination of public utilities and other facilities for the benefit of the community
- to balance the present and future interests of Victorians.

you are engaged in, consultation and engagement with your local community is a key foundation for success. The Consultation and Engagement website is a useful resource: www.vlgaconsultation.org.au.

Both the MAV and the VLGA have excellent resources about consultation.

Land use planning can make a real difference to local communities and generate much passion because it enables communities to develop land and manage their environment. Citizen involvement in land use planning can exemplify grass roots democracy and motivate people to become Councillors.

Members of the Womens Planning Network (WPN) have prepared the following information for you (pages 19–21).

Understanding land use planning

The State Planning (land use) Policy Framework has the goal of fostering the above objectives, and the integration of environmental, social, and economic benefits, in the interests of net community benefit and sustainable development.

Women have historically been very important in raising social and environmental issues and seeing issues strategically and from valuable new perspectives. As a new Councillor you can be a key player in encouraging planning decisions to look at new issues within a broader holistic context, rather than from a short term economic or political “survival” perspective.



Some tips

1. Read all your local planning policy frameworks, including Council Plan, Community Plan and Land Use Plan. This will include the Municipal Strategic Statement (MSS) and Local Planning Policies (LPP). These documents articulate Council and community visions for future development.
2. Ask questions and involve different sectors of your community in all planning decisions to clarify issues, generate new opportunities and seek a diversity of views using different consultation methods. It doesn't matter that concerns are not put in 'proper planning language' so long as the issues are raised. It is healthy that planners and developers justify how projects and planning strategies will maximise benefits to diverse local communities.
3. Don't let urgency and conflict in current Planning Applications for small proposals overwhelm Council's more important role in long-term strategic planning.

Councillors can make a more lasting contribution to their communities by fostering planning strategies to guide future development on a wider scale. Planning can be most effective where Councils have a visionary, clear and positive MSS supported by credible local policies which can then guide development.

Numerous and high profile objectors and community groups may not represent the whole community. Projects with even many local objectors may still be worthwhile for the wider community. Conversely, projects with no objectors may have little merit. Not all citizens can readily express their concerns, and may be deterred from making submissions.

Think long term and big picture.

Jan Salmon and Catherine McNaughton, Urban Planners, Women's Planning Network (2005)

Managing complexity and conflict

Planning, especially land use planning, is complex and often generates conflict because:

- it is about managing change in land-use and development, looking ahead and making choices, but change can be threatening
- many people with different and sometimes opposing interests are involved — developers, land owners, consultants, neighbours, local and wider communities, community groups, visitors, competing businesses, State Government, Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT). It is important the decisions consider the interests of future generations.
- it mixes law and politics
- planning intervenes in the development market, seeking a better outcome for communities and more orderly development for developers and landowners. Planning involves decisions, not automatic approvals, because some proposals as originally designed would contribute little to the community.
- lobby groups can escalate seemingly small local issues, which can stall the planning process at considerable expense to developers.

People have a lot at stake in planning decisions because of lifestyle, investment, job opportunities and community culture as expressed through land and structures.

Councillors and planners roles — land use

As a new Councillor you may find these planning provisions and development plans complex and unfamiliar. However, Councillors do not need to become experts. Councils' planners and consultants can give you advice, which you should consider but are not limited to.

Councillors' main roles are to decide on and ensure planning decisions are democratic and benefit local communities. Thinking strategically is the essential skill for Councillors. Land use planners have a professional role in advising Councillors on impacts, benefits and alternatives and compliance with planning law; informing the public and managing the long term strategic directions of development.

It helps to understand these concerns, but Councillors need to balance these different views in favour of net community benefits and sustainable development. These decisions need to be guided by local land use planning policies and provisions which set out the long term strategic directions for the municipality. These directions are set through the overall Council Plan and the Community Plan, if your municipality has one. Land use plans also need to be guided by the professional advice of Council drainage and traffic engineers and town planners.

The Victorian land use planning system provides ways of managing these conflicts, including:

- public notification to inform the community members and stakeholders about proposed development or changes to planning schemes.
- the opportunity for community members and stakeholders to make submissions about development and changes to planning schemes.
- many Councils host mediation sessions, seeking to clarify issues and reach compromises through design modifications.
- stakeholders can appeal to VCAT to arbitrate on an application.
- Council's community working group participation on strategies and development proposals.

Here's a story from someone as she learned the ropes in her new role as Councillor:

Planning in action — lessons I have learnt

Soon after I was first elected, I received an invitation to attend the opening of a large new children's playground constructed at a new subdivision in Sunbury. As well as receiving the invitation I also got a call from the Sales Manager of the property developer inviting me to come up and see the playground being constructed. As a mother of 2 kids this concept excited me, a massive playground that was suited to all ages being built in my area, so I took up all the invitations with vigour.

The opening day was a great success. A few days after the opening I received a memo from Council indicating that the appropriate permits for the construction of the playground had not been issued. It seemed to me to be minor at the time as it was a facility that was really needed in the area. However the residents that lived in close proximity, held different views and felt that the playground was spoiling their amenity. They had a lot more traffic than they had in the past, and hundreds of little kids having fun and making noise.

Well, after months of trying to negotiate with both the residents and the developer, we called in a professional mediator who worked wonders. The residents felt that their concerns were being taken seriously and the Applicant (developer) realised that they had a major problem on their hands.

The final outcome to all of this was that the developer decided that it was in their best interest to voluntarily downsize the playground and guarantee that they would reconstruct it on a site more appropriate taking into account that they would need to apply for another permit.

I have learned some important lessons.

- Before you commit yourself one way or the other, check with Council officers.
- Always have an open mind and accept that what may seem like a good idea to you may not be to others.
- In a majority of planning issues the law is not negotiable and emotion means nothing.
- Never commit yourself to supporting or not supporting an application until you have researched all of the facts.
- Listen to the people of the area; after all it is they who you are representing.
- And never, never attend an opening without finding out that they have the appropriate permits.



**Ann Potter, Councillor,
City of Hume (2000–2003),
Mayor (2002)**



Here's another story about land use planning:

Learning about land use planning...

My first impression was overwhelming. I recall the heavy folders of planning policies, Municipal Strategic Statement, zoning maps, codes and definitions... how would I ever get my mind around all this information, regulation and so on?

Then I realized that uncontested planning applications are issued "permits under delegation". Only applications that are opposed make their way to Council for a decision. The most controversial applications which have many, many submissions in opposition – say for Club X; a brothel; a multi-dwelling proposal; student accommodation; a motor cycle track – may be referred to a panel for consideration and direction.

Council is the Responsible Planning Authority and must make planning decisions on appropriate land use planning principles. It is difficult for some in the community to understand that moral objections to a brothel application, or "not in my backyard" reasons for refusing a permit to a multi-dwelling proposal, have no standing unless there are documented land use planning grounds to support their concerns. Finally, of course the unsuccessful party can

still appeal to Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT).

In my experience, the greatest reason for community dissatisfaction with their Councillors comes through planning decisions, even when the decision is validated at VCAT. Council may make a populist decision, even knowing that it will be knocked back by VCAT. But in the end the rights of the developer under State law may be re-instated by VCAT.

New Councillors are often elected on promises relating to planning decisions by previous Councils, and sometimes find themselves in a position where little or no change can be made. Best to find out before election time, but lessons in planning are not very appealing until they achieve relevance in the role of elected Councillor.



Mayor and Councillor Anne McCamish (right), City of Greater Shepparton (2000–)

Another aspect of land use planning you will learn about is building. The Victorian Building Commission has provided the following information.

Local governments' role in building

Local governments play a significant role in building control within the Victorian legislative framework governing the construction of buildings in Victoria.

The main objectives of the building control system in Victoria are:

- to establish, maintain and improve standards for the construction and maintenance of buildings
- to enhance the amenity of buildings and protect the safety and health of people who use buildings
- to facilitate and promote the cost-effective construction of buildings
- to provide an efficient and effective system for issuing building and occupancy permits
- to improve safety.

A Councillor's primary role in building services is a strategic one, as it is Council staff who will provide the services to the community. For more information please refer to *Building in Victoria – A Local Government Guide* or the Building Commission website: <www.buildingcommission.com.au>.

Finances and budgets

It's really important to get your head around the financial issues – management of multi-million budgets. Although I knew a lot about community services, I threw myself on the audit committee to grapple with different issues.

Understanding finances and budgets can seem difficult and rather daunting when you are first confronted with the list of figures and you realise your responsibilities, but it's all just a matter of taking things step by step and asking for help when required. And advice is at hand from Council officers or from experienced Councillor colleagues.

In providing useful advice on financing and budgeting, we thought who better to go to than experienced Councillors and a senior Council officer, all of whom have dealt with some major budgetary issues in their time.

First some practical hints from experienced Councillors:

Getting your head around the budget

Getting a handle on Council finances is not difficult. In essence they are the same as your household budget, just on a much larger scale.

Budgeting begins at planning phase, before you start thinking about dollars. Councillors and senior staff develop a vision with the community for the municipality to achieve the optimum level of affordable services, infrastructure maintenance and development, and community initiatives for the coming years. From this process comes the Council Plan, which goes alongside the other important plans which guide the budget priorities – community plans and land use plans. These plans are the basis for all of Council activities. The budget is then developed and, like all budgets, grand plans are limited to available income.

Management provides regular reports to Council, detailing how plan objectives are being met. The financial report is one of the most important reports you will receive; take time to understand it. If you need clarification, ask management for help.

Check that income is on target and understand fluctuations – Council income is not a regular monthly amount, grants come in at different times of the year and rates are collected at different times. Like income, expenditure also fluctuates due to major purchases or projects. If you have income-producing activities, check income against expenditure and the level to which Council subsidises or doesn't subsidise the activity. This knowledge is important for future planning and budgetary decisions.

Consider sitting in on Council Audit Committee meetings to help you understand the budgeting process better.



Councillor Fay Hull, Rural City of Ararat (2002–), Mayor (2003)



May Ward, Councillor, Rural City of Swan Hill (1997–2003) and Mayor (1999) advises new women Councillors that "If you're from a non-accounting background, finance and budgeting may seem daunting to you as a new Councillor, (but) you have probably already been budgeting a household, a business or a community club. While the numbers in the Council budget might be larger, the principles to a balanced budget are the same. Costs must not exceed income. Have confidence and trust your judgement."



And here's some more words of wisdom from an experienced senior Council officer:

How to understand Council finances and budget processes

Understanding the finances and budget processes of your Council can appear to be a daunting task even for experienced Councillors and senior Council Officers. Very few of us, after all, have formal accounting or financial management qualifications. But don't be daunted ... it is critical that Councillors seek advice from the CEO, the Director Corporate Services and Finance Manager, ask searching questions and require information which is in a format and language which is intelligible.

Beneath the stereotype of the local government "bean counter" resides a person who invariably aims to protect the financial interests of Council and residents/ratepayers. A worthy aim for any new Councillor is to strike up a deep and meaningful relationship with the Finance Manager.

It is critical that you understand how the Council budget is constructed, its timelines and processes; how you can have input into these processes and get your issue on the agenda; and how you can be confident that you can fulfil your duties as a Councillor in respect of the short and longer term financial health of the Council.

Here are a few practical suggestions from someone who has been involved in 15 years of budget processes (often described by Officers as "the Inquisition").

- Understand the broader context — is there a long term financial strategy and how does this strategy link with Council's over-riding strategic plans, capital expenditure program and annual budget process? Where have we come from and where are we heading?
- Ensure that the CEO clarifies for you your statutory responsibilities as defined within the Local Government Act 1989, particularly in relation to pecuniary interests; annual financial reporting and auditing requirements; preparation of the annual budget, revised budgets and public exhibition of these documents; corporate plan processes; and provisions regarding performance statements.
- Seek a copy of and become familiar with Council's Register of Delegations which details all powers and duties delegated to its Officers.
- Ask the Finance Manager to walk you through the budget in terms of both expenditure and income, highlighting major spending areas. Will projected rate increases match labour cost increases? What processes have been put in place for ongoing reporting to Council on financial performance against the adopted budget?
- Understand your Rates notice, the level of rates generated compared to other sources of income and the connection between property valuations and rate distribution. It is important that you are also familiar with your Council's overall rating strategy.
- What are the assumptions underlying Council's long term financial strategy, for example regarding Council's adopted Enterprise Agreement, the consumer price index, interest on rates, loan borrowings, investments, regional associations, and/or external contracts?
- What is Council's position regarding the balance between loans and repayment strategies versus the provision of new infrastructure such as roads and footpaths and community facilities?
- Understand Council's capital expenditure program. Have sufficient funds been included in Council's annual budget for recurrent maintenance of new assets?

... and please keep it in perspective — no matter how complex or confusing it may appear, we are just a phone call away.

Lydia Wilson, Chief Executive Officer, City of Yarra (2005)

And remember, just keep asking questions until you understand.

4 Power and politics

Learning the political aspects of the role is critical. It is important to claim the agenda and know what your own agenda is.

Whilst leadership is important, advocacy is also a very important role – it's vital to bring people along with you in making decisions.

Local government is political. It's seductive; it's like a drug...

Power "over" or power "to"?

Becoming a local Councillor is all about practising a particular kind of leadership in your community. It's about power and

it is through making effective use of this power that you will be able to make a difference.

To claim power and make it work properly, you will need the right tools and skills as well as being

clear about your values, intentions and achievable goals while in office.

Here is how two powerful women explain the rules about power:

Rules about power

Women-power is about finding balance. But the rules can be broken down into:

- Being centred. This is a shorthand way of saying that to be effective you have to be clear about what you want and why, who you are, and who you value. People respond to clarity and vision. This does not mean becoming egotistical or big headed. It is not tied to a particular job either.
- Self-confidence. This is an essential prerequisite. You have to believe that you can effect change, that you have the ability, the right to try, and the will. You must believe that you are worthy of power. Self-confidence is the key.
- Understanding the three levels of power. These are power over yourself (self-discipline, self-possession, steadiness under fire);

power to influence others (persuasion, example, encouragement); and power to communicate and act as part of a group (political power).

- Working your way up. Claiming your personal power is essential if you are to have any political power. Starting where you feel comfortable, you can actually make a difference. You can't become Prime Minister overnight. You shouldn't try to take your first political action at the top. Start at the level just about where you feel comfortable, and the likelihood that you'll feel effective after you've done it will be stronger.
- Not being afraid of power. Women need to be willing to claim political power – whether at work, in 'real politics', or in the community. Women should not be deterred by those who say that they are selfish or are asking for

special privileges. Nor should women be jealous or possessive about power. A lot of women say 'We don't want to be political.' But by that very argument they are being political. They're handing their small piece of power as a person, and a citizen, to someone else.

- Getting beyond wanting approval. By definition, 'nice' girls have only personal power. They depend on other people to do the things they want, to achieve their desires for them. But this is seldom effective. Powerful women make their own decisions; they have independent opinions and express them freely; and they act positively to get what they want for themselves and others.

Kirner, J & Rayner, M (1999), *The Women's Power Handbook*, Viking Penguin Books (p. 14)



Practising community leadership

Get in there and find your strength early. Don't be afraid to show leadership, don't waver from your values and set goals, and the community will get behind you.

Developing your leadership skills will be critical to your long term success and to ensuring that you achieve all you set out to do. As an elected Councillor you will definitely be seen as a leader in your community.

This may at first seem like a daunting challenge. However, it will be surprising how you can draw on your past experience as a community activist, a manager and/or running the family to build upon. One way to think about being a leader is to see yourself as practising leadership, as do other citizens in your community. The sphere in which you are doing leadership is special because you have been elected. However, the principle of making your practice of leadership and your use of power consistent with your values still holds.

Here's how one woman sees leadership skills:

Developing leadership skills

Leadership is hard to define, especially for women, in my opinion, because they never seem to go out with a definite idea of being a leader – they just really want to get things done.

My style of leadership is inclusive. I prefer to lead by example than lead from the top and I only ever expect someone to do something if I'm prepared to get in there and do it myself. I also believe it's really important to have staying power – people respect other people who are prepared to stay with something and see it through.

Other important factors in developing your own leadership style are listed below.

- Don't try to run the whole thing by yourself – make sure you involve others.
- Delegation is important – to be a good leader you have to bring people along with you. You'll burn out too quickly if you can't delegate.
- Have a belief in your own convictions – in local government you haven't got the luxury of sitting on the fence, although people may not agree with you, they will respect you if you stay with

your ideas and are willing to argue for them.

- Watch the people you admire and see what leadership style they have – you can learn a lot from watching others.
- A word about mentors – I've had several mentors in local government – both men and women. I'd advise to choose mentors carefully and develop trust before you open up to them and remember your mentors can teach you a lot about leadership too.
- And finally build on your own personal style and be true to yourself – people will see through you if you're not true to yourself.



Councillor Jenny Dale, Shire of Indigo (1997–). Jenny has been Mayor three times over.

Working in the male domain

The business of local government has traditionally been male dominated. With a number of the 79 local Councils

still having only one female representative, and many others having only two female representatives, many women still find themselves working in a minority environment. Being the only female Councillor on an

otherwise all male Council can be daunting. However as the following two case studies show, the experience can also be one of positive learning about power, how to get it, use it and keep it in a way consistent with your values.

Reflections on local government culture

I came to Council with an open mind. In fact, I'd have to admit that like many, I had no idea what it was about! Generally, all I knew was that Council charged rates, fixed roads and collected rubbish.

At the first training session I remember thinking 'So this is what it is all about. This is what is expected of me – WOW!' I remember being amazed at the range of programs and service offered.

At the first Council meetings I recall observing how other Councillors moved and spoke to motions, and got items on to the Agenda. I still learn much by observation but in the early days it was invaluable.

Asking questions is also invaluable, listening to the answers more so, but even more important are the questions others ask and their responses to the answers given. From this I learnt much about the values and motives of my fellow Councillors.

During my first term I was blessed with a Council which had real balance: environment alongside development, social equity alongside infrastructure, whole of Council alongside Ward needs and importantly, three elected women

and four elected men. This was a Council with Councillors who stood united as a Council but debated vigorously, who supported each other and respected diversity of opinion, a Council who understood and valued the role of Councillor and adhered to the principles of Council.

Since then I have had the experience of being the only female present. I have come to realise that the adage 'women think differently from men' has a wisdom I had formerly not perceived. This is not to say women are correct or better. It is the perspective women bring, the effect they have on the language and debate, the opportunity for community interaction, the co-operative spirit and the network approach. All are enhanced by the presence of women and preferably more than one! In my experience, women have tended to focus on a positive outcome for all and share the praise.

Despite the challenging times, I find that remembering the following keeps it in perspective.

- It is a Councillor's role to bring forward issues, to facilitate the community's interaction with the officers.

- You do not have to have all the answers; you do not need to be a brilliant orator.
- You do need to be open, honest and available for the community.
- Sometimes you may have to vote in a way you thought you never would. But there should never be a time where you compromise your own integrity.
- Stay grounded in your values. Honour yourself. This honours the commitment you have made to serve.

It is a step by step process learning what it means to be Councillor. Most importantly, enjoy! Congratulations and good luck.



Councillor Loretta Leslie,
Shire of Bass Coast (2000–)



As the only woman, the focus falls on you

As the only woman, you tend to stand out in a crowd — so often the focus falls on you.

I'm constantly asked what it's like to be the only woman — I think sometimes people want to hear that I'm not getting a fair deal — if this is true then they might be disappointed with my response.

I made a decision early not to sit on committees that were traditionally seen to be of interest to women. This decision was based on these services being similar to my paid employment and on me wanting to learn about things that presented new opportunities and challenges. However some people may have expected me to reflect my 'traditional role'.

Being the only woman I'm aware that some in the community see me as a role model for other women — this is useful in encouraging other women to stand for election or take a wider role in their community.

I'll be actively encouraging women to stand at the next election.

**Julie Hopkins, Councillor,
City of Moonee Valley
(2000–2003)**

These stories reflect not only individual style, but the organisational and political culture of Councils over time. In *Moving On* (2003), a research project about the reasons women Councillors decided not to contest the elections of March 2003, it is very clear that the leadership practices and behaviour of CEOs and Mayors have a major influence on Council culture.

If you are elected to a Council with a less than ideal political and organisational culture, keep your values and goals clear. Work early on developing strategies with a trusted network. Here's another story about a challenging situation and some successful strategies.

When people "cross the line"

During your time on Council, no matter how positive it all may be, you will from time to time come across some people who you and others will find difficult to deal with. How will you work with these people to achieve a positive outcome?

When talking about "crossing the line" we are talking about situations where bullying, harassment or other intimidatory behaviour is occurring to you or another person. Harassment and bullying is prohibited under the Federal Sex Discrimination Act 1984, the Disability Discrimination Act 1992, and other relevant Victorian legislation.

How to get back on the

What if you are locked out, left out of the loop, not staying behind drinking red wine or beer, what if you cannot be heard, what if the things that you were elected on never get a run? What if you promised the safe school crossings, and the parking at the library, and the increased child care, and a lick of paint for the scout hall, and more hours for the maternal and child health service, and easier access for older people to the library? What if all those reasonable and honourable issues never make it on to the agenda? What are you going to do?

Too often the game is played like keepings off in the playground, a wink, a nod, a derisory laugh, a humiliation for its own sake. What if they laugh at you, what if they take your pet program and slash it to bits, or slice it a bit in the budget for no good reason other than you are not one of them. What if you don't know what to do next?

Two things stand like stone for me. Number one – DO THE HOMEWORK. This means reading, and learning. Many Councillors don't know the rules which govern us, the *Local*

These behaviours are unlawful, but require some wise approaches if they are to be tackled in a constructive way. In both *Moving On* (2003), research about women and retirement from local

agenda if you have been locked out

Government Act, the Local Law governing meeting procedures, the community plan, the waste strategy, the role of an audit committee. Understand the roles and means of good governance, and seek and seek and seek to hold your fellow Councillors accountable to these rules. Number two – IT IS A NUMBERS GAME, and if you can't get the numbers at the table, you can get the numbers if you play the game openly in the community.

I got to the stage where I didn't lose often, because I have another couple of rules for myself. Some people cannot tolerate women in any threatening position, (or what they perceive to be threatening) and with no rhyme or reason, can make life hard. This is a fact of life. For me laughter is the way out, get everyone laughing. Get them to make jokes, and a couple of good ones have been made at my expense, which is good. Once we had two men shouting at and over each other in our Chamber, "Boys, Boys," I said, "didn't your mother teach you to be good when you are out?"

Laughter – for me the best and easiest strategy – do it as if you were in the playground some people are still in. A couple of little other hints — don't pick a fight you can't win! (but defining the win is important, wins can be incremental). Don't get too comfortable with the numbers at the table, if it is a comfy 5/2 or 6/3 every time, you are making two or three enemies, and the real numbers are in the community.

Remember that everything is political, and understanding the politics of gender is as much a part of achieving your goals as any other consideration, and we shouldn't shy away from this.



Marg Card, Councillor, Moorabool Shire (1997–2003), Mayor (2001)

government, and in anecdotes told to us by women Councillors, we know that these behaviours sometimes occur in Councils as well as in the community.

Unfortunately, women are more often on the receiving end and, depending on their previous experience, may be less likely to have the immediate skill base to deal with these very difficult situations.

Below are some general principles about working with people, especially if you are in a minority position.

- Make it very clear at the outset that you expect to be treated on your merits.
- Treat everyone else on their merits.
- Make sure you are competent at your tasks and document your successes to others.
- Find a mentor who will provide you with advice and support.
- Create and use your own networks to bounce ideas off, provide you with support and alternative strategies.
- Behave professionally at all times.

If the worst case does happen, ideally your Council will have formal complaint resolution procedures in place. Follow these procedures and report the incident through the agreed complaint resolution process. If there is no process and you feel that you are being intimidated or harassed by a colleague the following steps you may consider the following pointers.

- Become familiar with the *Good Governance Guide* (2004) to help you establish some principles of operating for the organisation and its members.
- Do not assume that ignoring the person will stop their behaviour.
- Try to talk it through with the individual(s) concerned, explain how you perceive their actions and ask them to stop.



- If the incident continues, make sure you record details, including the dates, times, witnesses (if any), what happened and what was said.
- Discuss your complaints with a Senior Council Officer (for example Director of Governance, if one exists) or the CEO.
- Depending on the nature of the complaint, resolution could be sought internally with a mediation meeting facilitated by the Senior Officer/CEO or an independent person involving both/all parties to discuss the complaint and seek a guarantee that the inappropriate behaviour will cease.
- If some form of agreement is not reached or the complaint is considered to be too serious for mediation, a formal complaint process is lodged with the CEO who will advise on the most appropriate next steps.
- The VLGA or MAV could be approached for further advice, for example if the CEO is involved in the complaint.
- If you are dissatisfied with the way in which your complaint has been dealt with, you may consider lodging a formal complaint with the Victorian Equal Opportunity Commission.

The *Good Governance Guide* (2004) recommends a dispute resolution process within local governments or amongst two or more local governments. In dealing with dispute resolution the emphasis is on conciliation and mediation and a commitment by parties to achieving good outcomes. If agreement is not reached through conciliation or mediation a local government may request the establishment of a Good Governance Panel to consider a matter of dispute.

It is the experience of the editor (3rd edition) that formal complaints should be a last resort. In the end, for you to remain an effective Councillor for your community, you must have enough ongoing workable relationships with Councillor and Officer colleagues to allow you to achieve your goals.

5 Working with your team

The Council officers are there to support you – it's really important to be clear on this.

The team you build around you will be very important over the long run. They will help you clarify and achieve what you want to do, provide resources and celebrate your milestones and they will include the other Councillors, the Council staff and your constituents.

Working with the Council team

Your relationship with fellow Councillors and Council Officers is really important – you need to understand them and they need to understand you.

The Council team includes your Councillor colleagues, the chief executive officer and Council officers. As you will be with them for much of the time you will want your experience to be a positive one. You have much to learn from them and they will also be learning from you, so developing a positive relationship right from the start will be important.

Working with your team

As a newly elected Councillor your first step should be to identify the sources of support your new team can offer.

COUNCILLORS: Get to know them, understand where they're coming from and work with them. Establish who will support you on various issues. While you may not agree with colleagues on some issues, you will need their support in the future, so don't bear grudges if you lose some debates. Eventually you will have some wins.

STAFF: Study Council policy to establish which member of staff to approach on issues. Council staff can be your best information asset; they know Council policy and will share information with you. There are always two sides to an issue;

aggrieved ratepayers will be quick to tell you their side of a story, ask staff about the facts and make your decision based on being fully informed.

MENTORS: Whether a colleague or a former Councillor, a mentor can help you learn the ropes and help you debrief.



Councillor Ruth McDonald, Baw Baw Shire (2000–), Mayor (2004, 2005)

Value staff and treat them well: they are your team.

There are many useful words of wisdom about working with your team throughout this Kit — check the Councillor stories.

For further information about working with the Council Team see our companion volume *A Gender Agenda* (3rd edition).



Representing your community

Many constituents want someone they can talk to one on one – they don't want a businessman in a corporate suit.

Sometimes I have 40-50 telephone calls or emails a week and I always manage to get back to people – it's an absolute must for me – sometimes the calls are nothing to do with local government but I try to help. They say to me 'I knew you'd know who to call'.

As a newly elected Councillor you will quickly discover the possibility of an ongoing tension between your broad governance role of setting directions and developing policy, and the myriad of practical issues that your constituents want you to deal with on their behalf.

The range of responsibilities and issues you will be addressing will also mean that you will not have a lot of time to take up individual concerns. Your priority will be to ensure that these concerns are passed on to the relevant officers for report or action, or where the issue impacts on Council policy, to ensure that it is taken up for discussion by the appropriate committee.

Community Consultation

When consulting with your constituents on a particular issue it is important to remember a few basic principles. Further details about principles and strategies for consultation and engagement are available on the MAV and VLGA websites.

- Everyone should be clear on why consultation is being undertaken.
- All affected parties must be consulted. The process needs to be accessible for all those who should be involved and everyone must be given an equal opportunity to be included.
- Make sure all citizens involved understand the limits of the consultation exercise as well as the potential. Do not advertise a consultation when it is really an information session!
- All groups and individuals should be actively encouraged to participate and any barriers to participation should be tackled.
- Consultation should be on the basis of informed comment and input and this means that information must be made available, in an appropriate form, to those participating in the process.
- The consultation must be timed to ensure that the results of the consultation are able to influence the policy, planning and decision-making process.
- Where possible, participants should know at the start of a process how their input is to be used.
- Communicating the decision-making process, both at the beginning and end of the consultation may also help people feel that they were listened to, even if they disagree with the ultimate decision.
- Participants must receive feedback as to the ideas received and how they impacted on the final decision.
- Councillors should be genuinely open to input and be prepared to take on new ideas. Participants should be clear as to how their input is being treated and how it might impact on the final decision.

Principles taken from the *Best Value Victoria: Community Consultation Resource Guide* (2001), Victorian Local Governance Association and Local Government Division, Department of Infrastructure. Note that this guide is being updated (2005).

You were elected by your community to represent their interests and you will need to follow through their concerns.

It will be important to be accessible to your constituents, listen to their concerns and ensure that they are being addressed appropriately within the system.

Reporting back to constituents on outcomes is a most important undertaking and it is highly valued by the community.

Tips for effectively representing your community

Everyone has their own particular individual style and it is important that you 'own' and retain your own style. After all, that's a big reason why your community voted for you.

Women do bring specific perspectives to local government; however that does not mean that you should stick to traditional women's issues. It is essential that you become familiar with a range of areas that you may not have even given a moment's thought to before being elected. Being able to represent your constituents on the broad range of issues makes you a responsible Councillor.

If you have stood for Council on a single issue, be aware that the issue will only be a minor part of your activity on Council. So don't keep focusing on that single issue. If you do so, you will run the risk of alienating your new colleagues who may not share that passion.

It's really important to work within the legislative framework

— because that's the basis for all decisions — you can't make promises to individual constituents that fly in the face of the legislation — because you certainly won't be able to keep them.

Council officers are there to help you. Make sure you know them well. Understand their role and try to establish a sound professional relationship with them. They should provide expert advice, particularly on legislation when required which enables you to be better informed when working through community issues.

An 'inclusive' rather than an 'exclusive' style is what is needed in local government.

Spending time in your community is really important throughout your time on Council, and particularly so at the beginning of your time. Using your community as a sounding board is invaluable. You need to also take the opportunity to talk to those

constituents who don't have a passionate burning issue. These community members will give you honest and useful comments and feedback.

And finally if you're going to represent your community well, diversity is all important in local government — it's important to have a mix of women and men, but it's also important to have a balance of younger and older Councillors, as well as a representation from people from a range of diverse backgrounds.



Councillor Julie Eisenbise, City of Manningham (1997–), Mayor (2001)



6 Sustaining yourself over the long haul

It was really hard when I started – balancing it all, particularly my work and family and finding some private time while on Council, but I put in place some strategies and my friends and family helped, so I'm still here today.

Balancing it all

It's really important to manage your physical and mental "space" in order to stay sane and manage stress.

You won't be on Council for the rest of your life – but you will want to keep your friends, family and your support network for all time. You will probably want to maintain some activities, whether it be your job, caring role or time at home and you'll also want to maintain your emotional and physical well being.

Early morning and late night meetings, the ever-present mobile telephone and the need to keep up with Council and community issues can really sap your strength, energy and enthusiasm for the joys of representing your community.

So how can you maintain a life?

Here are one busy Councillor's tips for keeping it all together:

Waving not drowning

Life as a Councillor is like swimming in the surf – wave after wave after wave... You struggle to keep your head above water and every so often there's a calm patch, but then it's all on again, So why don't I just get out of the water? I'm not ready yet! There's too much to do for our future.

To stay in the surf and not drown, it helps to have a surfboard – my coping strategies to deal with stress and overwork:

- Learn to say no – if you find it hard to say no then get some help. Know your limits. My partner, kids and friends help keep me on track.
- Delegate – hand over a resident's concern as quickly as possible to a Council officer. Request an email report back on how things are resolved. Develop and keep good relationships with key officers; they will make your life easier.
- Turn off the phone at times during the day – I work for myself from home and by turning the phone off I can get some work done. It also helps to avoid confusing Council work and other paid work. You can always ring people back.
- Don't miss that yoga class – I go every Wednesday no matter how busy I am (well almost always!).
- Ride a bike – I ride to meetings, activities or events that are in reasonable bike-riding distance. It's a great

way to keep fit and sane at the same time.

- Get enough sleep – you can stay positive and cope with anything if you are bright and alert.
- Admit when things promised don't get done – apologise and make a new deadline. Stressing out won't achieve anything.
- Schedule weekly time off – Friday nights are sacrosanct as family time. I've also taken up playing the violin again and allocated time for lessons and practice.
- Debrief – talk to other Councillors you like and trust, or with other people who know about local government. Laugh about how ridiculous the job is at times.

Despite the stress, the joy of catching waves and surfing onto shore is worth all the effort – enough to put my hand up for another term anyway.



Councillor Janet Rice,
Maribyrnong Council
(2003–)

To carry out your role as a Councillor, the full support of your employer is very important. I'm trying to track the number of hours I do for Council, it's all over the place — it goes from 18 to 38 a week.

We know that although being a Councillor takes lots of time and energy, it is not a full-time paid position. What this means is that you will have substantial other responsibilities that you need to attend to – paid and unpaid work, families or all three.

Your work with the Council will be like a part time job, but a job that takes up a great deal of your time.

So how do you juggle your other responsibilities and your work as a Councillor? Here are some of the strategies one Councillor used.

Juggling Council and personal life

The most important message I could pass on to women who are new to local government is to master time management and maintain balance in your life. A diary is an essential tool to help keep this balance and have it with you at all times. Begin by recording all family milestones, birthdays, anniversaries and any other special times for you and your family. Select suitable times for holidays and short breaks. Once this is done, you are ready to enter your public commitments.

Invitations can sometimes be overwhelming, so devise a strategy for accepting them. If some events clash, seek advice from your Council colleagues. When recording an engagement in your diary, prepare yourself by including expected length of time required, precise location, what is expected of you – function launch, thanking someone, presentation, questions and answers. Find out if other dignitaries will be present that you should acknowledge. If there is a contact, have their mobile phone number recorded and always have a pen handy.

Take into account travelling time between engagements and include getting fuel, finding a car park or changing clothes. In rural shires the distance between appointments can be considerable, so allow for this.

Set aside part of the day to read emails and reports, and answer letters and phone calls. File information and reports systematically. Try to keep this time separate from family time.

Remember to retain your life and interests, and your sense of humour. Your family needs you more than the people who elected you to represent them. Missing your child's school concert will be remembered far longer than missing a civic function.

Enjoy your term as a Councillor, the friends you will make and the influence you will have, and respect Councillor colleagues, who are probably doing the best they can. It is a fabulous experience, so good luck.



Councillor Karen Douglas, Northern Grampians Shire (1997–), Mayor (2001–2005) Karen will retire from Council in November 2005.



And here's some hints from another experienced Councillor:

Keeping several balls in the air

Being a Councillor means constantly handling competing interests. It is important to realise that you may, at times, slip up. If this happens don't be too hard on yourself; learn from experience.

The following tips may help:

- Negotiate your responsibilities with your employer.
- Be up front and honest with your employer about how much time you may need to fulfil your Council duties.
- Let your employer know your time-management strategies to give them confidence that you will get the job done.
- Allocate blocks of time in the week especially for Council work.
- Inform Council of the time you have to respond to Council issues.
- Treat family meal time as a special occasion.
- Keep in touch with your family during the day by mobile phone.
- Be at home when you say you will, which is vital for building trust and creating certainty for family members.



Rae Perry, Councillor, City of Darebin (1998–2004), Mayor (2004), President, Australian Local Government Association (2004)

Maintaining and maximising your support base

Understand that you don't know, and cannot know, everything. You need networks for feedback and advice; networks that can communicate and act – schools, pensioners, teachers, political parties, conservationists and business people might all be part of your network. Work out who you can trust – who will advise and support you.

Here are some hints about maintaining your support base.

- Put together a monthly newsletter – save paper by using email for those who have access to it.
- Turn your campaign committee into a support network with regular meetings.
- Ensure you're out there meeting your community – shop locally, keep up your membership to community organisations and keep smiling and listening.
- Use the local media. Letters to the editor, regular interviews and contact with a trusted journalist will ensure that your community knows what you are doing and why you are doing it.

And above all make sure you attend every Council meeting, unless you have an official leave of absence.

Remember that having a wide network makes you a more effective Councillor.

Finding a mentor or having multiple mentors

My mentor is always able to help me find ways through conundrums and to gently point out my perceived failings as relayed to her by various people in the community. As such she is a very important antenna and lightning rod. I love her!!

A mentor is someone who agrees to share their knowledge and experience with you, so that you can achieve your goals, and then you too can become a mentor.

A mentor could be male or female, but a female mentor might have a more personal understanding of

the role of Councillor as it tends to impact on a female Councillor.

Many of the women we spoke with in putting this kit together talked about the importance of mentors in assisting them through their campaigns, in the initial weeks of their role as Councillors, as well as providing ongoing support and advice over the long haul.

The relationship you have with your mentor may be formal, with set meeting times, agreed short and long term goals and a set timeframe for the relationship. Or it might be just someone you occasionally ring or have coffee with when you have a question or feel you need support.

You may be lucky enough to participate in a formal mentoring program in which you are matched with a mentor and have training provided. Or you may be the one to identify a prospective mentor and initiate the relationship. There is information about finding your own mentors on the Women's Participation in Local Government Coalition webpage <www.vlga.org.au/issues/women_gov.html>. Joining Australian Local Government Women's Association will automatically introduce you to a number of potential mentors who are experienced women Councillors (see *Useful resources and contacts*). Yet another approach is to have a network of multiple mentors.

Some Councillors have used their Council's Councillor development budget allocation and their own funds to engage a professional executive coach who works with them to identify goals, learning needs and strategies for achieving goals.

Friends and mentors

Looking back to when I was elected to Council in March 2000, I can honestly say that I was "as green as grass". I had not taken part in any pre-election candidate workshops, nor had I considered that I might need a mentor, especially with local government experience. In both cases, I was not even aware that either of those resources were available to me.

The months ahead were to be the steepest learning curve of my life. Every day was different, the work dynamic and diverse. I never stopped asking questions and must have driven my colleagues mad at times. Whenever possible, I attended training workshops and soon found myself forming networks which were able to offer me the support I needed to become an effective Councillor.

I identified Councillors, both current and retired, whom I considered to be "role models" and made a point of speaking to them about various issues. They were always generous with their advice and indeed flattered that I should seek it. Advice I found, was also always readily at hand through our peak bodies, VLGA and MAV. Sometimes I found that it was not always advice that I needed, but rather someone to just listen.

As I now reach the end of my second term in Council and a second term as Mayor, I realise that whilst I have not had the benefit of a formal one-to-one mentor relationship, I have

received an enormous amount of support from a variety of different "mentors" to whom I will be forever grateful.

In particular, there is the ongoing support I receive from trusted friends who got behind my campaign in those early days. I emphasise the word "trusted", because like any strong and enduring relationship there must be trust and honesty on both sides. They believed in me then and six years later they are still there for me. I am also most fortunate to have a partner who has given me support and encouragement throughout my time on Council.

In conclusion, my advice to new Councillors coming to grips with all the challenges that local government presents on a daily basis, is to take advantage of the wealth of knowledge and experience that is available to you, either through a mentoring program or your own networks. I guarantee you will find you have many friends and colleagues who will be only too happy to ensure that you succeed.



Mayor and Councillor Topsy Petchey, City of Kingston (2000–)



Friends and mentors

Former Councillor Clem Gillings, Macedon Ranges Shire Council (2000–2004, (Mayor 2001) says “There is no doubt in my mind about the value of the mentoring role. I needed advice and support of many kinds – personal, local, political, technical, and strategic. From the outset, I sought this support from not one, but several individuals. I located people who were in the best position to provide me with what I needed. This was not difficult, as they were largely people who I was already close to, or at least familiar with, and who were very willing to lend support to my political aspirations. There was the friend with a belief in my abilities, the friend with a strategic turn of mind, the retiring Councillor with social justice principles and flair to burn, and the local party political identity...”

Being the Councillor you want to be

There are at least two different ways of thinking about your term of office. One involves seeing your term as a constant campaigning exercise. Another approach is to put aside the thought that you may want to be re-elected, and instead think of your term as what you have in your hand, nothing more. You may feel empowered by the thought that you are in constant

A short guide to finding mentors

Decide the sort of assistance you want from a mentor – talk to other women who have had a mentor and ask what their mentor told them or showed them that made a difference

Think laterally about the mentor – will your need for advice, assistance and connections be met best by a former Councillor, a current Councillor in another ward or someone who has worked in local government?

Ask around your networks, observe and talk with potential mentors – you’ll want a mentor you respect and feel comfortable talking with.

Approach your preferred mentor by phone or in person – you’ll be surprised when you take this step

– most people will be thrilled to be asked.

Decide how contact will be made – via phone, email, meeting for coffee, and how regularly contact will be made.

Discuss and reach agreement on the need for confidentiality of all discussions.

Decide how long the mentoring relationship will last – you might like to test the water for a short period and then review.

Some hints for making sure the mentoring works well are below.

- Make sure the mentor is enthusiastic about being approached and that they want to assist.

- Choose as your mentor someone with background knowledge about your community and its challenges.
- Establish rapport early in the relationship through a face to face meeting.
- Ensure that your chosen mentor is a good listener.
- Ensure that your mentor has local government experience and connections so that advice is constructive, as well as good networks, which they are happy for you to use if you need to.
- Make regular contact.
- Establish early and agreed ground rules, for example, that the relationship is open and honest and that confidentiality is kept.
- Explore the resources listed at the back of this kit.

campaigning mode, on the alert for potential support from voters. Alternatively you may find it more empowering to act as if you are definitely not standing again, so you can better use your term to achieve things which motivated you to stand for Council. You can

decide to make an active decision about standing again at a later stage of your term.

It's up to you how you decide to think about it. Whatever you decide, be the Councillor you want to be, not the one others want you to be.

This is an underlying theme in many of the stories in this kit – if you want to ponder this some more, check out the WPILGC webpage <www.vlga.org.au/issues/women_gov.html>. Click on resources for women Councillors.

Reality checks and chats in the playground

I had always been really active in my community before the election, my children had attended the local kindergarten and primary school, and I had run a small business in town, so I knew everyone. After the election though, with my youngest child beginning secondary school and the demands of life on Council, I found it quite difficult keeping up the same level of community contact I had prior to the election.

It was only when someone said to me 'We don't see you at the school any more, don't you come around any more now you're elected?' that I realised the importance of keeping up that contact. I was missing out on the familiar chats in the playground and the networking that had been a significant part of my life for more than twelve years. Contact that had come so easily now had to be worked on.

Here's how I kept up the contact.

- Listening is important — there's lots of opportunities for this when I'm out in the community — shopping, at the library or at

the tennis club, in addition to formal settings, it's amazing how much I learn in the supermarket queue, sometimes more than in formal consultations.

- I make a point of attending the special meetings and AGMs of the clubs and associations in my Riding.
- I actively use the telephone and internet to keep contact and have set up an active email list which works like a telephone tree to send and receive community information — or just to have a chat and seek support on specific issues, i.e. environmental issues, or child care etc. This is a two way stream of information in my community.
- Reality checks with close friends who are also active in the community, people who will be honest in their dealings with me and provide direction that is grounded has been vital.
- Establish good honest relationships with local journalists, they may not always print exactly what you want,

but this is an excellent way of communicating your issues. Do not be cross if the issues are not always presented the way you want them to be, realise that you will win some and lose some.

- And finally always be ethical and honest in your public decision-making, and communicate your reasons for voting in a particular way. This may not always be the easiest course of action, but ultimately good honest and ethical decision should be the best basis to be an effective Councillor and eventually to be re-elected.



Marie Gosnold, Councillor, Moorabool Shire (2000–)



And here's another story about keeping in touch with your community.

The importance of keeping in touch

Over the past few months you have gone through a raft of experiences and emotions: the deliberation and decision about your nomination; the anxiety and exhaustion of campaigning; the elation of being elected and now the apprehension, and no doubt enthusiasm, of the challenges that lie ahead.

To even consider putting up your hand for nomination is a big step. As an active member of the wider community you probably have been canvassed by a number of groups or individuals to take that step. Now that you have been elected as their representative on Council, it is important to keep in touch with your community and represent all interests in your ward fairly.

This can sometimes be a difficult task, with opposing groups lobbying for your support. Many groups are well organised and you may receive letters, phone calls and personal visits on controversial issues. In an issue that involves the wider community, you may have to actively seek alternative arguments. To gauge the opinions of the whole community, talk to individuals and local interest groups. Often, it is only the vocal minority that gets heard. The voters have put their faith in your judgement and your ability to consider both sides of the issue and make a rational decision on their behalf.

Getting out into your ward is important. I regularly attend the local Progress Association meetings, which keeps me in

touch with the business sector and equips me with accurate information on shire issues.

As a mum of two school-age children, I am involved in School Council and the Parents' Association. This gives me an insight into a broad spectrum of the community and, more importantly, makes me accessible to a range of people. Quite often I am asked Council questions at Monday school assembly by other parents or hear about youth related issues when working in the canteen.

After election you may feel overwhelmed by the workload and tempted to sever ties with organisations you were previously involved in. If you can, reduce your involvement but try to stay in touch – these groups will be valuable information gathering sources in the future. On the other hand, don't be tempted to rush out and join new groups, it's important to keep a balance and manage your valuable time.

My life has usually focused on children and the many committees and organisations that come with them, such as playgroups, pre-school and sports committees. I felt there was a need to establish links with the older members of the community. Every few months I go along to the senior citizens group and local Probus clubs. I sit in on their meetings, give them a run down on Council news then have a cuppa. Older people have a wealth of knowledge and life

experience and I value their input. A monthly 'Meals on Wheels' run also puts me in touch with older people who use many of Council's aged services, but who often don't get out of their homes or have the opportunity to participate in community debate.

Over the past three years, I have written a monthly column for the local newspaper. Although much of the content may have previously been reported via Council's media releases, I like to put the information into my own words, unedited by Council staff or the newspaper. I have received a lot of positive feedback from the community who appreciate the information minus the jargon.

Finally, it is important to be as accessible to your community as possible. Your trips to the supermarket or hardware store will now take twice as long! Be as open and honest as you can with people. After all, you are their voice on Council. But most importantly – enjoy the experiences of the next four years.



Councillor Ruth Gstrein,
Corangamite Shire Council,
(2002–)

And finally here are some summary hints on how to sustain yourself over the long haul – whether it be one term or more:

Tips for sustaining yourself over the long haul

- Understand that you don't know everything; you need networks for feedback and advice; networks that can communicate and act – schools, pensioners, teachers, political parties, conservationists should all be part of your network. Work out who you can trust – who will advise and support you.
- Build alliances inside and outside the Council. Remember that you can't effect change by yourself. Make sure agreements are open, not closed; not nod and wink deals. Alliances shift according to issues: you have to work on them continually.
- Don't make assumptions about people. Check them out and work issues through with them first.
- Beware the managerial approach. It can cut across the need to engage the community in decisions and meet community needs.
- When controversial issues have to be dealt with, explain them clearly to the community; include interested community leaders and groups in round-table discussions; make the decision-making process clear and accessible; make complex issues easier to understand by breaking them into manageable components; listen to and use the community grapevine to keep up with the latest information and spread it; be accountable for your decisions.
- Always follow up, making sure you do what you said you'd do.
- Admit mistakes and learn from them.
- Give yourself space to think. You don't have to own the silence and you don't have to wear the pressure. You don't have to decide straight away.
- Learn from others' experience. You are not on your own. Analyse problems and agree on how to move on and cope with criticism.
- Say thanks. People matter. It's nice to be important, but it's important to be nice. Remember the Christmas card, personal phone call and thank-you note.
- And finally, identify apprentices and mentors. You won't last forever. Get people lined up in advance to take over from you when you're ready to move on. Too many people stay too long. Plan to do a job one, two or three terms and then pass it on. Passing on knowledge does not mean losing your power. Sharing knowledge is for your own and everyone else's benefit. Finding apprentices means you can all exert more influence together.

Linelle Gibson was a Councillor with the City of Hobsons Bay (1997–2000) and her advice is still just as applicable today. (from Kirner, J & Rayner, M, 1999, *The Women's Power Handbook*, Viking Penguin Books)



7 And after life as a Councillor

It's all about getting results. I want to walk away and say I gave it one hundred percent.

Nothing is forever and regardless of how you feel,

how hard you have worked to get elected and how much you are enjoying your role as a Councillor,

there will come a time when you are ready to try something else.

Making sure there are more women to take up the challenge

In my early days on the first Surf Coast Shire Council I would often reflect on the ideal training ground of years as a local community activist, partner, mother of three young girls, and part-time paid employee. As a Councillor or private citizen I would encourage other capable women to become involved in shaping the future of their communities. At the time, there was little information on how to get elected, strategies to maintain work, family and Council balance or research on why there were so few female candidates. However, my involvement from the early days with the VLGA and then the WPILG Coalition gave me the tools of encouragement to influence more women to think about entering local government.

My first three years at Council were a steep learning curve, recognising the importance of good relationships, focusing on the issues, sometimes getting Council support for initiatives, and analyzing what I had learnt to gain majority support in future. As a Councillor in a growing coastal municipality, with a natural and built environment under threat, I

began to lead strategic land-use planning issues at Council, seeing this framework as a key influence for communities creating the future they wanted. I undertook, with WPILG support, to encourage potential female candidates to stand, reinforcing that women have the skills to lead.

Knowing how to run a successful and ethical election campaign was particularly daunting to prospective women candidates. On this aspect I focused much attention on the fact that not to be elected isn't a reflection on you as a person of value. You just have to refine your strategies for the next election. It was still challenging to get a final commitment from many competent women. Six weeks prior to the 1998 election, my persistent requests to a highly skilled and tireless Community House employee, Beth Davidson, were rewarded. We exchanged high-value preferences and ran a disciplined, multi-member ward campaign. Constantly liaising and communicating with other candidates assisted in doubling female Councillors in my second Council term.

In the mayoral role many people were thrilled to have a female leadership role model. In my determination to be better prepared for the next election, I took every opportunity to particularly identify female candidates (four were elected). I was delighted when Beth Davidson became Mayor for the entire term of that Council, from 2001 to 2004. Together we actively encouraged women to stand, combining a successful WPILG presence and *Women Get Elected* workshop in the Shire, which influenced a number of talented young women to enter a hotly contested election. Now, the three female Councillors are proving to be highly strategic and collaborative, leading diverse community strengthening initiatives.



Julie Hansen, Councillor, Surf Coast Shire (1996–2004), Mayor (2000, 2001)

Encouraging others to take up the challenge

Before I could leave, I thought it was really important to find someone to take my place

How can you make sure that there are other women ready to take up an active role in local

government? There are many strategies you might use: you might actively assist other women with their campaigns, act as a mentor to other women Councillors, set up a support group to encourage women to stand for local government or be

an active participant in women's community organisations. The strategies are many and varied but their aim is to ensure that there are other women around to take up the challenge for women in local government.

When it's "all over" it can be quite difficult to go back to normality. Have a restbefore you decide what you will go on with and don't be tempted to make rash promises before you have had time to re-group. The value of your experience WILL benefit you and others for a long time.

Martina Hayes, Councillor, City of Boroondara (1999–2002)

Continuing to stand up and be counted

So what happens when you decide that you don't want to

stand again? Or if you don't get re-elected?

How do you continue to make a contribution to your community –

here's a story about a Councillor when she decided to move on from Council to new endeavours.

When it's time to go... plan and prepare for departure

I approached my decision about retiring from Council the same way I approached standing for elections – working hard to plan and prepare... I asked myself "How do I know when it's time to go?" A difficult question to answer. I came to the realisation that while it was about my family and career, it was also about succession planning and getting some fresh perspectives on Council's established policy objectives, and then the question became a lot easier to answer.

I recommend making the decision early, with at least a 12 month lead time before the next election. That way you can plan your own life, and encourage others to consider standing. It helps you to identify

well regarded, balanced and constructive candidates. I worked to persuade a woman whom I was happy to endorse at the next elections. This was great as I felt that I was leaving my role in "safe hands" and I have enjoyed the role of mentor and resource person.

Once I had formed my plan I started reading the employment pages on Saturday and I applied for positions that would stretch me. My goal was to get interviews and widen the possibilities about what I might do next.

There is life after Council – I have revved up my "old" life, as well as taking a step in a new direction. I experienced not grief but "relief" once I was no longer on Council.

Sure, I missed people, missed the community knowledge and contact and being central to decisions, but now I can finish work and know I have finished for the week. I see being a Councillor as really hard and incredibly rewarding work. If it wasn't for the hours and the pay – you couldn't find a better job!



Liz Johnstone, Councillor, City of Port Phillip (1997–2004)



This kit would not be complete without a story about **not** getting re-elected. After all, we are talking about politics!

Increasing your sphere of influence – as a Councillor and beyond

I first thought about becoming a Councillor because I was passionate about addressing social and community issues more positively and collaboratively. I was wanting to have an influence beyond the circle of my personal and working life.

Once elected, I felt that I did have influence from day one! By being at the table and bringing a different perspective you do immediately contribute something. I found it satisfying and rewarding. I did get listened to and felt that I was able to contribute in valuable ways to strategic documents.

Part of my learning was about having a significant effect on budget priorities. I learned how vital it is to form strategic alliances in order to create new approaches to meeting community needs. The process of getting something new up on Council involves relationship building and advocacy on many fronts. These skills are not learned overnight, and by the middle of my first term I was much more effective in getting things up than I had been at the start.

Personally, I found going to election as an incumbent much more difficult than as a new chum. I found it very challenging to play the game of exaggerating

the personal credit I could legitimately claim for outcomes which many people had actually contributed to.

When I was not re-elected (by a very close margin), I found that the grief involved is much underestimated. I was grateful to have some understanding of the grief process and therefore have some idea of how to work through it. Even so, it was a stressful and emotional time and I was struck by the lack of support that existed for Councillors who are not re-elected. Providing more to assist elected reps to process this experience positively would be beneficial. It is not unusual for ex-Councillors to become a negative voice in the community as a result of bitterness over losing an election.

I encourage all women Councillors when they stand for re-election to put some effort into mentally preparing for the possibility of losing the election. There is little community sympathy or understanding of the pain of this experience. Unlike sports people who lose an event, politicians are not expected to show any sorrow at their loss. The stiff upper lip and much talk of how great it is to get one's life back and how busy one is, is still the expected response.

What did I learn from my experience? I learned:

- that not being re-elected was surprisingly painful but an important and really valuable learning experience for me, I have been able to turn adversity into an opportunity
- that I care about democracy and the relationship between community and Council more than any other issue
- that I needed to get a campaign team together earlier and generally campaign more effectively
- to have a support team in place throughout the term
- that the learning from being a Councillor is long term and hugely valuable.



**Alice Aird, Councillor,
Macedon Ranges Shire
(2000–2004)**

What can I put on my CV?

Women go on to do many different things after serving on Council. Regardless of what this might be, the skills and experience acquired as a Councillor are invaluable and they are a great resource for anything else you might want to do with your life.

Here's how one woman described the transferable skills she learnt from her experience as a local government Councillor.

The range of skills I learnt in local government

Local government is the level of government that understands the realities of political decisions on people's daily lives. It therefore places significant responsibility on its elected representatives to engage, respond, represent, advocate, listen, advise, initiate and make decisions in an informed and timely way. Compared to other politicians, you are far more accountable for your actions both as a Councillor and a member of Council elected to govern on behalf of its community.

As a Councillor and Mayor I was able to expand my commitment to community service, while also improving my business and personal skills. I am delighted to share the list of some of these skills with you.

- Acknowledging and appreciating community organisation contributions – inclusiveness helps to build stronger relationships, a collaborative approach to problem-solving and workable, tangible outcomes.
- Leadership skills for chairing meetings.
- Maintaining calmness and patience regardless of provocation.
- Knowledge and application of accountability relationships and practice of good governance principles.
- Strategic thinking and planning skills at macro and micro levels.
- Ability to deal with a wide range of issues, requiring

reading and absorbing enormous amounts of information for responsible decision-making.

- Outcome focus, while following proper processes including relevant stakeholder input.
- Media and presentation skills for public speaking, to ensure messages are delivered, received and actioned.
- Reviewing management performance of Chief Executive Officer, including determining yearly performance bonus and remuneration increase payments, and providing feedback on executive staff management issues.
- Negotiating Chief Executive Officer contracts and agreed terms on behalf of Council.
- Negotiating with all community sectors, business and tiers of government.
- Emotional intelligence, organisational and people skills.
- Remaining true to your principles and always acting with integrity.



Judith Voce, Councillor, City of Boroondara (1999–2004) and Mayor (2003 and 2004)



Useful resources and contacts

See the Women's Participation in Local Government Coalition (WPILGC) webpage for further resources:

<www.vlga.org.au/issues/women_gov.html>

Resources

- Good Governance Advisory Group (2004) *Good Governance Guide*, VLGA, MAV, LGPro, DVC.
- Kirner, Joan and Rayner, Moira (1999) *The Women's Power Handbook*, Viking, Penguin Books Australia Ltd.
- Kirner, Joan and Rayner, Moira (2000) *The Women's Power Pocket Book*, Penguin Books Australia Ltd.
- McKenzie, Bonnie C. (1995) *Friends in High Places. The Executive Women's Guide*. Business & Professional Publishing, How to achieve your ambitions, goals and potential with the help of a mentor.
- Municipal Association of Victoria (2004) *From Citizen to Councillor: A guide for prospective Councillors*.
- Municipal Association of Victoria (1997) *Citizens not Customers: Local Democracy and Active Citizenship*. (video)
- Wettenhall, Gib & Alexander, Karen (2000) *Building Partnerships between Councils & their Communities*, Victorian Local Government Association and Stegley Foundation.

- Women's Participation in Local Government Coalition (2005) *A Gender Agenda*.
- Women's Participation in Local Government Coalition (2003) *Victorian Local Government Women's Charter*.
- Women's Planning Network Vic. (1997) *Women's Guide to Town Planning*.
- Women's Planning Network Vic. (2002) *Women's Participation in Local Decision Making Research Report*.

Websites

- Consultation and Engagement website, Victorian Local Governance Association, **W:** <www.vlgaconsultation.org.au/> This website provides information, tools and support to consult effectively.
- Women's Participation in Local Government Coalition website **W:** <www.vlga.org.au/issues/women_gov.html>

More web addresses are listed in the following contacts.

Contacts

Political Parties

Australian Democrats (Victorian Division)

Eastbourne House
62 Wellington Parade
East Melbourne, Vic 3002
T: (03) 9419 5808
W: <www.democrats.org.au>

Australian Greens (Victoria)

1st Floor, 377 Little Bourke Street
Melbourne, Vic 3000
T: (03) 9602 1141
W: <www.vic.greens.org.au>

Australian Labor Party (Victorian Branch)

360 King Street
West Melbourne, Vic 3003
T: (03) 9933 8500
W: <www.vic.alp.org.au>

Liberal Party of Australia (Victorian Division)

3rd Floor, 104 Exhibition Street
Melbourne, Vic 3000
T: (03) 9654 2255
W: <www.vic.liberal.org.au>

Central Council of Women's Sections Liberal Party of Australia

(Vic Division)
3rd floor, 104 Exhibition Street
Melbourne, Vic 3000
T: (03) 9654 2255
W: <www.vic.liberal.org.au>

The Nationals (Victoria)

Level 7, Farrer House
24 Collins Street
Melbourne, Vic 3000
T: (03) 9654 6588
W: <www.vic.nationals.org.au>

Electoral Office

Victorian Electoral Commission

Level 8, 505 Little Collins Street
Melbourne, Vic 3000
T: 13 18 32
W: <www.vec.vic.gov.au>
For information on elections, including nominations, process for voting and Council boundaries.

Victorian Government

Equal Opportunity Commission Victoria

Level 3, 380 Lonsdale Street
Melbourne, Vic 3000
T: (03) 9281 7111
Toll free: 1800 134 142
W: <www.eoc.vic.gov.au>

Local Government Victoria Department for Victorian Communities

1 Spring Street
Melbourne, Vic 3001
T: (03) 9208 3333
W: <www.dvc.vic.gov.au>
For information on legislative arrangements and other matters concerning local governments.

Office of Women's Policy Department for Victorian Communities

1 Spring Street
Melbourne, Vic 3001
T: (03) 9208 3333
W: <www.dvc.vic.gov.au>

Rural Women's Network Department for Victorian Communities

1 Spring Street
Melbourne, Vic 3001
T: (03) 9208 3333
W: <www.dvc.vic.gov.au>
Works with rural women to enhance skills and confidence to increase advocacy and participation.

Federal Government

Commonwealth Department of Transport and Regional Services

GPO Box 594
Canberra, ACT 2601
T: (02) 6274 7111
W: <www.dotars.gov.au>
Overview of Australian local governments and federal government policy.

Australian Government Office for Women

Department of Family and Community Services
Box 7788, Canberra Mail Centre, ACT 2610
T: 1800 808 863
W: <www.ofw.facs.gov.au>

Human Rights & Equal Opportunity Commission

Level 8, Piccadilly Tower
133 Castlereagh Street
Sydney, NSW 2000
T: (02) 9284 9600
W: <www.hreoc.gov.au>

Associations for Councillors, citizens and local government employees

Local Government Professionals (LGPro)

Suite 4, 27-33 Raglan Street
Sth Melbourne, Vic 3205
T: (03) 9686 3833
W: <www.lgpro.com.au>

Municipal Association of Victoria

Level 12, 60 Collins Street
Melbourne, Vic 3000
T: (03) 9667 5555
W: <www.mav.asn.au>
For general information, resource materials and training programs concerning local governments.

Victorian Local Governance Association (VLGA)

Green Building
60 Leicester Street
Carlton, Vic 3054
T: (03) 9347 2233
W: <www.vlga.org.au>
For general information, resource material and training programs for local governments and citizens.

Women's Organisations

*Also see the women's sections under Political Parties

Australian Local Government Women's Association Victoria

19 Joyce Street
Nunawading, Vic 3131
T: (03) 9877 1901
W: <www.algwa.com.au>
An association for women Councillors and others interested in women and local governments.



EMILY's List Australia

E: vic@emilyslist.org.au

W: <www.emilyslist.org.au>

A financial and political support network for progressive Labor women candidates and their supporters.

Women's Electoral Lobby (WEL)

W: <www.wel.org.au>

A feminist non-party-political lobby group for women.

Women's Planning Network

c/- Planning Institute of Australia
PO Box 675

Carlton South, Vic 3053

T: (03) 9347 1900

W: <www.wpn.org.au>

A network for women involved in and interested in planning and related issues. Also offers mentoring and undertakes research.

Women's Participation in Local Government Coalition (WPILGC)

c/- VLGA

Green Building

60 Leicester St Carlton, Vic 3054

T: (03) 347 2233

W: <www.vlga.org.au/test/women_gov.html>

A broad coalition of local government, community and women's organisations and individuals seeking to achieve equal and diverse representation of women in local government.

YWCA Victoria

(Programs) Queen Victoria

Women's Centre

210 Lonsdale Street

Melbourne, Vic 3000

T: (03) 8668 8150

W: <www.ywca.org.au>

An organisation managed and owned by women, that develops and delivers community programs and services to create better lives for women, families and young people.

Victorian Women's Trust

1st floor, 388 Bourke Street

Melbourne, Vic 3000

T: (03) 9642 0422

W: <www.vwt.org.au.>

The Victorian Women's Trust is an independent, non-profit body dedicated to improving the status of all Victorian women.

Victorian Immigrant and Refugee Women's Coalition

Ground floor, Queen Victoria

Women's Centre

210 Lonsdale Street

Melbourne, Vic 3000

T: (03) 8668 8150

W: <www.virwc.org.au>

The VIRWC advocates for and supports immigrant and refugee women and their community organizations.

Australian women are under-represented at all levels of government. In Victoria, women make up approximately 30% of all Victorian local government Councillors.

It is widely acknowledged that the presence of women in local government helps create a robust democracy and a diversity of views.

This kit, in its third edition, has been developed by a coalition of women's and local government organisations, members of the Women's Participation in Local Government Coalition (WPILGC). Further information about the Coalition's activities can be seen on the webpage: <www.vlga.org.au/issues/women_gov.html>.

Now You're Councillor provides information and practical hints for women once they are elected to Council and those who support them. The stories from past and present women Councillors offer useful examples of how individual women have approached their role.

Supporting newly elected Councillors, and in particular women Councillors, is vital to ensuring that their contribution is sustainable and the best it can be.