

LOCAL WOMEN LEADING CHANGE

a campaign
toolkit for women
running for local
government



Acknowledgment

Published by the Victorian Local Governance Association (VLGA).

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Text, editing and design by the VLGA.

This publication builds on decades of research, writing and advocacy by women leaders supporting gender equality in Local Government. Local Women Leading Change follows in the footsteps of 'A Gender Agenda' which was originally researched by Leonie Morgan and Sara Charlesworth (1998) for the Victorian Women's Participation in Local Government Coalition. It has been added to over years by both staff and volunteers, including Alice Aird, Sophie Arnold, Linda Bennett, Rosemary Hancock, Jenny Wills and Deborah Wu.



In 2024, VLGA collaborated with Tanja Kovac and Dr Maree Overall of Gender Lens Australia to review and update the publication, strengthening gendered analysis and developing training modules aligned to the toolkit.

Case studies: The case studies included were correct at the time of publication in 2024.

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Disclaimer: While we have tried to make the information in this publication generic, it is your responsibility as a candidate or campaign team member to understand all aspects of the conduct of local government elections.

Please enquire with the Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) or the Victorian Local Government Inspectorate (LGI) for detailed information on regulations and legislative requirements.

Acknowledgment of Country

The VLGA acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the country throughout Victoria and recognises their continuing connection to land, waters and community. We pay our respects to the Traditional Owners, their elders, past, present and future and to their cultures.

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About the VLGA

The VLGA is an independent, not-for-profit, state-wide organisation for local councils.

We support councillors, the elected representatives of local government, providing training and education, professional development, networking, information exchange and advice on all aspects of good governance and effective representation.

We actively engage with key policymakers and broader stakeholders to inform, influence and lead conversations on good governance in local government decision-making.

As part of our support to local councils and councillors, in the lead up to each council election cycle, we provide resources and training to equip candidates with the tools that they need to run a successful campaign and prioritise good governance should they be elected.

We also provide specialised training to women standing for election, as part of our commitment to gender equality.

In addition to this important election toolkit, our Local Women Leading Change Program provides online and face-to-face training for candidates through our member councils including the following modules:

- Becoming a Councillor
- Election Campaign Essentials
- Self-care in Public Office
- Life as a Woman Councillor
- Gender-based campaigning – canvassing for votes as a woman
- Safety and Self-care on the campaign trail and in public office

Check out your local council for details on these events.

We work closely with our members in metropolitan Melbourne, rural and regional Victoria to deliver face to face and online training.

We're always here to help.

Don't hesitate to get in touch if you feel that you need support throughout the course of the campaign.

Let us know if there is a program that you would like to see us deliver in your area.

Stay in the loop with our events and training by signing up to our newsletter.

Or join our Local Women Leading Change Facebook Group.

Foreword

It is almost 25 years since the Victorian Local Government Women's Charter was created by a group of committed and inspired organisations and individuals, with a vision of lifting the representation of women. Thanks to the ongoing support of the VLGA, the Charter has now been adopted by 74 of Victoria's councils, providing a platform for gender equity work across Victorian communities.

A key part of the Women's Charter is encouraging women's active citizenship and participation in local government.

The Local Women Leading Change Election Handbook is a resource developed to assist women with building the knowledge and skills necessary to succeed as elected representatives. It guides women through the process of local government elections, featuring case studies and insights from current and former women Councillors with lived experience of campaigns and councils. It's a toolkit we know women come back to again and again.

Since the last edition, the VLGA has partnered with the University of Melbourne and LaTrobe University to undertake an Australian Research Council (ARC) Project exploring the opportunities and challenges of being a woman in local government. Our latest research findings have informed our tips and advice, especially on keeping safe on the campaign trail.

When the VLGA first began supporting councils to progress towards gender equality, only 26 per cent of elected councillors were women. In 2016, that figure lifted to 38 per cent and in 2020 it rose again, to 43.8 per cent.



We are proud of the contribution the Women's Charter and our Local Women Leading Change resources contribute to increasing numbers of women standing at the election.

But there is more to do.

The Victorian Government has set a target of 50/50 gender equal representation on councils and in mayoral positions by 2025. Councils are now a key focus of "Our Equal State - The Victorian Government Gender Equality Strategy" and as public sector organisations must comply with mandatory reporting obligations under the Gender Equality Act 2020 (Vic).

To achieve the target and support Councils in their gender equality commitments, we need to support women to participate more fully in local democracy.

We know that gender equality benefits all of us, and gender-balanced decision-making leads to better outcomes. And that's good for everyone.

Cr Denise Massoud

President, Victorian Local Governance Association

Kathrynn Arndt

CEO, Victorian Local Governance Association



Background

The History of Women in Local Government

Today, hundreds of women choose to stand for local government to represent their community and make change.

But it wasn't always like that. When local councils were first forming, women didn't have the right to vote or to stand in an election.

After a long campaign for women's suffrage, Victorian women were granted the right to vote in 1908, paving the way for the election of the first woman councillor, Mary Rogers. Mary was a child and labour rights activist, elected to the City of Richmond in 1920.

For other councils, electing their first woman councillor took much longer. Victoria's first council, the City of Melbourne, was formed in 1841, but it took 125 years to elect its first woman councillor, Clare J Cascarret.

The first indigenous woman elected to local council was celebrated poet, activist and photographer, Lisa Bellear, who was elected to the City of Collingwood in 1988.

Despite Mary, Clare and Lisa's early success, by the 1990's only a handful of women had been elected to councils across Victoria.

A group of dedicated women got together to change that.

In 1997 the Women's Participation in Local Government Coalition (WPILGC) was formed to work towards the equal participation of women and men in local government, focussing on increasing the number of women standing in elections. A key part of the early work of the WPILGC was the development of a local government handbook for women standing for council.

By 2013, as the work for gender equity in local government gathered strength, the WPILGC dissolved itself and handed responsibility for the development of this handbook and other gender equity activities to statewide organisations, the Victorian Local Governance Association (VLGA) and Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV).

Women in Local Government Today

As part of Victoria's first Gender Equality Strategy, the Victorian Government set a bold target to elect 50/50 women and men in local councils and Mayoral roles by 2025.

Currently women make up 43.8% of councillors.

If we are to reach the target by 2025, we need #1000women to stand for election later this year.

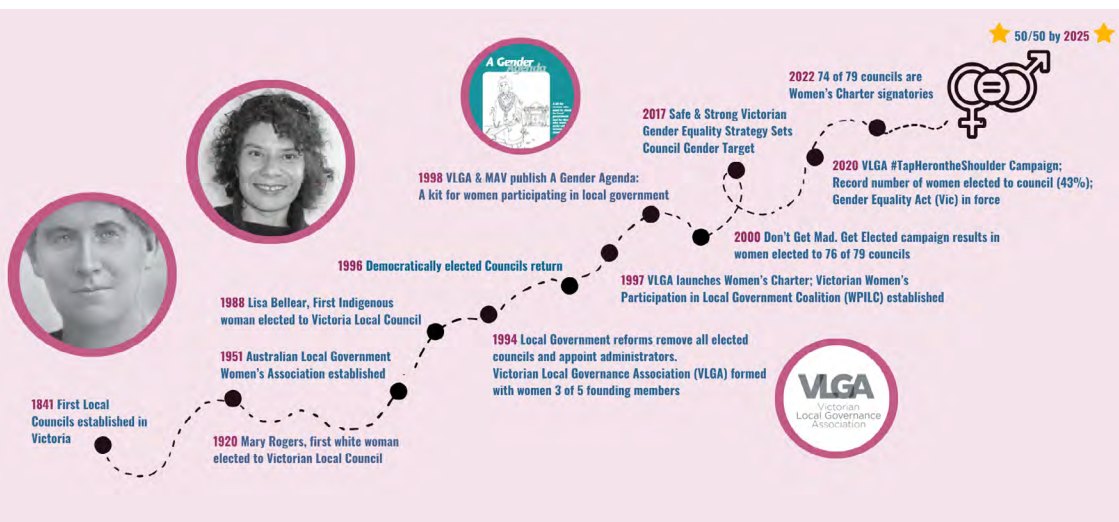
Women play a pivotal role in the leadership of their communities, but this work is often under-appreciated and not formally recognised.

Local councils need to look like the communities that they represent.

Councils are a significant contributor to the Victorian economy, employing over 50,000 people, spending more than \$8 billion on delivery of over 100 services for 6.6 million customers, and maintaining over \$123 billion of local roads, facilities and infrastructure.

Women's connections to their community, their skills and their perspectives mean they are rich with potential to be elected representatives.

Are you ready to stand for local council?



Supporting Women

About Local Women Leading Change

The VLGA's Local Women Leading Change Handbook is a resource designed to equip you with the information and insights you need to decide if running for local government election is for you.

The handbook is filled with key dates and information, tips and tricks for campaigning and case studies from women councillors who have been elected before.

The Local Women Leading Change Handbook is part of a suite of programs and projects supported by the VLGA to promote gender equality.

Victorian Local Government Women's Charter

VLGA encourages Councils to increase women's participation in key decision making forums in the community by adopting the Victorian Local Government Women's Charter and committing to the following principles:

Gender Equity

That women and men have an equal right to be representatives in local governments, committees and decision-making positions.

Diversity

That the inclusion of different experiences and perspectives in local governments and community decision-making strengthens local democratic governance and helps build cohesive communities. Councils and communities encourage and welcome the participation of all women.

Active Citizenship

That local governments work with the community to increase the numbers and participation of women in public life, so that decision-making more clearly represents and reflects the interests and demographics of communities.

74 of Victoria's councils have become signatories to the Women's Charter, affirming their commitment to improving the representation of women on Victorian councils.

Training for women candidates and councillors

VLGA provides tailored training to women candidates and councillors on all aspects of local government, empowering women with information and resources

ARC Research on Women in Local Government

VLGA is a partner in an award winning Australian Research Council project examining the opportunities and barriers to the participation of women in Local Government. Led by Professors Andrea Carson and Leah Ruppanner, this research is informing VLGA's programs for women and its advocacy.

You can read the latest findings of the research on the VLGA website.

Gender Equity training

The Gender Equality Act 2020 (Vic) places obligations on local councils to report on workplace gender equality and on the gender impact of services and projects. The VLGA supports councils with understanding gender equity compliance, implementing the Best Practice Guide to Gender Equity in Local Government and sharing information on the community and economic benefits of gender equal cities.

#TapHerOnTheShoulder

To encourage women to stand for election, VLGA actively encourages people to reach out to women in their networks and #tapheronthesoulder. VLGA's research into women's leadership has shown that it helps women if they are encouraged to be leaders by people they respect and admire.

Local Women Leading Change - Facebook group

VLGA also hosts a Local Women Leading Change Facebook group to encourage women considering election to share information and resources.



Local Government 101

Another level of government

Take a moment to think about who you voted for in the last local government elections. Do you remember? Did they get elected?

If you don't know, you wouldn't be alone.

Local government is the level of government closest to the community. But we don't seem to pay our elected representatives, who govern the councils and make decisions on behalf of our communities, nearly as much attention as their state or federal government counterparts.

In a practical sense, councils facilitate essential community networks, provide services, and act as advocates for the diverse needs of communities through physical, social and economic planning.

There are 79 councils in Victoria, which represent over 6.9 million people (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2023).

All councils have between five and twelve councillors, who are elected by the people who live in the local area or who own a local property or business.

Services provided by each council can differ, depending on its financial resources and the needs of its community.

Councils receive most of their income from rates and untied Australian government funds. They also receive targeted state and federal government financial grants, usually for projects and initiatives driven by the council (and its councillors). These include funding to prepare for and respond to natural disasters.

What Local Councils do

Local Councils:

- Provide leadership and good governance for their communities
- Develop and maintain community infrastructure such as roads, bridges, drains, halls, libraries, recreation facilities, parks and gardens
- Plan for future growth and development
- Provide a diverse range of property, economic, human, recreational and cultural services
- Enforce state and local laws relating to land use, environment protection, public health, traffic and parking and animal management.

The role of a councillor

It's important that you understand the roles and powers of local councils before you make a commitment or take a stand on issues.

Local government is run according to the provisions of the Victorian Local Government Acts (1989 and 2020), and any subsequent revisions or amendments. Although it's not necessary to read through an entire piece of legislation, having a grasp of the key concepts covered in the Acts will help prepare you to run.

Every day and every week councillors perform a diverse range of tasks – far beyond attending weekly council meetings and opening the odd building.

The role of a councillor is like a part-time job.

Councillors do receive a taxable allowance, with the amount differing between Councils and set by the state government.

The part-time role of a councillor is often undertaken while juggling family, community and paid work responsibilities.

The legislation dictates a minimum frequency of council meetings that councillors must attend, but after that it's up to the individual councillor to determine how much time she spends on council matters.

It could be 11 hours, or it could be 30.

It all depends on what you can do – and what you want to achieve.



How local government elections work

Who can stand?

Almost* any Australian citizen enrolled for state and federal elections in the municipality or on the council voter roll is eligible to stand for council.

The voter roll closes at 4:00pm on 7 August 2024. You don't need to live or be enrolled in the ward you are seeking to represent, but you must be enrolled as a voter in the municipality itself.

*The Local Government Act (2020) disqualifies some people from standing, e.g. if they are an undischarged bankrupt. Seek advice from the VEC about this if you have any questions.

How many candidates are elected?

Internal boundaries (wards) and the number of councillors who represent each ward are determined by electoral reviews conducted under the Local Government Act (2020).

Councils consist of between five and twelve councillors.

Some councils have no wards and are known as "unsubdivided". Some are divided into many wards, each of which has a single councillor representing it.

Other councils are subdivided into multi-councillor wards, with the same number of councillors in each ward.

It's important to understand how your municipality is structured because this will affect the strategies you choose to use in your campaign. Additionally, if you live in the City of Melbourne there are some unique differences.

Mandatory local government candidate training

Prior to lodging a nomination form, a prospective candidate must have completed the mandatory local government training required by the Act. This includes prospective candidates who are currently or have previously been a councillor of a council in Victoria.

The training requirements are prescribed by the Regulations and are not administered or delivered by the VEC. However, prospective candidates are required to declare their completion of the mandatory local government candidate training, including prescribed details of their training, on the nomination form prior to lodging it with the Election Manager.

A prospective candidate who has not completed the mandatory local government candidate training within the last four years is not qualified to become a candidate. It is an offence to make a false declaration about this.

For further information on the mandatory local government candidate training, contact Local Government Victoria or visit localgovernment.vic.gov.au.

How do I nominate as a candidate?

1. Complete the nomination form available from the VEC
2. Pay the prescribed fee (\$250)
3. Lodge the form and fee with the VEC in person before 12 noon on Nomination Day, 17 September 2024. The form can be downloaded from the VEC website or obtained from the election office, and you are encouraged to contact the election office to make an appointment to lodge your nomination form. It is essential that you check and double check all the requirements for nomination. The VEC is the most reliable source for this information.

The nomination fee (or deposit) will be refunded if the candidate polls at least 4 percent of the total number of formal first preference votes received by all candidates or if they are elected.

Who can vote?

You can vote in council elections if:

- You are 18 years and over and reside in the municipality – just like state and federal elections (the Victorian Electoral Commission manages your enrolment); and/or
- You have applied to be a Council enrolled voter because you own property in the municipality, occupy and pay rates in the municipality or represent a company that pays rates in the municipality.

Voting is compulsory for all, with a few exceptions.

Non-Australian citizens should check their voting status with the Returning Officer or the VEC.

You can exercise only one vote per municipality.



Key election terminology

postal voting: All eligible voters in the municipality will receive their ballot papers by post, along with a booklet of candidate statements.

full preferential voting: In Victorian council elections, voters must number every box on the ballot paper in the order of their choice for the vote to be counted. If no candidate has an absolute majority of first preference votes, preferences are distributed until one candidate has an absolute majority. This system of voting occurs in single member wards (i.e. one candidate to be elected).

Proportional representation: Similar to upper house or senate voting. This occurs in councils that are unsubdivided or have multi-member wards. A candidate must receive a 'quota' of the votes to be automatically elected. If there are not enough candidates who reach quota to fill the vacant positions, the preferences are redistributed until all positions are filled.

unsubdivided means that the ballot is based on proportional representation, so you are aiming to reach quota to get elected. This also means you will have to receive votes from voters across the entire municipality.

single member ward means that you need to receive more than half of the votes in your ward (following preference distribution) in order to be elected.

multiple councillor ward means that the ballot is based on proportional representation within your ward, so you are aiming to reach quota to get elected. You may want to work with other candidates in your ward to increase your chances.



You, the candidate

What makes a good councillor?

Is a good councillor one who is consistently re-elected? One who is always in the local paper? Or one who has a reputation in the community for being willing to listen, and get things done?

If you have experience with any kind of community group or running your own business – chances are, you'll make a good councillor.

If you have ever gathered signatures on a petition on an issue that affects your street, or you have brought a group of concerned parents together to lobby the school council – you're more than halfway there.

If there is something (or things) that you care about, if you want to make a difference in your community, and if you have the willingness to listen and fight for change (however incremental) – you will make a good councillor.

Running for council can give you the opportunity to:

- influence outcomes on issues that you believe in
- contribute to policy and programs that impact on the local community
- meet people from other places and from all walks of life
- know more about what's going on in the local community
- work on interesting and diverse local issues
- learn more about your community through an interesting and diverse workload; and
- develop a range of policy, negotiation and procedural skills

Even if you don't think you're ready, chances are you know someone who might be.

So, if you know a woman who you think would make a good councillor, tap her on the shoulder and ask her to stand. Better yet – ask her to stand with you.

What is good governance?

Good governance is about the processes for making and implementing decisions. It's not about making 'correct' decisions, but about the best possible process for making those decisions. Practising good governance will allow you to be a good leader.

Accountable and transparent: be transparent in your actions and decision-making. Even if someone disagrees with your point of view, you can be comfortable in knowing that you have made good decisions if you are able to justify to other people how you came to them.

Equitable, inclusive and participatory: bring the community with you. Consider all points of view and actively empower voices that are marginalised or underrepresented. Listen.

Follow the rules: make sure that your actions and decisions are consistent with the laws and procedures of the forum in which you are operating. You may be surprised at how often being across the rules – even if it is just meeting procedure – will give you a significant advantage.

Efficient, effective and responsive: balance competing interests and time pressures to ensure that concerns are addressed in an appropriate manner. Work collaboratively to achieve your objectives. Having a reputation for being able to 'get things done' is the best tool you can have in your toolkit.

Getting started

Pull out a fresh notebook or open up a new Word document and buckle up.

Here we've compiled some things to consider, research and explore that might help you in your journey towards deciding to run. Don't try to answer them all in one go or treat it like an assignment – this is purely for your own benefit, and your own reference down the track.

Council

- What council area do you live in?
- What ward do you live in? Would you run in this ward, or is there another one in which you have more connections to leverage?
- Who are your current councillors? What do they stand for, and how does this align with your own values? What have they done that you do and don't agree with?
- Look up your council's website and Facebook page – have a browse and note down some issues and initiatives (or improvements) that exist in your municipality. The council's 'vision' or strategic plan is a great starting point.
- Consider attending a council meeting, watching the live stream online, or looking through some meeting agendas and meeting minutes.
- Consider joining a council committee (if the opportunity arises) for a policy area that you are interested in or attending as an observer.

Community groups

- Take stock of what community groups you, your family and your friends are involved in. The council website should have a listing of several community groups that may be a good checklist.

The most rewarding experience, without a doubt, is when you help a person in need"

- Cr Emily Dimitriadis,
City of Darebin

- What are these community groups aiming to achieve? How does council support them to do this at present, and how might council better support them to do this in the future?
- Who are the leaders (office bearers, or key influencers) in these community groups? If you know them, consider reaching out to let these leaders know you are considering running, and ask them what issues are most important to them or their group.
- Look up Facebook groups that are run by and for your local community, such as community discussion spaces and buy-sell-swap pages – they are a great way to gauge community sentiment, as well as engage with other community members.

Your ward

If you're not sure what ward you want to run in, you can do this for any of the wards you're considering.

- Make a list of the suburbs in your ward. The VEC website will help with this.
- Make a list of key landmarks or community hubs in your ward – i.e. shopping centres, schools, kindergartens, sporting grounds/clubs – high traffic areas where the community comes together. Don't worry too much about getting every single one – jot down the ones you're familiar with.
- Can you think of at least three major issues facing the ward? If not, time to do some reconnaissance with friends and neighbours. They don't need to be time-sensitive, pressing issues – it can be something that a lot of people care about, like access to children's services, aged care or the local pool.

Your family

- Have a chat to your family about the possibility of you running for council. Are they supportive of your goal?
- Do you have caring responsibilities at the moment? How might you accommodate them during the campaign and while you are on council? Keep in mind that councils do provide childcare arrangements for councillors while they are performing official business, but it is always useful to have a support network of family and friends.
- Is your family willing to be in the spotlight with you as a public figure? If not, how will you protect them from unwanted scrutiny?
- Will your family form an active part of your campaign? Consider whether you want to include images of them in your campaign materials or at public appearances, particularly when it comes to children.

Your reasons

- What is your number one reason for wanting to run? Is it wanting to make a difference across the board, or are there more specific issues that you want to improve?
- Either way, make a list of 10 things that you would want to get into council to achieve.
- Think about your past interactions with elected representatives (councillors, state and federal MPs). What kinds of issues did you approach them with, and what kind of response did you receive? What positives and negatives can you take from those interactions to improve your own style of advocacy and representation?
- What traits do you have that you think would make you a good councillor?
- What will you do differently? If you had to identify one reason (no more than a paragraph) why people should vote for you, what would it be?
- How will being a councillor benefit you? What will you learn and achieve that will make your time on council worthwhile (for you, your family and your constituents)?
- What are you willing to sacrifice in order to be a successful councillor, and what is absolutely non-negotiable?

Your values

When it comes to the political sphere, we can view our personal values in two particular ways:

- values that inform our passions or policy interests, i.e. fairness, equality, diversity
- values that inform how we behave, i.e. tolerance, conscientiousness, logic

Select five values for each category, and use these to think about how you might communicate your values to voters.

These aren't set in stone – we're just brainstorming. Now, identify which of your personal values these things are connected to.

| | | | |
|-------------------|---------------|-------------|-----------------|
| achievement | creativity | inclusion | progress |
| authenticity | curiosity | integrity | reason |
| authority | determination | intuition | recognition |
| autonomy | diversity | justice | reliability |
| balance | empathy | kindness | reputation |
| boldness | equality | knowledge | resilience |
| challenge | experience | leadership | respect |
| citizenship | fairness | learning | responsibility |
| community | family | logic | security |
| compassion | foresight | loyalty | stability |
| competency | generosity | openness | status |
| conscientiousness | growth | optimism | success |
| consistency | happiness | pragmatism | tolerance |
| contribution | honesty | principles | trustworthiness |
| cooperation | humour | proactivity | wisdom |

Example:

"I am passionate about social justice, and want to see council deliver for everyone in our community, particularly those who are most vulnerable. I am principled, progressive and pragmatic, and if elected will work with my fellow councillors and council officers to achieve the best possible outcomes for our municipality."



Developing your platform

Once you have taken stock of the issues facing your community, the next step is to decide which of these issues you will focus on throughout the course of your campaign.

Although it is important to listen and absorb the issues that residents might raise with you, you are not expected to be an expert on every issue. More importantly, you are entitled to take a different position.

Focus on the things you feel passionate about and run with them. Find out all you can about these issues - not just the concerns themselves, but their history of advocacy and action, who the key players are and what has and hasn't worked so far.

From there, you can develop your responses. Think of practical, achievable actions that you can implement, either over the course of your campaign, or in the event that you are elected.

You may even choose to take the position that the concerns raised require further investigation and consultation - that you will listen to the issues and concerns raised by local residents and businesses while campaigning and raise them if you are elected.

As a candidate, your job is to listen to the community, advocate for the positions and views you believe in, and remain open, transparent and honest. Don't make promises you can't keep. Once you're on council, change will require the support of other councillors, and some things you would like to change may not even be part of the responsibilities of local government.

If you're a member of a political party, be mindful of policy platforms or rules that you may be expected to adhere to - the last thing you want to do is backtrack on your stated position because you weren't aware that your party had a different one.

What is your position on the issue?

Do you have one? Or do you still need to find out more? Has your position on this issue changed over time, and can you explain the reasons behind your position changing?

What will you do throughout the campaign?

What can you do to link your previous actions to your candidacy? Are there additional steps that you can take which leverage off your increased profile as a candidate? Are there actions that you can take that can form part of your community activation strategy (i.e. petitions, street stalls, issues-based doorknocking)? Do you need to find out more about the issue, or hear other points of view? Can you schedule meetings with some of the key players to listen to their perspectives and outline your plan for change?

What have you done so far?

What is your history of advocacy on this issue? Can you demonstrate your commitment to achieving change through actions that you have taken? Do you have other experiences that are relevant to the issue that demonstrate your courage of conviction?

What will you do once you are on council?

What steps will you take on this issue once you are elected? Keep in mind that you will have to work with council officers and other councillors, following council processes in order to achieve change.

Will your commitment be to resolve the issue, or is it safer for you to commit to prioritising the investigation of the issue once on council, working collaboratively to achieve the best possible outcome?

Community networks

No matter how good you are at campaigning, it is impossible for you to speak to every voter in your ward in person.

Nevertheless, you need to be able to get your ideas out there into the community.

People need to know who you are and what you stand for. Then they can choose to vote for you.

Your networks and the community groups you are involved with can help make sure your name is heard around your area. When meeting people for the first time, they may recognise your name even if they don't know your face.

The best way to demonstrate that you are connected to the community that you want to represent is to be seen, heard and spoken about in that community.

You may not be able to knock on every door and speak to every resident, but you can at least aim to speak to most of the people that you know will speak to others.

kindergartens

action groups

markets

craft groups

environmental groups

festivals

sporting groups

parents groups

Facebook community groups

religious groups

school councils

toy libraries

seniors groups

neighbourhood watch

playgroups

community gardens

schools

rotary clubs

small business

ratepayers associations

special interest clubs

neighbourhood houses

any kind of local group that comes together regularly! connection is key.

Campaign Timeline

| | |
|------------------------------|--|
| March - September 2023 | Information gathering and self-reflection. Develop your knowledge about your council, your ward and yourself, and start to develop your platform. Use the questions in the section 'getting started' as a basis. |
| October - November 2023 | ONE YEAR OUT - profile and skills building. With one year until the election, you need to have more of an idea of whether you want to run. If you belong to a political party, you need to be testing the waters and speaking to others about your candidacy - check the rules to see what your obligations are and what support you can receive. Start your social media presence - if you're not quite ready, you don't need to announce that you are a candidate - you can position yourself as a community leader (which is what you are!). Keep an eye out for candidate training. Local councils often advertise free training for those considering their candidacy in local government elections. Consider the gaps in your knowledge and the skills that you might need to work on- and seek out training in these areas. |
| December 2023 - January 2024 | Start to get the word out and develop a plan. Although it is usually wise to avoid political conversations over the festive season, this is an ideal opportunity for you to speak to friends and extended family about your candidacy. You might find that they are actually extremely supportive - and they may also have a different (and valuable) perspective on many issues. This is also an ideal time for you to plan your year. Fill in the gaps in 'developing your platform' and consider what you need to achieve before your campaigning really ramps up. With family and friends around, you can do the 'hard ask' - request their assistance in activating the community, street stalls, doorknocks and letterbox drops. Make sure you leverage their skills and networks. |
| February 2024 | Compile a budget and bring your team together. Figure out your budget and stick to it. Don't end up owing money at the end of your campaign. What can you source through friends, family and volunteers and what will you have to pay for? You don't need to build your entire team at this stage - try to find a campaign manager at the very least. You might also want to find someone who can organise fundraisers, manage your social media or contact community groups and businesses on your behalf. Keep having conversations. Be aware of the donation rules and the declaration process and timeline for reporting back to council for all candidates, not just the winners. |
| March 2024 | Get prepared for the campaign. Have some professional photos taken - do you know someone who can do this for no/low cost? If not, try to use a local business. Consider whether you need a separate mobile phone number just for the campaign - this means you can switch off when you need to. Do you need a campaign website, or is a Facebook page enough? Developing a website can take a lot of time, so set the wheels in motion. |

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| Develop your messaging and strategy. Keep your key messages simple and memorable. Think about what you want to say in print flyers and brochures, in your 200-word statement and online or on social media. Send the drafts and concepts around to friends for proofreading and comment and then get it proofread again! Your messaging should be consistent across all platforms although the language or tone might be different. Maintain your social media presence - even if it's just photos of you visiting local parks and cafes! | April 2024 |
| Information gathering - election specific Attend any election information sessions your council is running (or at nearby councils) and make sure you have all the relevant information from the VEC. Learn about the nomination process, voting systems and look at previous voting results. If you are a member of a political party, pre-selection processes may have started by now. Make sure that you are conscious of any rules or protocols that your party might have around its members running as candidates - or be prepared for any consequences. Continue to hone your messaging and build your profile. Meet regularly with your campaign team (in person or remotely) to maintain momentum. | May 2024 |
| Gather your materials and get campaigning. What kinds of materials do you need, and what can you afford? At the very least, you should get some business cards and some flyers or brochures with information about you and your plan for the ward. You might also decide to get postcards, print ads or fridge magnets - but these all cost money. Decide on the size of your print run and get it happening as this step can take 3-4 weeks. If possible, support a local business. Try to print on recycled paper. Remember that you must follow VEC guidelines about this material and what must be included - for example, ensure they are all authorised. Once you have some printed materials (even if you print them at home), get out and start talking to the community. | June 2024 |
| Contact Australia Post to understand how the bulk mail-out rules operate in your area. Explore the costs, benefits and timeline constraints of using Australia Post distribution versus volunteer or paid advertising delivery. Remember that the VEC will no longer accept or distribute your 'how to vote' preference order - you are responsible for distributing this information if that is what you want to do. | Postal Voting |
| Be seen, be heard, and listen. Keep meeting with local community groups (see 'community networks') to raise your profile and to gain a better understanding of what the local government issues are in your municipality. Attend local events, festivals and farmers markets, or hold a 'listening post' at the local shops. Hand out your business card and election material when you can. If you're speaking to someone who seems particularly receptive, don't hesitate to ask them to get involved with your campaign. At worst, they'll say no. At best, you'll gain an invaluable volunteer. | Week 1 - 2 July 2024 |

| | |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| Week 3 - 4 July 2024 | Candidate statement and key messaging. Prepare the final draft of your 200-word statement - make it clear and straightforward. Decide on the key issues for your campaign - you should have an idea by now from your conversations with residents and community groups. Put out a press release on one of these issues, try to arrange a topical photo opportunity or just post regularly about them on social media. |
| BONUS: Budget/time considerations | Consider whether you can take some leave from your employment duties. September and early October is the time to really raise your profile with doorknocking, letter writing and meetings in your electorate. Review your budget and see if you have funds for placing advertisements in the local paper, community newsletters or with sporting clubs. September and early October may be useful times to place these ads. |
| Week 1 - 2 August 2024 | Direct voter contact. Develop a regular roster of street stalls, doorknocks and letterbox drops with volunteers. Be seen and be active. When doorknocking, there may be something you can help people with during your campaign or let them know that if elected you will follow it up. Make sure you get back to them if elected and don't make promises you may struggle to keep. |
| Week 3 - 4 August 2024 | Be creative - what else can you do to build your profile? Keep attending local council meetings, writing letters to the papers, posting on social media, getting on radio and raising your profile. Contact your local community radio station (if you have one) and introduce yourself - let them know that you would love to be interviewed about a local issue. Find out when any 'Meet the Candidate' forums are being held (either by your council or community groups) and put them in your diary. Make sure you and your supporters are correctly enrolled to vote - the rolls close at 4:00pm on 7 August 2024. |

Volunteer Appreciation

As your direct voter contact work continues, it's a good idea to thank and boost up your volunteers as the final weeks of campaign approach and there will be little spare time for socializing. Host a bbq or a pizza night that doesn't involve phone banking or door knocking for a chance to say well done team, striving for that finish line with energy and purpose.

| | |
|--------------------------------|--|
| Week 1 September 2024 | Continue to be visible and active. Finalise election logistics. Scrutineers are useful not only for election transparency and accuracy, but to give you an early indication of results. Appoint one or more scrutineers for counting - preferably someone who has experience in this aspect of elections and can oversee the counting of the postal votes. If you don't have someone on your team who is experienced in scrutineering, don't despair - just make sure your appointed person reads the scrutineer handbook carefully. Remember - as the candidate, you can't be a scrutineer. The election manager will advise the details for counting timetable after nominations close. |
| Week 2: September 2024 | Time to make it official. Nominations will open on 9 September and at 12 noon on 17 September 2024. You can pre-fill the nomination form online using the VEC's 'Candidate Helper', however the form and your nomination fee must be lodged in person with the Returning Officer. Your candidate statement and photo also need to be lodged before the deadline. Make sure you check the dates, deadlines and specifications on the VEC website. If you haven't already got posters or corflute signs prepared, order them now and ask friends, neighbours and local businesses to display them for you. |
| Week 3: September 2024 | You're a candidate. Use social media to announce that your candidacy is now official! Find out about the other candidates who have registered. Get in touch with them and introduce yourself, and if you have time, try to meet. Think about your strategy with preferencing and 'how to vote' cards. You may choose not to distribute HTVs, but if you are in a multi-member ward, it may be useful for you to work with other candidates and swap preferences. Remember that if you are a member of a political party, you should check their processes and your obligations in relation to preferencing. |
| Week 4: September 2024 | Keep campaigning - voting starts soon! Spend as much time as you can out and about, speaking to residents and business owners about your policies and ideas. You may be surprised by how many people don't know that council elections are coming up. When you speak to voters, make sure you have materials that you can give them that include your contact details, bio, key messages and a photo of you. Don't hesitate to ask local businesses to put up a poster - the worst that can happen is they say no. |
| October 2024 | This is the month. Ballot packs will begin to be mailed out by the VEC for postal elections. This occurs 17-19 days before election day. Ballot packs are distributed via post to every enrolled person in a random order. |
| ELECTION DAY - October 2024 | Close of voting Today is the day. With the postal voting system, the final day for postal votes to be sent is when campaigning ends. Definitely celebrate your campaign. Publicly and privately thank all your supporters. Results are usually declared in the last week of October. Celebrate your campaign whether you win or lose. Have two speeches ready for the declaration of the poll: one for if you are elected and one to thank your supporters and team. |

Campaign Infrastructure

The political minefield

For many candidates, running for council is part of the natural progression of their political activism. Becoming active in a political party can offer practice in many of the skills you may need as a candidate and as a councillor – local leadership, partnerships, communication skills, political understanding, governance, meeting procedures, and so on.

But for some candidates, the decision to run for council may be their first experience of the world of politics. Our research tells us that some women who haven't been used to political decisions and political conflict before, can find exposure to it during the campaign quite challenging and confusing. Whether you're an old hand at politics, or new to the game, it is important that you consider the political environment before you decide to run and whether you want to identify with a particular party or to stand as an independent.

Making this decision can be both personal and pragmatic. There is no right or wrong choice. But there are political considerations which may impact on your likelihood of getting elected.

Start with doing some research on political parties to understand connection to your values and reasons for running.

Think about the people you know who are in political parties and people who stand as independents. Who do you admire? Who do think has the best impact for their community? Who shares an interest in the issues you believe in?

Choosing to run with a political party

Running for local government as a member of a political party can be complicated and involve a number of different considerations.

Political parties have their own rules that govern their members when it comes to local government elections. Here are a few things to consider:

- Does your political party endorse or support candidates for local government?
- Are you bound by rules that require you to endorse members of your party ahead of other candidates? Does this still apply if you are not endorsed or supported?
- Do you have the support to win a pre-selection process if required? What will happen if you are unhappy with the other candidates that your party selects?
- What will you do if you are not endorsed or supported but still want to run?
- What kind of message does your political party membership send to voters (rightly or wrongly)?
- Will your membership, support or endorsement translate into support (in kind or material) for your campaign?

Remember, you will need to consider making your party affiliation known when running for council. It is important to be up front and honest about this, especially once you are officially a candidate, whether or not you are officially endorsed by that party.

Choosing to run as an independent

Running for local government as an independent can also be complicated. There are different things to take into account.

Such as not having the same resources, access to volunteers and supporters or campaign funds if you choose not to be part of a bigger group. You may also struggle to get members of the community to recognise where you stand on important issues.

Some candidates, however, find being an independent is advantageous, giving them greater flexibility to make decisions on issues and to carry less political baggage from major and minor parties.

A few things to consider if you're thinking of standing as an independent:

- Do you have enough support and recognition in the community to get elected on your own?
- How will you make decisions on complex issues without political colleagues to turn to for advice and support?
- Are you prepared to be the deciding vote on an issue if opposing political parties are tied?
- What kind of message about yourself will you want to share with the community?

Your campaign team

Campaign teams can come in many shapes and sizes, formal and informal, but it is crucial that you have a team around you to provide support when you need it.

Although you might be tempted, you won't be able to run the campaign entirely by yourself.

A good campaign is more work than one person can handle. You need to be out there meeting voters, not stamping envelopes. The last thing you want to do is burn out - and as multi-talented and exceptional as you are, there will always be someone in your networks that can do something with more ease and finesse than you - use that to your advantage.

Who you choose to be part of the campaign team will be important to your election. As well as being people who are loyal to you and committed to your success and your vision, they need to be people who can quickly pick up particular skills, such as publicity and fundraising. If you have people with some experience of previous campaigns, that's an added bonus. Use their knowledge and their skills.



Campaign manager

Your campaign manager might be an organised friend or family member, someone with experience on political campaigns, or even a former or retiring councillor.

Most importantly, your campaign manager needs to be someone that you trust and can work with collaboratively.

You might be looking for someone with political nous, someone who is great at proofreading, or someone who is terrific at organising events.

They don't have to be able to do everything - but they should be able to take the reins when there is something else you need to do.

Other campaign roles

There is no hard and fast rule about how large or small your team should be.

You should build your team around the skills that they bring to the table.

For example, someone that is good at event planning might be an ideal fundraising or events coordinator. Someone who has experience managing a public Facebook or Instagram account might be a terrific social media manager.

It may also be useful for you to have someone on your team that can assist you by contacting community groups and businesses on your behalf.

Once you have put your team together, make sure you stay in regular contact with them.

They should have a clear idea of what you need them to do and that you appreciate their help.

Remember, you are only as good as your team - and you need them to get elected.

Budget

It's important that you plan what you are prepared to spend on your campaign before you begin to spend the money.

The budget should be based on your campaign plan and take into account what you need to spend, and anticipated income from donations or any other sources. The difference between how much you need to spend and how much income you can count on will then become your fundraising target.

You don't need to have thousands of dollars to be a successful candidate. Many successful candidates don't have any source of funding apart from their own money or that of their family.

Think about what you can source through friends, family and volunteers and what will you need to pay for. Sometimes that can be costs you would normally absorb yourself, such as extra petrol or travel costs, a new outfit, or additional haircut.

A campaign budget will vary for each campaign. It could depend on where you are standing and how many candidates are running. No matter how much or how little you think the campaign will cost, you will still need a budget.

You may want to assign a specific person in your campaign team the responsibility of fundraising or managing the campaign budget.

This is helpful when it comes to sourcing funding so that your time can be used for campaigning, and you can ensure you are meeting your reporting requirements set out by the Local Government Act.

Campaign donation returns

Election candidates are required under Victorian law to provide campaign donation returns - a record of donations or gifts, including in-kind support, given to a candidate during the campaign period.

The Local Government Inspectorate (LGI) supplies a form to enable candidates to fill in details of donations or gifts they have received above the \$500 threshold, as applicable under the Act.

Under the Local Government Act (2020), all candidates must submit their completed campaign donation return to the council's Chief Executive Officer by 5 December 2024, even if they were not elected and/or did not receive donations.

Failure to submit a return, or providing false or misleading information can result in prosecution and fines of more than \$11,850.

Make sure that you or a member of your campaign team keep records of any donations and gifts throughout the campaign, as this will make it much easier to file your return.

Key details to include:

- the full name and address of each person who made the gift or donation
- the date on which the gift or donation was given to you (the candidate)
- the exact value of the gift, and the form in which the gift was given (i.e. electronic transfer, cheque, cash etc)
- in the case of a gift in the form of goods or services, a description of the gift and its estimated market value.

"Build a strong network of volunteers, donors and advocates who believe in your candidacy and are willing to help spread your message"

**- Cr Seema Abdullah,
City of Greater Shepparton**



Sample Campaign Budget

| Campaign costs | \$ |
|---|-------------------|
| Nomination fee | \$250.00 |
| Photoshoot (basic) at discounted rate | \$750.00 |
| Brochures (x5000) incl. design DL | \$700.00 |
| Business cards (x500) | \$200.00 |
| A2 posters (x100) incl. laminating | \$450.00 |
| Corflutes (x50) | \$350.00 |
| Zip ties | \$20.00 |
| Website design, domain registration and hosting service | \$500.00 |
| Facebook advertising | \$500.00 |
| Basic phone + SIM card and initial phone credit (\$75 x 3 months) | \$150.00 |
| Snacks for volunteers | \$100.00 |
| Pizza night for volunteers | \$250.00 |
| TOTAL | \$4,222.00 |
| Campaign income | \$ |
| Personal investment | \$1500.00 |
| Donations from friends and family | \$500.00 |
| We need to raise: | \$2,220.00 |

Fundraising ideas



Time management

Managing your time wisely is crucial to running a successful campaign and to being an effective councillor.

Use the campaign timeline to draft a rough plan of the campaign preparation and activities you will need to undertake.

As soon as the nominations close, it is only a matter of days until votes will start to come in.

Although it is important to have the major tasks and milestones mapped out, it is just as important for you to manage your time effectively on a daily basis.

The amount of time that you dedicate to your campaign should increase as the date of the election grows closer, but it is up to you to decide what you can manage and how much assistance you will need from other people.

At the start of each week, write a list of tasks that you need to complete. Initially, you may only have one or two small things per week that can be achieved on your own. As the campaign progresses, your lists may get longer and require some help from volunteers.

Make sure that you identify the things that only you can do and the things that you can delegate to others on your team.

Time management tips

- Break down tasks into achievable steps.
- Break your spare time (your campaign time) into blocks.
- Goals should be SMART: specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and timely. Prioritise tasks by level of urgency.
- Set yourself a time limit to complete each task (or each step). Take a break or reward yourself when you finish each task.
- If you can delegate, do it. As the candidate there is always something useful you can be doing. Lighten your own load.
- Reflect regularly on how well you're achieving your goals and managing your time. If something's not working, change it and then reassess in a week or so.

Safety and wellbeing on the campaign

It is essential to take care of yourself to ensure that you make it through the campaign without any interruptions from illness, and that you are not shattered physically or mentally by the end. Here are some tips from experienced campaigners on how to survive and thrive through the campaign period:

- Allocate personal time (for yourself, family, friends, whatever is your sole feeding activity) and protect it ferociously. If you don't allocate personal time in the campaign it's a form of self-sabotage.
- Gather your "girl gang" – those friends who will centre you and support you, especially when the campaign is at its most difficult
- Find a mentor who will focus on your needs and be honest about your challenges with them
- Appoint a social media manager if you have someone who you trust. It will be a great time saver, filter some of the negativity you may experience, and prevent the "doom scrolling"
- Plan for campaign milestone treats for yourself and your team, remember to have fun
- Invest in self-care. Make time for your favourite form of self-care – a soak in a bath, a massage, meditation, exercise, art and craft or a special meal.
- Focus on your core values and reasons for running. When the campaign gets hard or challenging it helps to remember why you put yourself out there to represent and connect with community.



Campaign Actions

Candidate statement and key messages

A candidate statement is absolutely critical now that all council elections are conducted as postal ballots. Preparing your candidate statement will help you to refine your key messaging - so even if your election is by attendance, it is worth working on a candidate statement that you might want to promote on your website or put on your how-to-vote card.

Your statement of up to 200 words should state why you're running and why people should vote for you, and include:

- A brief outline of your policies, proposals, and party affiliations (if any)
- Your reasons for standing for council and what sets you apart
- An overview of your goals if elected
- Personal or community experiences as examples of what you believe in
- Information about connection with your area: how long you've lived there, community or business involvement

This is the pitch that the majority of voters will see. Ask for their vote.

Present and arrange your statement to attract the attention of voters. Use plain English and avoid using slang, lingo or colloquialisms.

Where possible, mention specific problems that you want to try and address in your area, but don't make promises you can't keep.

Try to persuade voters that your presence on council will ensure their voice is heard.

Emphasise your accessibility and skills and your pride in making your area a great place to live and visit.

You will need to include a high quality photo that appears well in black and white (this is how it will be printed). Smile and make sure voters can clearly see what you look like.

Ensure your authentic voice comes through - balance a professional tone with your heartfelt sentiments. Make sure the statement does not contain spelling or formatting errors. Ask a supporter to proof read it.

Double check and meet all VEC requirements about electoral material, including format and word limit for candidate statements in postal voting elections. There are very detailed guidelines on formatting and what content is allowed in the candidate handbook that the VEC produces.

Example Statement: Family and community

I care about the kind of world we will leave for our children. I believe that local Council is the one level of government that you can influence so I have made the decision to stand as a candidate in Cherry Lake Ward. In the words of Mahatma Ghandi: 'be the change you want to see in the world.'

As the mother of two school-aged children, and the daughter of ageing parents, I understand the needs, pressures and pleasures that come with family life. I have been a resident for 18 years, active as community campaigner for public transport, on Sports Club Committees, a School Council member and Council President and represented community on Council Advisory Committees.

In my professional life, I have worked in the fields of equal opportunity, training, policy and community service. I am not a member of any political party.



Example Statement: Representing local causes

I am standing as a candidate in Magpie Ward because our growing community needs to focus on better delivery of the basics. Properly maintained roads, responsible development of community infrastructure and quality services are my top priorities. We need a Council that embraces change, is responsive and puts the immediate needs of ratepayers first.

Born a local, I returned with my young family 15 years ago. My family has a long tradition of community involvement in the district. As a parent, small business owner, and with a background in education and land management, I am very aware of the diverse needs of our community.

I have been on kindergarten, netball club and school committees, as well as The Valley Landcare Group. I am a graduate of the Community Leadership Program.

If elected as an independent Councillor, I will listen, be accountable and work hard towards achieving the best results for our community.





Communication with voters

Although there is nothing that beats one on one communication or organic community engagement, ultimately you want to reach as many voters as you possibly can.

This is where mass forms of communication can be extremely effective.

You want to get your name, face and message out there, so that voters will think, "I know her - I like what she stands for," when they see your name on the ballot paper.

Some commonly used forms of communication include:

- local newspaper/s
- local radio (this is particularly effective in regional/rural areas - but you know your community and you know what they listen to)
- direct or unaddressed mail (these have very different costs and levels of effectiveness)
- public speeches or appearances
- social media - Facebook, X, Instagram, TikTok

Make sure that any media that you have to pay for (i.e. advertisements) are targeted to your community. There is no use in paying exorbitant amounts of money for a statewide publication that only a handful of voters in your ward will read.

You should always be asking yourself, "Where do people in my community get their information?"

If you know that the local paper hasn't been delivered in your neighbourhood for years, why would you advertise in it? Or if it is delivered, but immediately tossed in the recycling bin, why waste your money? But if you know that there is a publication - even if it is a small community newsletter that most people read cover to cover - then get in touch with the publishers and place a small ad, and try to get them to run an article about why you are standing.

Think about how you can get free, organic exposure.

If you have an interesting perspective, or a compelling story on any local issue, put it in a media release and send it to the local journo. Include quotes that get your message across in a succinct and effective manner. Tell the story, including key facts. You want to make it as appealing a proposition as possible - the less work the journalist has to do, the more likely they are to publish your story.

Social media is a (mostly) free, effective way of getting your message across. It is a great way to cut out the middle man and communicate directly with voters - but you need to find ways to target your community rather than shouting into the ether. The best way to do this is with content that is interesting to a local audience and geographically grounded. Write about visiting local cafes, restaurants, parks and sporting groups and tag them into your posts. Post articles that are relevant to local people and issues that users are likely to share - this expands your audience.

Facebook

These days, we use Facebook for everything from messaging friends and selling second-hand goods to following and interacting with politicians and public figures.

Facebook is a terrific tool as it integrates users' personal lives (their friends, family and colleagues) with news and information. Used correctly, it has great potential as a tool not only for you to broadcast information to voters, but to engage and connect with them on a more accessible level.

It's a way for you to get your message out, to engage and to build a profile.

Facebook is used by a wide demographic of people across generations and has functionality that enables you to target your campaigns to the geographic area and demographic profile you are trying reach.

Create a page

Make a public page (not a profile). Think about what you might want to name the page (you can always change this later) - you could just use your name, i.e. 'Firstname Lastname' or your name and ward that you are running for, i.e. 'Firstname Lastname for Council Ward'.

Facebook will ask you to choose a category for your page - you should select 'Community or Public Figure', and then 'Politician or Political Candidate'. Add a cover photo and a profile photo - make sure that these are not blurry and reflect the image that you want to present to the community.

Create engaging content

Post consistently. Aim for a post 2-3 times per week, and eventually, you'll want to post at least daily to maintain your presence. Use a variety of post types (e.g., photos, videos and text), subjects (e.g., news, quotes, calls to action and updates on projects or issues), and original and shared content (e.g., links to articles and individual's posts). Make your content local, topical and timely,

and respond promptly to any messages or comments. Facebook also has some great tips for you to engage with your community as a political candidate.

Consider Facebook advertising

Although you can get great results by inviting friends and asking them to share your page, Facebook advertising can be a cheap and easy way to promote your campaign. You can set a limit for spending (e.g. \$150) and set a target demographic for your ads - for example, women aged between 18-60 who live in your suburb. Your page will then be promoted to the audience that you've set and you will only be charged when these people 'like' your page.

Remember: if you don't feel comfortable managing your own Facebook page, ask for help from someone on your campaign team. Google is your friend - there are countless 'how to' articles online on how to effectively manage a public page.

Stay on message, be genuine and make sure you come across as a real person, not a robot. Proofread every post before publishing it - and have a friend who will message you straight away if there's a typo in any of your posts - you can always go back and edit.

Facebook is much more than just your public page though. Think back to your list of community groups that are active on Facebook and engage with them. Post about your campaign, ask for input on issues, and invite them to events.

You may want to reach out to the administrator of the Facebook group before you post to check that it is okay. This person might end up being a great ally for your campaign - as a community leader in their own right - and connect you with community groups on and offline.

X (formerly twitter)

X is a great rapid news platform, with its focus on word limited, snappy observations, analysis and commentary. In recent years, however, it has also become a site for polarised political debate and intense trolling.

X is not necessarily a useful campaign tool unless you already have an established profile. If this is the case, make sure you go through your tweets and delete anything that you wouldn't want a voter to see - keep in mind that it may still be archived somewhere on the internet.

Most people don't use X for local information - so don't expect voters to. Instead, use it to connect with existing networks or when there is a significant political story breaking and you want to be updated on it as quickly as possible.

Instagram

Instagram is a popular platform that is very visually dynamic. It is popular with political representatives, influencers and is increasingly the go-to if you want to share photos and images. Instagram users skew towards a younger demographic. While it's a great platform, it might not have the same reach as facebook.

If you already have an Instagram profile and are used to making visual content, adapting your media presence to promote your campaign activities will be easy. But if you don't have a profile or experience using it, don't be too worried about making a candidate profile.

It's not as effective in communicating directly with voters as Facebook is, but it is a good way to document your interactions with the community.

TikTok

TikTok is a platform designed for short video content. Unless you already have a TikTok presence and experience in producing video content, TikTok can be time-consuming without giving you the political connection you desire.

TikTok's audience is very much a young adult based platform, with 36% of its users aged between 18-24.

Safety and wellbeing online

A lot of political incivility today comes from engagement in social media, where trolling and harassment of representatives of the people with differing views from each other is undermining democracy and discouraging people from standing for public office.

Staying safe online means having a clear strategy for how you will manage aggressive opponents, baiting and bullying and

People who want to undermine you will go back through years of social media to find salacious statements or photos to share with media and constituents. Before you announce your candidacy, consider cleansing your personal social media of content that is likely to embarrass you, inflame people or encourage trolling and abuse.

Also take extra care to remove all identification which could lead people to your home address.

"If you are setting up social media separate your 'candidate persona' from your 'personal profile'. I can't stress this enough."

- Cr Marcia Timmers-Leitch,
Knox City Council

Traditional media

Local newspapers and journals are still excellent ways to reach people in your community and can help create and build social media following.

Make contact with your local newspapers - you should be able to find a contact email address and/or phone number online. e.g. Leader, Star Weekly, Weekly Review, and other regional newspapers.

Introduce yourself as a candidate. If you can organise to have coffee with the local reporter, make sure you come prepared with issues that you want to speak about, in line with your key messaging.

- Nothing is ever off the record - don't speak ill of other candidates, or say things you wouldn't want published.
- Frame your messages in a positive way - i.e. 'I want to change this,' rather than 'This is bad'.
- Be succinct
- Know your issue or subject
- Don't be afraid to say, "I will get back to you on that," - and then get back to them.
- If a journalist rings and wants a comment, ask them to send the question in an email - this will give you time to understand what it is they want and what you want to get across.

TIP: Get in touch with community radio stations to see if you can get a weekly segment during the campaign.



Direct voter contact

The best way to connect with voters is by meeting with members of your community face to face. Getting out and about in your local area – being seen, approachable and engaged – can do wonders for your campaign.

Direct voter contact is a proven and traditional way of increasing the chances of someone voting for you. A good in person experience with a candidate can have ripple effects, as the story of an encounter with you is shared beyond just the individual you talk to.

The more personal the technique of direct voter contact, the more persuasive and memorable it will be.

There are many ways to create opportunities for direct voter contact.

Street stalls

A street stall is a great way to increase your visibility and speak to voters about their concerns.

They are less challenging than doorknocking, but they still take some getting used to.

Set up outside the local shops, near school pick up or drop off, or anywhere else that there is a regular flow of foot traffic.

Make sure that you check council regulations - you may need a permit - and if you are set up outside a business, ask them for permission before you begin.

It is useful to have a small card table that you can put materials on and display a sign.

Alternatively, you can put together (or purchase) an 'a-frame' sign with your corflute on both sides.

The same advice applies as with doorknocking - prioritise safety, don't be pushy or argumentative, and never hesitate to say you'll get back to them.

A useful tactic in street stalling is to use a petition. Choose a local issue that you can lobby on, and print out a few pages of a petition - it is easy to look online for suitable formats. Think about who you want to petition - it might be the current council or

your state member of Parliament. This way, you have an easy 'call to action' and it is a great way to get phone numbers and email addresses.

Doorknocking

Doorknocking is one of the most common community campaigning activities, and when done by the candidate, certainly the most effective at changing voters' minds.

You or your supporters knock on the door of a voter and talk to them about the issues that are important to them. Do not door knock alone.

Leave some campaign literature with the resident - this is where flyers come in handy. If there is no one home, you can leave a flyer under the door (make sure it is not visible from the street). Ensure you have your contact details printed on the flyer so that they can look you up or get in touch.

In addition to building your profile, doorknocking may also help you to identify your supporters and even recruit enthusiastic voters as volunteers. You and your supporters might benefit from some training prior to going doorknocking.

This could include some role-play to practise what you will be saying, as well as some important considerations when it comes to safety.

To those who haven't done it before, doorknocking can be a daunting prospect. Once you jump in the deep end, however, you will be surprised at how enjoyable it can be to get out and speak to voters.

Get advice from others about your ward. When are residents likely to be home? Are certain areas better to doorknock than others? Consider asking your volunteers to doorknock their street.

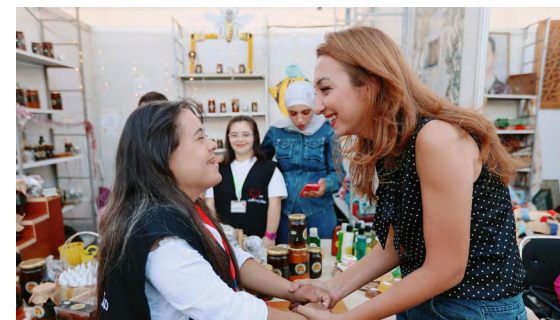
Remember that when you or your volunteers are out speaking to voters, your aim is to connect your values and vision with the values and concerns of residents. Tell your story - and stay on message.

- Doorknock in pairs at each door, or in pairs with one person on each side of the street.
- 'Do not knock' stickers do not apply to charities or political candidates - that said, you might want to use your discretion as to which doors you and your volunteers knock.
- Do not hesitate to say, "I'm not sure, but I'll get back to you,"
- Remind your volunteers that they can always say, "I'm not sure, I'm just a volunteer, but I can get the candidate to contact you."
- If a house looks unsafe, obstructed, there is a menacing dog or the front door can't be seen from the street - skip it. It is always better to be safe than sorry - you can leave a flyer in their letterbox.
- Never go into someone's house, no matter how friendly they may seem. You are on a tight schedule - they should understand this!
- Remind your volunteers to be respectful and considerate of residents. Once you knock on the door or ring the doorbell, take a step back so you're not in their face when they open the door.
- If someone says that they're busy or not interested, listen to them. Give them a flyer and wish them a good day.
- There is no use being pushy, insistent or argumentative. If someone is not going to vote for you, don't bother arguing with them. Be polite, understanding and cordial - win their respect if not their vote.
- Don't spend more than 5-10 minutes at any one door. If their concerns are complex, take notes and promise to call them at a later date.

Phone-banking

If you have a great telephone list of connections in the community, another efficient way to reach voters directly is by making direct phone calls. The advantage of phone banking is you can call people in your community from the comfort of your own home or from a campaign office, working methodically through a list of voters. Can be a good campaign tool if you have care responsibilities of an evening. You can also ask volunteers to make calls for you, as long as they are trained on your key messages.

The best time to do phone banking is between 5:00-8:00pm, when people are coming home from work, settled after school, preparing, serving or just after dinner.



Other direct voter contact ideas...

- Host a "Coffee with a candidate" event at a local café.
- Organise an online campaign event or Q&A
- Hand out promotional leaflets to commuters at train stations
- Staff a stall at significant community events, fetes and festivals.

Indirect voter contact

Letterboxing

Letterboxing is considered 'indirect' voter contact, because you are not necessarily having a conversation with voters as you deliver letters or flyers to the postbox.

This is a task that you should probably delegate to volunteers, unless you are letterboxing at a time that you are likely to catch residents at home and in their front yards.

Make sure any material has your contact details so that voters can look you up and get in touch.

Posters, corflutes and billboards

Getting your name and face out and about in the community is important. Posters and corflutes are cheap, but need volunteers to help place them in strategic locations and monitor if they are being removed or defaced. Billboards are expensive but are managed by others and are less likely to be damaged or stolen.

Make sure you comply with local laws about where you place election advertising material.

Safety and wellbeing on the campaign

As we have seen in recent months, women face risks of gendered violence in the home, on the streets and in the workplace. Women also face gendered violence while running for political office too. While VLGA research has shown most women find their experiences of running for local government positive, some women do experience online and other bullying, gendered aggressions, sexual and other forms of harassment. It's important you make a plan to keep safe, and that you know where and how to get support if you need it.

- Make a safety plan with your campaign team. It will support you and your volunteers.
- Discuss the possibilities of any activities that may be unsafe and assess the risk level (Low to High).
- Always campaign in a team. Never door knock or be on street stalls alone. Apart from the fact it is lonely campaigning by yourself, it is also difficult and unsafe if you are in a dangerous confrontation and you have no other support around you.
- If you experience gendered violence online or while face to face campaigning, make a complaint to Victoria Police and to the VEC. VicPol and the VEC have some powers to intervene if members of the public or other candidates are harassing or threatening you.

After the election campaign

Once the election campaign is over, and all the votes are counted, there are two outcomes to prepare for.

Now you're a Councillor

If you are fortunate enough to be elected, you will commence the process of being inducted into your new role. The State Government is in the process of introducing mandatory councillor induction training, to ensure all new councillors understand their roles and responsibilities and comply with the Code of Conduct.

The VLGA works with Councils to provide Councillor Training. If you are elected and would like VLGA's support with induction training, please reach out to us.

VLGA also has a useful resource - 'Now You're A Councillor' - available on the VLGA website, containing stories and advice from councillors past and present on what they have learned from their time in local government.

Missing out - Life after candidacy

Not everyone can get elected to public office. Representing the community is competitive and unpredictable. There may be many reasons why you didn't get elected. Don't take it personally.

If you enjoyed the experience and would like to try again, start right away by keeping records, building on connections made and paying close attention over the next four years to local council developments.

It's a big step putting yourself out there as a candidate and it can take some time to readjust to your everyday life. You may be disappointed or tired. Make sure you treat yourself kindly. Plan some time away with loved ones or treat yourself to your favourite form of self-care

Thanking volunteers and supporters

Don't forget to reach out and thank all the people who helped you during the campaign. This is a lovely way to stay grounded, humble and connected to the people who believed in you.





Cr Seema Abdullah, City of Greater Shepparton

Why did you stand for local government?

I stood for local government because I wanted to play a role in uniting the Council and the Community. At the time, there was a significant need to bridge gaps and foster a cohesive, trust-based relationship at various levels. My determination to build a connected, respectful, and understanding community was driven by a desire to work together to achieve greater socio-economic benefits for all.

I chose to run because I believed I could make a significant difference at the council table, contributing to important community decisions. My fresh approach, professional skills, decision-making experience, and enthusiasm to work hard for and with the community were key attributes I felt were needed at the Council, and I was confident I could offer them.

As a woman Councillor, did you experience any unique successes or challenges during your term?

The flexibility of the Councillor role allows for adjustments to accommodate various work-life balance situations.

Outside of Council duties, I participated in various committees and launched a platform for migrant women in Shepparton, all while balancing my roles as a mother and wife.

Challenges arose as well, particularly as a woman from an ethnic minority. I encountered unpleasant interactions and experienced bias and microaggressions that deeply hurt me.

Despite these challenges, I remained steadfast in upholding my principles of respect and courage.

Here are some strategies and insights I've gathered along the way:

- Be brave and courageous, and don't shy away from asking questions.
- In moments of difficult conversations and decisions, your values become your compass.
- While the councillor role may not be financially rewarding, the non-monetary rewards are abundant, including numerous professional development opportunities. For example, I utilised the Council's professional development budget to complete an AICD course and become a graduate.

Overall, navigating the role of a Councillor as a woman leader has been a journey filled with both successes and challenges, but it has been immensely rewarding to serve my community and make a positive impact.

Have you found being a woman councillor an advantage?

A letter was sent to me that was signed by 80 women from both culturally diverse and mainstream communities, expressing the need for regular, culturally appropriate, women-only safe spaces for healthy activities.

I ensured the community's feedback was heard, leading to the establishment of a regular fortnightly women-only swimming program at a council-run Aquatic facility in Shepparton. Without a woman's voice and seat at the table, this important initiative might not have been considered.

What is the most rewarding experience you have had?

I am both delighted and honoured to be the first Pakistani-born, first-generation migrant Muslim woman to serve as a Councillor, Mayor, and Deputy Mayor in Greater Shepparton. This accomplishment is likely a first not only in Victoria but also in Australia. I take pride in shattering numerous glass ceilings and overcoming barriers, inspiring other immigrants to recognise that participating in Australian politics is both attainable and significant.

One of the most fulfilling experiences was being part of the Council that declared a climate emergency in 2020. When the vote was tied, I used my casting vote as Mayor to support the declaration. It provided the leadership and strategic direction needed to aim for zero carbon by 2030, ensuring that the community is engaged in this journey.

“Despite these challenges, I remained steadfast in upholding my principles of respect and courage.”

"I take pride in shattering numerous glass ceilings and overcoming barriers, inspiring other immigrants to recognise that participating in Australian politics is both attainable and significant."

I also value the opportunity that the councillor role gave me to be elected as Mayor of Greater Shepparton. It was an immense joy, honour, and privilege to represent Greater Shepparton as Mayor at various levels during a particularly challenging COVID year.

What is your top campaign tip for women candidates?

- Focus on your own campaign rather than getting caught up in comparing yourself to others. Stay true to your values, goals, and unique strengths.
- Embrace a positive campaign strategy. Avoid engaging in negative tactics that undermine opponents or spread divisiveness. Instead, highlight your own vision, qualifications, and solutions for the betterment of the community.
- Listen to community members' concerns and aspirations. Engage in meaningful dialogue and demonstrate your commitment to representing their interests.
- Develop a clear and compelling message that resonates with voters. Articulate your vision for the future and how you plan to address pressing issues facing the community.
- Build a strong support network of volunteers, donors, and advocates who believe in your candidacy and are willing to help spread your message.
- Utilise social media and other digital platforms effectively to reach a

broader audience and engage with constituents.

- Be responsive to inquiries and feedback from online followers.

What advice do you have for a woman considering running for Council?

- Be specific and unwavering about your values, objectives, and beliefs. Clarity and conviction will resonate with voters.
- Select a few key issues that you are passionate about and consistently advocate for them across various platforms. This repetition helps reinforce your message and priorities.
- Don't shy away from getting tough questions. Be prepared. This shows your commitment to accountability and transparency, qualities valued in elected officials.
- For culturally diverse women candidates, be prepared for challenging questions related to your background. Unfortunately, some may have racist undertones. Stay resilient and respond confidently, focusing on your qualifications, experience, and vision for the community.
- When you are elected as a councillor, consider using your Professional Development (PD) budget for training. You can also hire a coach to guide and support you in your council role.



**Cr Susanne
Newton,
City of
Darebin**

Why did you stand for local government?

I stood for council in 2016 because I wanted to see gender equality on council. Darebin Council had two women and seven men at the time, and when I was elected we became a majority female council with six women and three men. In the eight years since every Darebin mayor has been female! I was nervous about putting myself out there publicly as a candidate – I wondered if I knew enough and was ready – but what inspired me was spending a year working in Kenya and Uganda with UN Women, working closely with female politicians. I saw their strength, power and conviction in the face of big challenges, and saw in them role models I could learn from.

As a woman Councillor, did you experience any unique successes or challenges during your term?

For me, it's gotten better over the years. When I was first elected my workplace did not like that I was now a Councillor; so I found a new job at LaTrobe University, where I worked part time (firstly .6 and later .8) for five years. It's often not easy to balance the councillor role with your job; particularly as there are times when council can be really stressful. I learnt over time thought that while some employers will see being a councillor as a hindrance, the right employer will see that what you bring to your job by being a councillor is often really valuable and complementary.

*“Stay strong,
hold your ground,
and don’t let it
all consume you!
Politics is one part
of life, but you need
a life outside politics
too!”*

Something I’ve managed to work out pretty well recently is juggling being a mum to a toddler and Mayor. I know that family responsibilities can be a hindrance to women councillors running again, or whether candidates decide to stand or not. For me, it was really important to role model being a mum of a toddler and a Mayor at the same time.

I became Deputy Mayor when my son was a month old, and Mayor when he was 13 months. He’s at child care Monday to Thursday, and on Fridays and weekends I’ll generally have him with me. That means he comes to a lot of community events with me.

Having him has made me more committed than ever to making decisions that are in the interest of not just the next generation, but further ahead.

I have absolutely experienced sexism and harassment in my role from other councillors and members of the public. I’m Mayor this year, but also the youngest councillor on Darebin.

Over the years I’ve developed a pretty thick skin, what I want is to pave the way for others; to do what I can in my role to address poor behaviour, and to have politics be a safe place for anyone who wants to participate. I feel strongly that things only change if good people opt in and stay in and create a better culture. I encourage you to stand if you want to be part of creating a better society – politics can be hard but it’s also one of the very best places to make long-lasting change for your community.

Have you found being a woman councillor an advantage?

It is so important to me that we have women in leadership positions. It breaks barriers and shows that politics is for women, too. I didn’t see that much growing up and never thought about running for election seriously until I was in my 30s. I think there are experiences women have that are different to men such as the safety we feel or don’t feel in different places, where lived experience can help inform our decision making. An example is the ‘Merri Merri Wayi’ project we are working on with Ceres and Merri-bek council which is a community-led collaboration to enable our natural and urban worlds to thrive along the Merri Creek. The collaboration is something really positive that followed something absolutely awful – an assault on a woman jogging along the creek. Making addressing gender based-violence and reaching gender equality as a council a priority is one reason why having women around the decision making table is crucial.

What is the most rewarding experience you have had?

I think it’s the small things and the big things. The small things are when you can make a difference in someone’s life and you know that you’ve been able to help them. The big things have been pretty amazing. We were the first government in the world to declare a climate emergency in 2016, kickstarting a worldwide movement that has become huge and put councils at the forefront of climate action for our communities worldwide. We were the second council nation wide after

Yarra to no longer celebrate on 26 January and have been able to push the nation forward on First Nations issues. I was really proud when an elder said in a committee meeting, ‘we trust Darebin Council and know we can work with them’. Knowing that your work has an impact has been the most meaningful thing for me.

What is your top campaign tip for women candidates?

Believe in yourself and trust your gut.

I felt so shy at times when I first ran but I think introverts can make very good politicians because to be a good representative you need to listen and respond to what your community is telling you. You probably have more to offer and are more ready than you might think!

*“I feel strongly
that things only
change if good
people opt in
and stay in and
create a better
culture.”*

What advice do you have for a woman considering running for Council?

It’s not for everyone. It is likely that there will be hard parts of the role and that you could experience harassment or trolling. Be prepared for how you will handle it but remember: when people are going after you it often says so much more about them than it does about you. Stay strong, hold your ground, and don’t let it all consume you! Politics is one part of life, but you need a life outside politics too!

*“The small things are
when you can make a
difference in someone’s
life and you know that
you’ve been able to
help them. The big
things have been pretty
amazing.”*



Cr Tina Samardzija, Monash City Council

Why did you stand for local government?

With two young children I found myself relying heavily on local services and infrastructure provided by councils such as playgrounds, parks, maternal child health centres and kindergartens. I wanted to improve local amenity, services and infrastructure for my community.

I also wanted council to do more to ensure our migrant community was included when planning and providing for these things. As the first-born child of migrant parents with limited English, I was responsible for translating and navigating for my family and I know how important it is for migrant families to feel part of our community.

As a lawyer and economist, I have also spent a great deal of my career advising ministers and policymakers and knew I had a lot of skills and experience to offer.

As a woman Councillor, did you experience any unique successes or challenges during your term?

It's important to recognise and accept you can't fire on all cylinders at once. As a mother of two young children, employee, councillor, marathon trainer, school councillor and helper, I've overlooked dress up days at school, missed training sessions, not prepared or read as much as I would like to. I learned quickly that prioritising my exercise made me perform better in my other roles.

Gender norms are incredibly stubborn, and women councillors face similar challenges to leaders everywhere. But going for and attaining those leadership roles will put you in a position where you can make changes to the community around you, physically and culturally, so that it is easier for all the women and girls who come after you.

Have you found being a woman councillor an advantage?

I'm proud to have continued Monash Council's strong focus on important local services and facilities for families such as kindergartens, playgrounds, and maternal and child health services.

Monash has a great network of local sport and active recreation infrastructure and I'm delighted to have launched the Monash Women's Sports Directory, a go-to resource for local women to see which Monash sporting clubs and organisations have women's and girl's teams and physical activities they can get involved in.

And I am so pleased to have introduced a greater focus on the 'maternal' part of our vital Maternal and Child Health appointments, with Monash Council now providing information for mums on how to stay active post-partum, including a link to our Women's Sports Directory.

What is the most rewarding experience you have had?

Coming from a migrant family, it was very special to be able to conduct citizenship ceremonies and welcome our newest citizens to our community. And I'm proud as Mayor to have introduced Monash Connects, a program that brings together people from different migrant backgrounds to share their stories, so we can learn from each other's experiences and connect migrant groups with each other. Growing up in this area, starting school with no English, migrant families like mine were not very common. To see such a transformation occur within my lifetime, that being born overseas or having parents born overseas is now the experience of the majority of people in Monash, is astonishing.

"I'm proud to have continued Monash Council's strong focus on important local services and facilities for families such as kindergartens, playgrounds, and maternal and child health services."

What is your top campaign tip for women candidates?

- Seek advice from a broad range of people, including those who work or have worked in local government. Attend information sessions and events. Read resources such as this one.
- Take as much as you can in. Then at some point, bite the bullet and start putting things into action.
- Set up a detailed campaign plan that includes the key dates, planned election material distribution and other campaign activities. Find people to assist you with bouncing off ideas as the campaign takes its course and to do the work such as letter boxing.
- When things feel difficult, reach out to your supporters and advisers, and always remember your values and why you are doing this.

What advice do you have for a woman considering running for Council?

Don't think of all the reasons not to run.

Understand yourself and why you want to run, and understand your community, so you can explain what you want to do and why they should vote for you.



Cr Emily Dimitriadis, City of Darebin

Why did you stand for local government?

Initially, I had never thought of running for council. I was working as an emergency department pharmacist, a human rights lawyer and a personal trainer in the months before I ran for the City of Darebin, so I had a lot on my plate. I put my hand up for local government because I care about where I live.

I felt Darebin needed to be a council that focuses on real issues affecting real people, and councillors needed to work with their constituents - not against them.

At the time, for many locals, COVID had meant that the jobs, goals and prospects they once had, simply no longer existed. The return to work, to school and to our "old lives" was much easier said than done.

We needed local solutions to help local businesses adapt to a COVID normal world;

Affordable and public childcare, reduced fees and a council that backed local artists and creatives; More parks and open space for our kids and families to enjoy closer to home; And stronger protections against creeping overdevelopment and destruction.

And if we were going to get through the pandemic, I believed we had to do it together, as a community. So I stood for local government. Because local government needs to be local and needs to support all community members, including the most vulnerable.

As a woman Councillor, did you experience any unique successes or challenges during your term?

As a first term councillor, it has been difficult to maintain a good work-life balance over the past four years. Initially, there was lots to learn, from understanding meeting rules to making informed planning decisions. Then I

fell pregnant, twice throughout my term, and life became a little more challenging with late night meetings, reading lengthy reports, while also taking care of a young family.

This meant that I couldn't attend all meetings in person (but thanks to COVID I could attend online) and that I had to focus my energy on important matters, such as delivering for the community.

And if I had my time over again, I would do it all the same. Because being a councillor sometimes means fighting for what you believe in, for the interests of your community.

Have you found being a woman councillor an advantage?

About a year ago, council had proposed to reduce the lease duration for our not-for-profit kindergartens and childcare centres to only 2 years while also increasing their rent and fees.

I was approached by many concerned parents, community members, kindergartens and childcare centres about this proposal and as a woman on council with young children, this issue was front and centre for me because I understood what they were going through.

My lived experience as a mother helped me understand the importance of stability and affordability in early childhood education.

After many months of persistent advocacy, the council backed down from the original 2-year contract with additional costs, and agreed to a 5-year contract with the option of 5 more years, with no changes to their terms and conditions. This outcome was a significant win for our community, providing stronger conditions that benefit current and future families, children, staff, and the broader community. My role as a woman on council, with firsthand understanding and empathy for the issues at hand, was instrumental in achieving this positive result.

What is the most rewarding experience you have had?

I remember receiving a call from a distressed mother who was upset that her 5 year old son could not play in his local playground, because he was in a wheelchair.

Before she contacted me as her local councillor, she had been asking council to install an all-abilities swing for over a year and she stated that she was told to drive her son to an all-abilities park a few kilometers away and use the swing there.

I immediately raised a motion and advocated for funds to be available in the budget to install an all-abilities swing at the local park. The mother also came to speak to all councillors about making the playground more accessible and shared her story about the importance of play for all our local children.

Eventually the motion passed and seeing the mother's eyes light up when she heard the news was heartwarming. As a councillor, achieving that outcome in order to help another, is most rewarding.

If I had my time over again, I would do it all the same. Because being a councillor sometimes means fighting for what you believe in, for the interests of your community."

“Be authentic and true to yourself. It’s an incredible privilege to be elected to represent your community”

What is your top campaign tip for women candidates?

You can do it! Don’t let negativity wear you down. Push through, stay true to your values and be the best representative for your community.

What advice do you have for a woman considering running for Council?

Be authentic and true to yourself. It’s an incredible privilege to be elected to represent your community as a councillor, but it’s essential to remember that being on council is what you make of it.

I’ve chosen to spend my time and energy helping others and the community I love. At the end of my first term, I can proudly say that I have worked really hard to achieve positive outcomes for my community.

“Local government needs to be local and needs to support all community members, including the most vulnerable.”



**Cr Marcia Timmers-Leitch,
Knox City Council**

Why did you stand for local government?

My pathway to Council began with serving my community on Playgroup and Kindergarten committees. I am a Mum with 3 children and being on volunteer committees was a great way to meet other families and use my professional skills in a valuable way. From there I joined Council’s Early Years Advisory Committee.

In 2015, I was president of my son’s three year old kinder, when we were advised that due to Federal Government reform, we were no longer able to use a Council building to run our sessions. I spent two years leading a team of parent volunteers to relocate, rebrand and relaunch a dedicated three year old Kinder for our kids. The sense of pride and achievement was almost indescribable.

So leading into the 2016 elections, when I was tapped on the shoulder to run I thought, “Why not!”

Whilst I came second in 2016, I was successful in my ward’s 2019 bi-election and have been a Councillor ever since.

As a woman Councillor, did you experience any unique successes or challenges during your term?

Geoff and I run our own business, a Jim’s Mowing franchise, and that has allowed us to work flexibly and share the parenting responsibilities.

Knox is set up to for night-time meetings, so I would handle the daytime parenting and Geoff be on point in the evenings.

When the kids were little they would often come with me to Council events which was a great introduction to new experiences, ideas and leadership modelling.

Later in my term I worked part-time. Carving out council versus non-council days was essential for setting boundaries for both workplaces.

“As women, we are told that we can do it all and sometimes need reminding that we don’t have to do it all.”

My greatest successes have been stepping into the leadership roles. In 2019 I was elected Deputy Mayor and was part of Knox’s first ever female Mayor/Deputy Mayor team. Being elected Mayor in 2022/23 was a great privilege and an experience I will never forget.

The biggest challenge is finding that balance. As women, we are told that we can do it all and sometimes need reminding that we don’t have to do it all. Setting boundaries and prioritising family within the mix is super important especially as the kids get older.

Have you found being a woman councillor an advantage?

Knox City Council has eight female and one male councillor which is a different mix to many councils.

Prior to 2020, the council was male dominated (6/3). It had a reputation for being a boys club with a toxic culture. The community demonstrated a strong desire for change with a clear statement about women representation on council.

This current council has made some great strides forward with a more inclusive culture and endorsing significant policy change.

What is the most rewarding experience you have had?

There are the local playgrounds upgraded, the support to get Knox’s first Park Run established and my biggest achievement, the successful delivery of a forever home for the Knox Hockey Club. The club had been in limbo on a series of temporary sites for 50 years and the advocacy road was bumpy. After exploring co-location with other

municipalities, multiple sites within Knox and an eventual relocation of existing tenants prior to securing \$3.5m funding, the day we finally opened their brand new pitch was a great day.

What is your top campaign tip for women candidates?

- Get out and talk to people. Let your voters know who you are and what you stand for. Go to where the people are to understand what they want in their representative at council.
- Be brave. Stand out at local shopping centres, make appointments with local sporting clubs and community groups, door knock and speak with residents. Still to this day, six years later, people say to me “I remember when you door knocked my house”
- Separate your life now and create boundaries. If you are setting up social media then separate your “Candidate persona” from your “Personal profile”. I can’t stress this enough. Keep your personal profile and lock down the security. Start a new profile with your candidate name and then let that persona run your candidate page. This will be even more important if you get elected.
- Be kind to yourself. Surround yourself with a team who will support you and say yes when people offer to help. Sleep. Eat nutrition. Enjoy the ride.

What advice do you have for a woman considering running for Council?

- Do your homework. Understand the realities of the role.
- Attend council meetings, review council meeting papers to understand the quantum of reading, participate in a community consultation such as the Council Plan and reach out to existing Councillors to assess the culture. Make sure you go in eyes open before you nominate.
- Understand that Councillors do not have independent decision making power and are not an extension of Customer Service. You will have no power to install a footpath or remove a street tree. If that is the reason you want to stand, this is not the job for you.
- Bring your authentic self and be human. People want to know that their representative is approachable and will listen.

“Be kind to yourself. Surround yourself with a team who will support you and say yes when people offer to help. Sleep. Eat nutrition. Enjoy the ride.”

“Get out and talk to people. Let your voters know who you are and what you stand for”



Cr Denise Massoud, City of Whitehorse

Why did you stand for local government?

I wanted to stand for local government because I was a volunteer across several community organisations – kindergarten and primary school, Secretary and Girls coordinator for a large Basketball Club, volunteer and committee member for a Parkland Advisory Committee, volunteer teacher for an Environmental Education program servicing local schools and community.

As a woman Councillor, did you experience any unique successes or challenges during your term?

When elected to Council I chose to resign from any volunteering roles so that I could not be considered in conflict when making decisions in the Council. That was respected and understood by my community.

This gave me the time and opportunity to connect with many more community groups and to truly value the diversity of our volunteers and their commitment.

Volunteers are the essential “fabric” which holds the community together and strengthens networks and relationships which empower the community to achieve great things in partnership with Council.

Although working fulltime when elected, I chose to resign in my second year on Council due to the need to care for my husband as he traversed his own medical journey which had a great outcome thankfully after some years.

Council does require some time commitment which is mostly outside of business hours in metro councils, except if Mayor which has a much greater level of commitment.

Have you found being a woman councillor an advantage?

In 2016-2017 I was Mayor and chose to do extensive advocacy for female change facilities as the rise in popularity of women playing sports which were previously seen as traditionally male pursuits. I am very proud that we got change happening quickly with most pavilions now redeveloped. I also advocated strongly for lifts to support train users with mobility issues and accessibility and DDA compliance has become an important aspect for construction projects especially public toilet access.

What is the most rewarding experience you have had?

Having been a councillor for 12 years, my journey has been interesting and always developing. I am proud to have been Mayor twice and also Deputy Mayor. I have contributed to the Board of VLGA and am the current President. All these roles have enabled my learnings and successful advocacy. Council committees cover a vast range of topics and I have benefited from participation with community members on many including Audit and Risk, Environmental Sustainability, Disability, Reconciliation, Visual Arts, Business Group, CEO Employment, Domestic Animals, Waste, Sport and Recreation and more.

The local government sector is both interesting and at times challenged by state and federal government policies. The importance of good governance underpins a functional council that operates respectfully and VLGA directly supports councils in achieving this. Training is essential for a councillor to develop in their role.

What is your top campaign tip for women candidates?

Be mindful that a majority of votes is needed at a Council meeting to pass a motion. No single councillor can guarantee any particular project. It is about advocacy to your councillor colleagues to get support.

Do not campaign on a single issue which may not happen if support is not achieved in the Council Chamber.

Do listen to your community and commit to advocacy on their behalf. I think more listening to your community rather than talking at them is a positive path. Let them know you are representing them and what they hope for.

What advice do you have for a woman considering running for Council?

Sometimes you may need to explain an outcome which is less palatable for some in your community. If you have fully understood the information and are committed to the decision being in the best interests of the whole community you will find the majority will understand. Have the resilience to have difficult conversations at times. You will be respected for your honesty.

“I think more listening to your community rather than talking at them is a positive path. Let them know you are representing them and what they hope for.”

Other resources



The VLGA has a series of resources designed to support candidates from a diverse range of backgrounds on their election journey.

Represent supports culturally diverse Victorians considering running for local government.

Rainbow Resource supports Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer Diversity and Inclusion in Local Government.

Your Campaign Toolkit is a guide for anyone considering running for local government, giving you the information to empower you on your candidacy journey.

For a copy of these resources, contact the VLGA or visit our website at www.vlga.org.au.

VLGA Connect



The Victorian Local Governance Association provides key information to the local government sector and the Victorian community through VLGA Connect including *The Governance Update*, *In Conversation*, *Local Leaders* and Live Panels.

As the national broadcaster on all things local government, the VLGA brings together key agency leaders to speak to matters relevant to the local government sector and the Victorian community. Available via YouTube or, wherever you get your podcasts.



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