

VLGA

Victorian
Local Governance
Association

FastTrack 2023

Civility in Local Government

Leadership Development Program

Friday 17 November 2023

RACV Club, Melbourne

The VLGA acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Victoria and recognises their continuing connection to land, waters, and community.

We pay our respects to the Traditional Custodians, their Elders past, present and future, and to their cultures.

Welcome to FastTrack

Civility in Local Government

Divisiveness and partisanship have become increasingly prevalent in local government. Councils throughout the state are looking for tools to address this issue in a way that is authentic and effective. They are looking for tools to assist in breaking the cycle of incivility in public meetings.

Our democracy relies on representative participation and open and transparent meetings. However, incivility and negative discourse threaten to weaken this foundation. As a result, local officials and staff must prioritise maintaining public access and participation while ensuring the safety of elected officials, staff, and community members.

Negative comments in public meetings can derail and prolong council meetings, impacting the council's ability to conduct the public's business. Incivility in public service can also affect a city's ability to attract and retain talent, ultimately impacting the community service level. Some fear that continued negative discourse could discourage broad community engagement with local governments.

A review into the culture of local councils was commissioned in 2022. An Interim Report has made significant findings about the support infrastructure required to improve councillor behaviour and ethics, promote outstanding and diverse leadership, and cause structural sector-wide improvements.

To improve civil discourse, local governments must act. Elected leaders must model the behaviour they expect from the community and prioritise strengthening relationships and building trust.

The Victorian Local Governance Association (VLGA) supports the work being undertaken by Local Government Victoria to map and develop a Sector Plan to improve Local Government culture and the role the VLGA has in it,

With the local government elections in October 2024, action is required to support behaviour change among current councillors and to promote good governance and ethics in prospective councillors.

President's Message

It is my pleasure to extend a warm welcome to all of you, as we gather for the VLGA's signature program, FastTrack, to unpack the theme 'Civility in Local Government.' In my role as President of the VLGA, I am honoured to host this event, which brings together some of the most recognised thought leaders in Local Government. I am equally delighted to welcome The Honourable Melissa Horne, Minister for Local Government.

We recognise that the journey of working in local government can, at times, be a challenging one. Our daily endeavours revolve around serving communities, and in the face of unrest, it can be testing to navigate these waters while maintaining a positive outlook. This is why today's theme holds such relevance. The concepts that will be explored during this program strike at the core of our work and shed light on how we can best traverse the challenges, emerging on the other side stronger and more resilient. Serving as a councillor is indeed a remarkable calling, and together, let us unite, listen, and learn from one another.

Today's lineup features expert speakers in their respective fields who will generously share their knowledge and engage in thought provoking discussions. We encourage you to take full advantage of this unique opportunity to ask questions and learn. The agenda is nothing short of exciting, culminating in a workshop led by Monique Toohey, guiding us in the exploration of 'Cultural Intelligence in Leadership: The Psychology of Doing Difference Well.'

I have no doubt that each of you will leave this conference with a renewed sense of energy, inspiration, and motivation.

I encourage you to actively engage with your fellow attendees, to exchange experiences, and to share insights. The collective wisdom in this room is a valuable resource for all of us.

Once again, I extend my sincere welcome to every one of you. I eagerly look forward to witnessing the incredible achievements that will undoubtedly emerge from FastTrack.

Warm regards

Cr. Denise Massoud

President, Victorian Local Governance Association



CEO's Message

I am thrilled to extend a welcome to every one of you as we gather for the final FastTrack program of 2023. It's not just a program, but also a celebration of your remarkable journey over the past four-years as councillors, and an occasion to wish you all the very best as you prepare for the upcoming 2024 council elections.

FastTrack provides the space for us to unite, share our wealth of knowledge and insights, and collaborate on groundbreaking solutions to the myriad of challenges confronting our sector.

Throughout the day, we'll have the opportunity to listen to esteemed experts, engaging in thought-provoking discussions, and actively participating in an interactive workshop designed to ignite our imaginations and push the boundaries of what we once considered attainable.

FastTrack provides an invaluable platform for councillors to learn about practices and groundbreaking approaches. It's a place where ideas flow freely, infusing our decision-making processes with fresh perspectives and invaluable insights.

I encourage all of you to keep your minds open, to actively listen and learn from your fellow attendees, and to seize every opportunity for engagement that we've thoughtfully designed. This is your moment to acquire fresh perspectives, hone new skills, and cultivate relationships that may very well lead to exciting opportunities down the road.

I want to express my deep gratitude to our esteemed panel members and Chris Eddy, whose tireless contributions have been instrumental in making this event a reality. We are indebted to them for their dedication to advancing our collective aspirations.

Kathryn Arndt
Chief Executive Officer



FastTrack 2023

Civility in Local Government Agenda

9.00 am	Arrival
9:30 am	Welcome <i>Chris Eddy, MC</i>
9:35 am	Acknowledgment of Country Welcome Address <i>Cr Denise Massoud, President, Victorian Local Governance Association</i>
9.45 am - 11.00 am	Session 1: Managing Difficult Conversations with Constituents and Colleagues: Depolarising From Within Panellists: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cr Nicholas Reece, Deputy Lord Mayor, City of Melbourne• Melissa Scadden, Managing Partner Justitia Lawyers & Consultants• Lydia Khalil, Senior Research Fellow, Deakin University & Project Director, Lowy Institute
11.00 am	Morning Tea
11.30 am - 12.00 pm	Ministerial Address <i>Minister for Local Government, The Hon. Melissa Horne</i>
12.10 pm	Group Photo
12.30 - 1.30 pm	Lunch
1.30 - 2.45 pm	Session 2: Strategies to Improve Civil Discourse: Breaking the Cycle: Steps for Reducing Negative Discourse and Incivility in Public Meetings Panellists: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dr Josh Roose, Associate Professor, Alfred Deakin Institute for Citizenship & Globalisation• Sheena Frost, Chief Executive Officer, Hume City Council• Emily Keogh, Executive Manager Corporate Affairs, Wyndham City Council
2.45 - 3.00 pm	Break
3.00- 4.30 pm	Session 3 Workshop: Cultural Intelligence in Leadership: The Psychology of Doing Difference Well Facilitator: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Monique Toohy, Psychologist and Certified Cultural Intelligence (CQ) advisor
4.45 pm	Closing Address <i>Kathryn Arndt, Chief Executive Officer, Victorian Local Governance Association</i>
5 pm to 6 pm	Networking and Drinks

Ministerial Address

The Hon. Melissa Horne
Minister for Local Government



Melissa Horne has worked in senior levels of government and the corporate sector. She has extensive experience in communications and stakeholder relations, particularly in the transport sector. Her experience also includes community advocacy work including helping secure a new public high school in the inner west.

As the daughter of two schoolteachers, Melissa's belief in the values of public service and education influenced her to lead a successful grassroots campaign for a new public secondary school in the inner west. Her experience on this campaign led Melissa to consider the role she could play in advocating for change within Parliament.

The priorities Melissa has for her community are making sure all kids have access to a world class education, improving air quality in the inner west, increasing and expanding green spaces in our suburbs, and supporting good, local jobs.

Melissa's vision for Victoria's future is that it continues to be a state known for progressive policy.

The areas of public policy that she is most passionate about are education, reforming our mental health system and mitigating the effects of climate change.

Session 1

Managing Difficult Conversations with Constituents and Colleagues

Depolarising From Within

Panellists

Cr Nicholas Reece

Deputy Lord Mayor, City of Melbourne



Cr Nicholas Reece was elected Deputy Lord Mayor in November 2020, after having previously been elected Councillor in the City of Melbourne in 2016.

Nick is portfolio lead for City Planning and deputy lead for Finance, Governance and Risk and Heritage portfolios.

Nick is also Council's representative on the following committees and bodies: Committee for Melbourne, Melbourne Sustainable Society Institute Advisory Board.

Nick is a senior executive at the University of Melbourne and holds the academic position of principal fellow at the Melbourne School of Government.

Nick has considerable experience in government and policymaking, having worked as a senior adviser to Prime Minister Julia Gillard and Victorian premiers Steve Bracks and John Brumby. Nick has also served as Secretary of the Australian Labor Party in Victoria.

Nick is a founder and former chairman of global men's health charity Movember. Founded in Melbourne, almost 10 million people have participated in Movember and raised almost (AUD) \$1.5 billion for prostate cancer and men's mental health. For over 10 years, Nick was a director for the street newspaper The Big Issue, Australia's most successful social enterprise for homeless and marginalised people.

Nick is married and has three daughters who attend school in Melbourne.

Lydia Khalil

Senior Research Fellow, Deakin University & Project Director, Lowy Institute



Lydia is a Research Fellow on Transnational Challenges at the Lowy Institute. She manages the Digital Threats to Democracy Project.

Lydia has spent her career focusing on the intersection between governance, technology, and security. She has a broad range of policy, research, and private sector experience. She has a professional background in international relations, national security, and strategic intelligence analysis, focusing on terrorism and other forms of political violence.

Lydia is also a Senior Research Fellow at Deakin University's Alfred Deakin Institute, where she is the co-convenor of the Addressing Violent Extremism and Radicalisation to Terrorism (AVERT) Research Network. Lydia is a research member of the Centre for Resilient and Inclusive Societies (CRIS) where she leads the Crisis Points project on the intersection of disasters, extremism, and disinformation. She serves as an editorial board member of the academic journal *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*.

Lydia has held previous appointments as an international affairs fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations in New York, the Australian Strategic Policy Institute and Macquarie University. She has previously served as an adviser with the US Department of Defence and as a senior policy and intelligence adviser to the Boston Police Department. She has also been a senior counter-terrorism and intelligence analyst for the New York Police Department.

Lydia is a frequent media commentator and has published widely in both popular and academic publications on her areas of expertise. She holds a BA in International Relations from Boston College and a master's in international security from Georgetown University.

She is the author of the book *Rise of the Extreme Right: The New Global Extremism and the Threat to Democracy* (Penguin, 2022).

Melissa Scadden

Managing Partner, Justitia Lawyers & Consultants



Melissa practices in workplace, industrial relations and employment law. She has a particular interest in assisting clients to take a proactive approach to building an exceptional workplace, rather than just mitigating risks when problems arise.

Melissa has experience working with large private sector clients across various industries including education, local government, healthcare, professional services, construction and labour hire. She has been involved in large projects and matters including High Court litigation, business restructures and complex workplace investigations. She has also advised employers on a range of employment-related matters, including post-employment restraints, misconduct and performance management, termination of employment (including negotiated settlements), discrimination and FWC proceedings. She has a keen interest in alternative dispute resolution, is a trained mediator and regularly conducts workplace training.

Session 2

Strategies to Improve Civil Discourse

Breaking the Cycle: Steps for Reducing Negative Discourse and Incivility in Public Meetings

Panellists

Dr Josh Roose

Associate Professor, Alfred Deakin Institute for Citizenship & Globalisation



Dr Josh Roose is an Associate Professor at the Alfred Deakin Institute Melbourne. He gained his PhD in Political Science from the Asia Institute at the University of Melbourne in 2012.

Josh has served on several advisory panels to the State and Federal Governments on Violent Extremism. He has conducted fieldwork across the United States including New York, Pennsylvania and Michigan and has been a visiting scholar at the Graduate Centre, City University of New York, New York University and Harvard Law School.

In 2019 Josh was awarded a BYU ICLRS-Oxford Young Scholars Fellowship in Religion and the Rule of Law and with colleagues currently holds two ARC Discovery Projects exploring the Australian Far Right and Anti-women online actors.

His recent books include *The New Demagogues: Religion, Masculinity and the New Populism* (2020) and *Masculinity and Violent Extremism* (2022).

Sheena Frost

Chief Executive Officer, Hume City Council



Sheena Frost joined Hume City Council as CEO in July 2021. In her 16-year career in local government, she has developed extensive experience across both service delivery and corporate services functions. She has a background in leading change programs to uplift capabilities within organisations to deliver improved service outcomes to the community.

She has formal qualifications in Communication and Workplace Coaching and is a graduate of the Australian Institute of Company Directors.

As CEO, Sheena is responsible for the day-to-day running of Hume City Council and, in particular, implementing Council decisions, providing timely advice to Council, and achieving Council's goals in accordance with the Council Plan and approved budget.

Emily Keogh

Executive Manager Corporate Affairs, Wyndham City Council



With over two decades of experience in the local government sector, Emily brings the precision of a qualified lawyer with the insightful lens of a journalist. As a governance specialist, she's committed to fostering transparency, integrity, and a culture of good governance.

Emily is currently the Executive Manager of Corporate Affairs at Wyndham City Council and is responsible for the areas of Governance, Risk Management, Legal Services, Communications, Marketing and Tourism. Emily has previously managed Customer Service and Major Events and this diverse experience provides a unique platform from which to support elected members in their decision making. Emily holds a Degree in both Communications and Law and held a board position of a not-for-profit Aged Care facility for almost a decade. Emily has extensive experience in managing complex governance related matters, working with various integrity and Governance agencies to achieve best practice operations in corporate governance.

Session 3

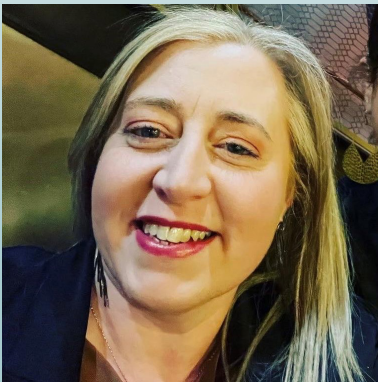
Cultural Intelligence in Leadership

The Psychology of Doing Difference Well

Facilitator

Monique Toohey

Certified Cultural Intelligence (CQ) Advisor & Psychologist



Monique is a Certified Cultural Intelligence (CQ) advisor working across government, corporate & community sectors in Australia, Indonesia, and Malaysia.

She is also a psychologist in private practice and lectures in Cross-Cultural Counselling at the Australian Catholic University.

She is a current committee member of the Psychology & Culture Interest Group for the Australian Psychological Society. For the last 20 years, she has worked with over 40 different Muslim organisations, including appointment as a board member to the Islamic Council of Victoria in 2014 & 2015.

Monique is the Author of the book 'Without You: Rising above the Impact of an abusive relationship' and in 2015 was the recipient of the International Women's Day 'Honouring Women in Moreland Awards' for her capacity-building work with women. She has been seen on ABC TV, Lateline, featured in The Australian, The Age, The Herald-Sun, ABC & 3AW radio.

Moderator

Chris Eddy



Chris Eddy is a 40 year veteran of local government and media. He has been a Council and peak body CEO, an administrator at the City of Whittlesea, and a consultant working with councils on CEO performance review processes and as an independent audit and risk committee member.

Chris now presents Australia's #1 local government news podcast, the Local Government News Roundup, as well as the popular VLGA Connect series of interviews, panels and the weekly TGU (The Governance Update).

VLGA Connect



The Victorian Local Governance Association provides key information to the local government sector and the Victorian community through our online and podcast interview series VLGA Connect, which is hosted by Chris Eddy on behalf of the VLGA.

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 through this online interview series. The series to date has over 400 episodes.

The VLGA Connect Series which consists of “The Governance Update”, “In Conversation”, “Local Leaders” and “Live Panels” programs, is distributed through our YouTube channel and is downloaded as a podcast on all major podcasting platforms. It has become a sought-after resource for the sector and the broader community – as is the national LG News Roundup program proudly sponsored by the VLGA.



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