

Intergovernmental Relations and Advocacy Framework

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Contents

Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners.....	3
Commitment to Strategic Leadership.....	4
Purpose of the Framework	5
Our role.....	6
Our audience.....	7
Our partnerships are essential.....	8
Key principles.....	9
1. Partnerships and collaboration.....	9
2. Transparency	9
3. Clarity.....	9
4. Consistency.....	9
5. Evidence-based.....	9
6. Solutions-focused	9
7. Equity of access	9
8. Proactive	9
9. Respectfully pan-partisan	9
10. Integrity.....	9
Embracing Alignment	10
Our advocacy priorities.....	11
State Council – The sector’s voice.....	12
How we advocate	13

Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners

The Municipal Association of Victoria acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Victoria, and recognise their continuing connection to lands, waters, and culture. We pay our respect to Elders past and present who carry the memories, traditions, cultures, and aspirations of First Peoples, and who forge the path ahead for emerging leaders.

We support local government's commitment to strengthen relationships with Victoria's First peoples communities and for it to encourage greater unity, knowledge, cultural awareness, and respect for the first occupants of our land — through its strong community links and local representation.

Commitment to Strategic Leadership

No one understands the challenges and opportunities facing Victoria in the 21st century better than local councils.

Councils right across Victoria work tirelessly to support and deliver outcomes for their communities. Equipped with a deep understanding of their community which only councils, as the closest level of government, can ever truly develop, they have a responsibility to plan, provide, and advocate for services, policies and infrastructure which impact the lives of every single person.

The Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) is uniquely positioned to partner with and support councils. As the legislated peak body for local government in Victoria it is the MAV's role to empower and provide a voice to all 79 councils across the State.

The *Municipal Association of Victoria Strategic Plan: Shaping our Future 2024-2027* identified the ten priorities which will shape and inform the MAV for the next four years. In developing an Intergovernmental Relations and Advocacy Framework the MAV is demonstrating and outlining how, through its advocacy, it will fulfill this mission.

This Intergovernmental Relations and Advocacy Framework is a commitment to being a leader, to driving outcomes through being an influencer advocate, and to amplifying the impact which local government in Victoria has.

This Framework defines how the MAV intends to demonstrate strategic leadership in how it advocates in partnership with local governments right across the state. By outlining the principles and practices which will be employed, this is a roadmap for how the MAV will advocate to support councils in their work and to deliver a more sustainable, resilient, and prosperous future.

Purpose of the Framework

The MAV's Intergovernmental Relations and Advocacy Framework ("the Framework") outlines how the MAV will advocate, including the key principles and objectives which support the MAV in completing this role.

Advocacy is more than campaigns; it is a strategic and considered approach to influencing outcomes which align with an organisation's objects. It requires structure, consistency, and clarity and relies upon building a partnership between the advocate and the decision maker.

This Framework shows an organization-wide advocacy approach which positions the MAV to build and maintain relationships with Governments and other decision makers based on trust, communication, and mutual respect.

At the Framework's core are the principles the MAV will advocate on. Councils can expect that this will be how we work to best represent their voice, and decision makers should be prepared that this will be the position from which we approach our advocacy.

Developing and implementing the Framework is action 2.3 in the MAV's annual action plan, contributing towards the delivery of the MAV's 10 strategic directions. By implementing the Framework, the MAV is taking tangible and proactive steps towards being a stronger advocate for local government and being better positioned to amplify the voice of councils within Victoria.

The Framework was developed in consultation with the Victorian local government sector and is informed by best-practice intergovernmental relations and advocacy.

Our role

As the legislated peak body for local government in Victoria the MAV plays a leading role in advocating for, and in partnership with the sector.

The MAV Strategic Plan 2024-2027 outlined the roles the MAV plays:

Leader:

We will seek to understand the underlying values of councils and the needs and aspirations of their communities and invest in building local capacity and leadership.

Service provider:

We will provide a range of projects, programs, and services for the benefit of the local government sector to create more innovative, resilient, and inclusive communities.

Amplify impact:

We will provide timely, accurate, inclusive, and inspiring information to the target audiences of our programs, projects, and services, and engage them in conversation about the work we are doing.

Influencer advocate:

We will act as an advocate on behalf of our sector, giving voice to their communities' needs and aspirations. We will call on other levels of government and industry for policy and regulatory reform, as well as changes to service provision for the benefit of the local government sector and its communities.

Networker:

We will engage in local, state, national, and global networks to share and develop expertise in urban, regional, and rural issues.

Capacity builder:

We will work with councils and their communities and related organisations, building connections and strengthening their capacity to respond to their needs and not just face the future, but help shape it.

Thought leader:

We will commission and publish thought leadership and research on urban, regional, economic, social, environmental, and cultural issues and solutions relevant to the sector and our communities.

Partner:

We will embed partnership in all our initiatives, prioritising co-design and collaboration

Planner:

We will use our professional expertise in policy, research, planning, and program and service design to undertake research, provide information and collaborate with councils, communities, and stakeholders to develop and evaluate ways to resolve identified issues.

Convener and facilitator:

We will bring together all the forces essential for the success of the local government sector, including governments, civil society, industry, and academia to deliver outcomes with and for our communities.

Our audience

The Framework informs and directs engagement which targets the following audiences:

- State and Federal Governments including Ministers and their staff;
- State and Federal Members of Parliament;
- State and Federal Departments and their officers; and
- Other relevant State and Federal Government decision makers.

The MAV advocates in partnership with or on behalf of Victorian local governments. Engagement with the local government sector and other sector partners is established in the MAV's Engagement Strategy.

Our partnerships are essential

Local government exists within a broad and complex environment and the MAV, therefore, cannot advocate alone. Building and utilizing partnerships is essential to effective and impactful advocacy. The MAV must demonstrate that the positions upon which we advocate are not ours alone but are common to a broad range of stakeholders.

Success in implementing this Framework places valuing and empowering partnerships as an essential priority.

In advocacy our partners could include, but are not limited to:

- The Victorian local government sector;
- The Australian Local Government Association and other state peak bodies;
- Regional advocacy alliances and partnerships;
- Policy specific peak bodies or key thought leaders;
- Universities and other research institutions;
- Members of the MAV Advisory Panels;
- Other levels of government; and
- Other trusted and respected voices.

In its advocacy the MAV will strive to always act in partnership, empowering many voices to amplify our messaging.

Key Principles

When advocating the MAV is committed to the following ten principles:

1. Partnerships and collaboration

The MAV will build partnerships with key decision-makers, prioritizing relationships based upon mutual respect, trust, and benefit.

2. Transparency

The MAV will be transparent in its decision making, being clear and honest with the local government sector, State and Federal Governments, and other stakeholders and decision makers.

3. Clarity

The MAV will prioritize clarity in its advocacy and related communications ensuring that the narrative and messaging is comprehensive and accessible.

4. Consistency

The MAV will be consistent in its advocacy taking an organization-wide approach which supports a long- term view of the outcomes being sought.

5. Evidence-based

The MAV will always base its advocacy upon the best available evidence, including through actively investing in research and thought leadership.

6. Solutions-focused

The MAV will take a positive approach which, wherever possible, presents solutions and opportunities.

7. Equity of access

The MAV will amplify the voice of all communities equally recognizing socio-cultural dynamics and will be aware and responsive in its framing, structure, and approach.

8. Proactive

The MAV will be flexible and take advantage of opportunities whilst building relationships which position it and the local government sector to be the first voice heard when relevant decisions are made.

9. Respectfully pan-partisan

The MAV acknowledges that intergovernmental relations and advocacy occurs within a political environment, however The MAV will be non-partisan and will be fair and equal in its approach to and relationship with all decision makers.

10. Integrity

The MAV will work ethically and professionally, ensuring integrity in its advocacy by following these 10 principles.

Embracing Alignment

It is essential to align the local government sector's advocacy with the strategic objectives and priorities of other levels of government. Finding the nexus between our sector priorities and those of state and federal governments is the core business of intergovernmental relations.

By embracing alignment, the MAV and, by extension, the Victorian local government sector will be able to position itself as a critical delivery partner and thought leader to other levels of government and is more likely to:

- Attract confident investment from government, particularly in a time of fiscal constraint;
- Keep a seat at the table to influence policy and outcomes by contributing to problem solving and identifying innovative solutions to state-wide or nation-wide concerns;
- Create greater understanding about the critical role local government plays in every aspect of community life;
- Ensure funding and programs are responsive to local needs, build local capacity, and are delivered in a coordinated manner; and
- Influence policy or sector reform.

Where alignment cannot be achieved, the MAV will rely on best practice advocacy principles to develop evidence based, proactive, and solutions focused advocacy.

Our advocacy priorities

To be effective and impactful a small, targeted list of priorities is required. By minimizing and focusing its priorities the MAV will be able to achieve clarity and consistency and limit the risk of flooding its relationships with too much information.

The MAV's advocacy priorities are based upon the feedback, input, and direction from the Victorian local government sector. This is then considered through five key criteria:

1. Issues of state and national significance;
2. Contribution to state and nation building;
3. Long term, sector wide outcomes;
4. Alignment to State and/or Federal policy; and
5. Regional economic benefits.

It is essential that priorities, once established, should remain as steady and consistent as possible. Advocacy is a long-game, and the MAV will take a consistent approach to developing and advocating for its priorities.

State Council – The sector's voice

The MAV holds two State Council meetings each calendar year. The State Council presents a unique sector-wide opportunity for local governments across Victoria to come together to discuss matters of statewide significance.

It is important that State Council is an authentic and energizing forum. It is an opportunity to demonstrate the vision, leadership, and value of local government, empowering the MAV by providing clear policy, strategic, and thematic guidance.

The purpose of this Framework is to position MAV to be the leading advocate for local government and the communities they represent. The twice annual State Councils should be utilized as the anchor opportunities to clarify and amplify the voice of the sector. Doing this should include incorporating clear external messaging, elevating the role and prominence of the State Councils, supporting the development of strategic motions, and exploring the possibility of expanding and enhancing the experience for delegates, councils, and other attendees.

MAV State Council meetings are a rare opportunity to deliver clarity and unity of voice in advocacy and intergovernmental relations.

How we advocate

Effective advocacy requires a structured, considered, whole-of-organization approach. It is more than campaigns; it is the careful construction of a relationship coupled with compelling evidence-based narrative.

As the legislated peak body for local government in Victoria, the MAV is well positioned to be an effective and impactful advocate in partnership with and on behalf of the Victorian local government sector. The MAV is uniquely positioned to draw upon the knowledge, expertise, and on-ground experience which Victoria's 79 councils hold.

The MAV has numerous tools and levers available to support its advocacy. The implementation of these options is often situational, outcome, and relationship specific, and can include letters, meetings, media, collateral, MOUs, aligning campaigns with partner organisations, and formal agreements. It is important that the MAV make strategic determinations regarding when and how to utilize the intergovernmental relations or advocacy options available.

In situations where these advocacy options have been exhausted, the MAV can escalate advocacy efforts to include delivering community and public campaigns, running issue specific delegations to state or federal parliament or partnering on national campaigns with other peak bodies, allied organisations and ALGA.

Likewise, de-escalation can occur to cease advocacy in situations where alignment is no longer possible, or the desired outcome is no longer available.

This Framework aligns with the *Municipal Association of Victoria Strategic Plan: Shaping our Future 2024-2027*. By the end of this Strategic Plan the MAV intends to be viewed by decision makers as the trusted, respected representative of the Victorian local government sector.

To achieve this, the Framework is supported by an implementation plan which clearly identifies the tools, opportunities, roles, and responsibilities. The implementation plan considers a range of process and strategies including:

- Engagement with decision makers;
- Leveraging parliamentary and other submissions; and
- Electoral and political cycles.

Advocacy is an ongoing and ever evolving process. This Framework will best position the MAV and councils right across Victoria to influence outcomes by being a preferred partner of State and Federal Governments.