



# Community Conversations

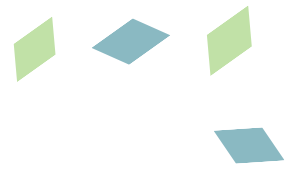
## SUMMARY



Supporting you to stay healthy, active and connected



# INTRODUCTION



## The Conversations

The Community Conversations initiative was born out of a desire by the Northern Grampians Shire Community Development Team to adopt a more strategic approach to supporting local community groups.

Traditionally, the Community Development Team has consisted of two workers with portfolios focusing on Arts and Culture, Grants, and Community Planning. Much of the team's work had been centered around grants, project development, and responding to community needs on an ad-hoc basis. However, through ongoing interactions with community group representatives, staff identified recurring challenges, including the rising costs of running a group, difficulties in recruiting executive committee members, an ageing demographic, limitations in project development and grant writing, and, in some cases, uncertainty about the groups' purpose and direction. These discoveries prompted the team to consider how they could work more strategically, to support a larger number of community groups in ways that addressed their ongoing needs and helped them to thrive and grow. Funding was allocated and planning began.

In mid-2023 and early 2024, the team expanded to include a Multicultural Officer and two Healthy Ageing Hubs Connections Officers. While these new roles had clear, specific outcomes, it was evident that there was overlap with existing community development work and opportunities to consolidate and strengthen the team's offerings. This expansion led to broader engagement with community group representatives, highlighting the need for a more coordinated and purpose-driven approach.

Recognising the challenges community groups face in continuing their important work, the team felt it was crucial to not only understand these difficulties but also to explore potential solutions. As a result, Community Conversations was created to provide a platform for deeper discussion and collaborative problem-solving.

Although initiated by the Community Development Team, the Community Conversations series is driven by the needs and desires of community group representatives and sessions tailored accordingly. Future programming will be continually shaped by the insights and feedback gathered during these sessions.

This summary report provides an overview of the Community Conversations Initial Workshop and Workshop 2 – Next Steps. The outcomes from the workshops outlined in this report will now inform the development of a program and approach that is both guided by the insights gathered and, in some aspects, co-designed with community group representatives.



# OVERVIEW CONVERSATION 1



The Community Development Team facilitated three Community Conversations sessions. One in Stawell with 19 participants and two in St Arnaud with 62 and 37 participants. These sessions were designed with the following objectives:

## 1. Identify Current and Future Challenges:

To gain insights into the factors currently impacting community groups, as well as potential challenges they may face moving forward.

## 2. Gather Ideas for Sustainability and Growth:

To collect feedback from community group members on how they can remain sustainable, thrive, and expand, so that the Council can provide targeted and meaningful support.

## 3. The Community Development Team Understand Broader Systemic Changes:

To explore the broader systemic changes needed to inform and influence the Council's priorities, ensuring that future strategic directions align with the needs of local groups.

## 4. Provide Reflective Space for Community Groups:

To offer an opportunity for community groups to reflect on their own sustainability and growth, and to gain insights into the steps they can take to prosper in the future.

A DEEP DIVE  
INTO HOW COMMUNITY  
GROUPS CAN  
**PROSPER AND  
GROW**

## Trends that may be impacting community groups

The Northern Grampians Shire, with an estimated residential population of 11,879 (ABS 2023), is experiencing some key trends that are influencing how residents engage with and remain involved in local community groups.

- **Age Demographics:** A significant portion of the population (37.31%) is aged between 50-75 years, with the median age being 49. Between 2001 and 2021 there has been a significant decline in people under the age of 40. This age profile may affect the types of activities and the level of involvement in community groups.
- **Changing Workforce:** There has been an increase in temporary workers within the area, which could be impacting the continuity and stability of volunteer involvement in local groups. The continuing trend of families needing two wage earners to cover living costs is also impacting volunteering due to time constraints.
- **Volunteering Trends:** Like many communities, the shire is also seeing a decline in traditional forms of volunteering, which can present challenges for maintaining group participation and leadership.



# CONVERSATION 1 SNAPSHOT



## Current challenges and realities

Attendees at the Community Conversation session expressed their concerns around a range of challenges they are experiencing, impacting their capacity to operate effectively and plan for long-term growth. These include fewer volunteers, programs that aren't connecting with younger people, rising costs, and a need for stronger communication and promotional skills.

There's also a gap in governance knowledge and a need to improve computer skills and tackle technology-related issues. Addressing these challenges will help ensure that community groups can continue to thrive and serve their members for years to come.

## Important Factors

For a community group to thrive and sustain itself in the future, a number of key qualities were identified at the Community Conversations session. Strong leadership is crucial for guiding the group, while embracing technology can help improve efficiency and reach a wider audience. Involving young people in programs and activities ensures fresh ideas and continued growth.

Adequate funding and solid financial planning are necessary to support the group's initiatives, alongside effective promotion to spread the word and attract new members.

**St Arnaud**

- Effective Leadership
- The ability to attract new members
- Understanding technology
- Youth involvement
- Adequate funding / Finances
- Effective promotion / marketing
- Learning from others
- Collaborating

## WHAT'S IMPORTANT

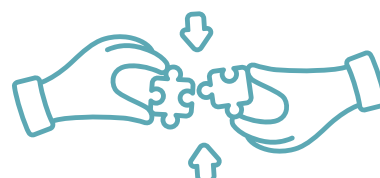
**Stawell**

- Strong Leadership
- Having enough volunteers / members
- Having a venue or facility
- Maintained finances
- Targeted promotion
- Admin support

Staying aware of what's happening in the broader community and collaborating with other groups can bring valuable resources and partnerships. Finally, ensuring access to transportation can make participation easier for everyone. Together, these factors create a strong foundation for lasting success and impact.

## The future

Community group members identified a range of challenges that could affect their long-term sustainability. However, by recognising the key factors essential for their groups to thrive, they can now leverage their collective skills, expertise, and knowledge to directly address these issues, positioning themselves for long-term success.





# OPPORTUNITIES



After identifying the key factors for community group sustainability and success, attendees explored the necessary steps to move forward, strategies for achieving these goals, and broadly who could be responsible for driving the process. The following outcomes reflect the group's collective input on the key steps required to establish a strong foundation for future growth and sustainability. The strategies and actions will be further developed through a co-design process involving the groups, key organizations, and the council in the future.

WHAT'S NEEDED	STRATEGY	ACTION
<b>Increased membership/ Promotion</b>	Develop platforms to promote groups and projects in the shire.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create a community groups newsletter. (S)</li> <li>• Hold a community expo.</li> <li>• Create a directory.</li> </ul>
<b>Increased membership/ Promotion</b>	Share and promote what groups are doing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use school newsletters. (STA)</li> <li>• Use the SCAN calendar. (STA)</li> </ul>
<b>Increased membership and promotion</b>	Shire wide promotions.	Make a campaign about the community.
<b>Youth involvement</b>	Connect with young people.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make groups more appealing. (STA)</li> <li>• Support leadership/ mentoring programs for young people. (STA)</li> </ul>
<b>Youth involvement/ Technology skills</b>	Young people sharing technological skills.	Look for opportunities to develop intergenerational programs. (STA)

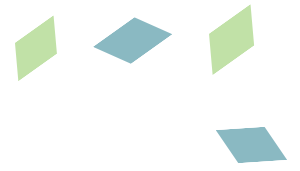
Key: **S** - Stawell specific / **STA** - StArnaud specific.

WHAT'S NEEDED	STRATEGY	ACTIVITY
<b>Collaboration</b>	Share skills and knowledge.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Produce a local skills register. (STA)</li> <li>• Create a list of external groups to make connections with. (STA)</li> </ul>
<b>Collaboration</b>	Share skills and knowledge.	Look for opportunities to share administration tasks.
<b>Collaboration</b>	Share facilities and resources.	Develop a comprehensive listing of the available community facilities/resources in the shire. (S)
<b>Collaboration</b>	Work with and learn from other groups.	Hold events/gatherings showcasing what others groups are doing. (STA)
<b>Leadership</b>	Develop strategic plans (roadmaps).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Skill building</li> <li>• Mentoring</li> <li>• Share resources</li> </ul>
<b>Leadership</b>	Re-think the structure of a committee or group.	Research and consider different group/committee models & options. (S)
<b>Transport</b>	Address limited transport options for people to get to group activities and events.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide a community bus.</li> <li>• Advocate for change of bus times.(S)</li> </ul>

Key: **S** - Stawell specific / **STA** - StArnaud specific.



# SUGGESTIONS FOR WHAT COUNCIL CAN DO



To help local community groups thrive and make a lasting impact, participants in the Community Conversation workshops emphasised the crucial role the council can play in providing essential support. Participants suggested that this support could include helping groups achieve financial sustainability, facilitating effective promotion, offering skill and knowledge-building opportunities, fostering collaboration, and advocating for youth programs.

- 1 Provide grants that are responsive
- 2 Provide grant writing support
- 3 Provide a platform to promote groups
- 4 Promote the benefits of volunteering
- 5 Provide skill and knowledge building opportunities for groups
- 6 Support opportunities for community groups to connect
- 7 Support youth mentoring programs



# BUILDING SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE



During the community conversations workshops, participants were asked what would help their groups thrive and remain sustainable in the future. Both the Stawell and St Arnaud groups identified key areas where members would benefit from enhancing their knowledge and skills. This insight provides an exciting opportunity for growth and development, ensuring groups can continue to make a lasting impact in the community.

Participants from both St Arnaud and Stawell identified a wide range of learning opportunities that would be valuable for their groups. These topics span from high-level group management to more practical skills, including:

- strategic planning
- financial sustainability and viability
- leadership development
- governance and committee roles
- social media management
- understanding auspicing
- marketing and promotional strategies
- upskilling in using promotional tools

The St Arnaud group identified several key skill-building activities that would support their growth and sustainability.

These areas focus on enhancing the group's ability to secure funding, effectively promote their activities, and strengthen internal communication.

These include:

- grant writing
- flyer design
- event promotion
- communication skills

On the other hand, the Stawell group highlighted different priorities, focusing on:

- managing volunteers
- strategies to increase membership

These skills are crucial for ensuring that Stawell's groups remains engaged, and capable of attracting new members to sustain its activities in the long run.







# CONVERSATION 2 NEXT STEPS



The initial Community Conversations sessions provided valuable insights, but it became clear that a deeper exploration of the topics was necessary. To address this, two months later, the Community Development Team organised Community Conversations: Next Steps. These follow-up sessions were held in Stawell, with 6 participants, and in St Arnaud, with 22 participants, offering a more focused environment for discussing community needs and priorities.

This second session also provided an opportunity to fulfill requests from community group members for further education on topics that are important to them.

Nolene Gratton, with 25 years of experience in the community sector, was invited to present on *The Building Blocks of a Strong, Sustainable Community Group*. This presentation allowed attendees to reflect on what is most important to their groups and identify areas where they could strengthen their efforts. The Next Steps session was designed with the following objectives:

**1. For Community Group Members to gain key insights into the building blocks of a strong, sustainable community group.**

To share information on how community groups can be effective and grow by focusing on the areas of Purpose, Passion, Project priorities plans and Promotion.

**2. Provide an opportunity for Community Development staff to share new initiatives and upcoming opportunities.**

The Community Development Team will present a summary of initiatives that have been developed based on the ideas and feedback gathered during the first Community Conversations workshop.

**3. Provide an opportunity for community group members to actively participate in the co-design process for upcoming community projects and initiatives.**

Empowering community group representatives to take an active role in developing key initiatives fostering a sense of ownership and leading to more effective and sustainable outcomes.

**4. Provide an opportunity for community group members to contribute to the future direction of the community-strengthening program.**

To actively involve community group members in shaping the future a capacity building program by identifying priority topics and best methods of delivery.



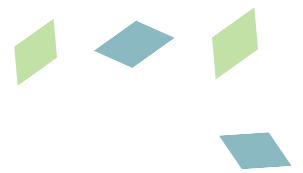


# OPPORTUNITIES - NEXT STEPS

Attendees were given a list of opportunities to choose from, selecting those they believed would best support community groups in growing and thriving. The following priorities reflect the collective input of the attendees, aiming to establish initiatives that will provide a strong foundation for future growth and sustainability. These strategies and actions will be further developed through a collaborative co-design process, involving community groups, key organizations, and the Council in the future.

## Priorities identified in the St Arnaud workshop

WHAT'S NEEDED	STRATEGY	ACTIVITY
<b>Increased membership</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Develop platforms to promote groups and projects in the shire</li><li>• Share and promote what groups are doing</li><li>• Shire wide promotions</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Hold a Community Expo</li><li>• Use school newsletters</li><li>• Make a campaign about the community</li></ul>
<b>Youth Involvement</b>	Connect with young people/share technological skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Make groups more appealing</li><li>• Look for opportunities to develop an intergenerational program.</li><li>• Support leadership/mentoring programs</li></ul>
<b>Collaboration</b>	Work with and learn from other groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Hold events/gatherings showcasing what other groups are doing</li></ul>
<b>Transport</b>	Address limited transport options for people to get to group activities and events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Provide a community bus</li><li>• Advocate for change of bus times</li></ul>



## Priorities identified in the Stawell workshop

WHAT'S NEEDED	STRATEGY	ACTIVITY
<b>Increased membership</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Shire wide promotions</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Make a campaign about the community</li></ul>
<b>Youth Involvement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Connect with young people</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Make groups more appealing</li><li>• Support leadership/mentoring programs</li></ul>
<b>Leadership</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Develop strategic plans</li><li>• Re-think the structure of groups</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Skill building</li><li>• Mentoring</li><li>• Research and consider different groups/committee models and options.</li></ul>





# AN UPDATE ON WHAT COUNCIL IS DOING

After the first Community Conversations sessions, the Community Development team has been focused on supporting local groups in achieving their goals, based on the priorities identified by the community in the first session. Some initiatives have already been launched, while others are still being planned. Additionally, certain programs require further collaboration with key community members to ensure they are tailored to meet the community's needs and aspirations effectively.

## **Provide Grant Writing Support**

Community group representatives have indicated that grant writing can be a challenging task for many members. To ease this process, the Council has introduced a Grant Writing Support service to assist with applications for grants other than those provided by the Council.

The support service includes:

- Writing grants based on the information provided by your group
- Reviewing draft grant applications
- Offering practical grant writing tips and advice
- Assisting with gathering supporting documentation
- Providing ongoing support throughout the grant writing process

This service is available for grant applications of \$5,000 or more.

## **Providing Skill and Knowledge Building Opportunities for Groups**

The Community Development team is planning a workshop program for the first half of 2025, focusing on the top priority topics identified during the Community Conversations Next Steps workshop. These workshops will take place from February to June, offering valuable opportunities for local groups to build skills and knowledge in areas that matter most to the community.

## **Provide Grants that are Responsive**

The Community Development Grants offer local groups the opportunity to apply for funding based on their specific needs. These grants currently provide flexibility, allowing groups to request funding for events, small activities, equipment, donations, or sponsorships. The priorities for these funding opportunities can be adjusted as community needs evolve. Representatives from community groups have identified that funding for running costs is a top priority at the moment. To support this, the Council encourages groups to apply for contributions that can help cover essential expenses, such as insurance, electricity and publicity costs.



# WHAT COUNCIL IS DOING CONTINUED.....

## **Providing a Platform to Promote Community Groups**

Several years ago, the Community Development team launched the Northern Grampians Shire Community Directory. This directory allows groups to directly submit and update their information, helping to promote their activities and raise awareness within the community. The Thrive 50+ Hubs has been working with groups that are not yet listed to ensure their information is included. Additionally, the Community Connect App offers another valuable platform for groups to share their initiatives and keep residents informed about their activities.

## **Support opportunities for groups to connect**

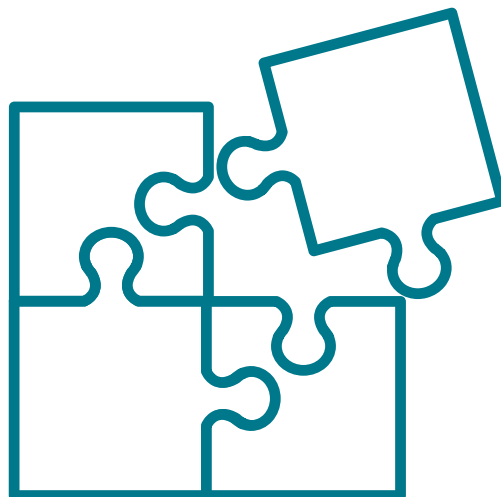
Each year, as part of the Community Conversations, the Community Development team will provide an opportunity for local groups to share what's important to them, identify the support they need, and discuss ideas for collaboration and community growth.

## **Promote benefits of volunteering**

As part of the Thrive 50+ Hubs, council staff will collaborate with community groups to develop a campaign and activities that highlight the benefits of volunteering and promote local volunteer opportunities during National Volunteer Week from 19 May 2025.

## **Support youth programs and initiatives**

A Youth Strategy was completed during 2024 as an action from the 2021 - 25 Council Plan. The strategy has a number of activities that support youth development and community connection. For programs to be successful, council will work in collaboration with community groups and organisations.





# BUILDING SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE

## NEXT STEPS

Attendees from both Stawell and St Arnaud were asked to prioritize topics for capacity building, based on the list developed during the first Community Conversations session. The priorities in both towns are similar, with the only significant difference being that St Arnaud placed a higher priority on upskilling, while Stawell focused more on strategic planning and leadership.

### St Arnaud

- Event promotion
- Grant writing
- Upskilling - social media etc.
- Managing Volunteers
- How to increase membership

### Stawell

- Grant writing
- How to increase membership
- Event promotion
- Strategic planning / leadership
- Managing Volunteers

### Approaches to Strengthening Capacity in Stawell and St Arnaud

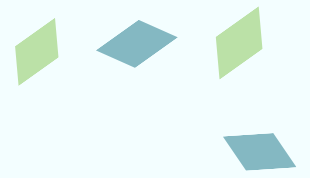
Attendees from both Stawell and St Arnaud have expressed that workshops are the most effective way to learn and build capacity within the community. Additionally, there is a strong interest in making the workshop materials available on a digital platform, such as the NGSC website, for easier access.

Both Stawell and St Arnaud participants supported the idea of holding workshops on a regular basis, with a preference for either a monthly or bi-monthly schedule.

In terms of timing, St Arnaud attendees preferred evening sessions, while Stawell participants were flexible, with both mornings and evenings being suitable. Most participants indicated that a workshop duration of one to two hours would be ideal for keeping sessions engaging and manageable.



# MOVING FORWARD



The Community Development Team will:

- Focus on areas where the council has direct influence and was designated to take the lead.
- Collaborate with community groups to co-design activities and programs that address their needs and priorities.
- Develop a community knowledge-building program, incorporating input from local stakeholders.
- Organise and facilitate more workshop opportunities.

**WE THANK YOU**  
FOR YOUR POSITIVE INPUT  
AND SUGGESTIONS FOR THE  
**FUTURE OF YOUR**  
**GROUPS**

