

Lessons from practice

Insights from funded projects

This document shares the insights from organisations funded through Victoria Law Foundation's General Grants program.

For more than 50 years our Grants Program has funded organisations to deliver diverse projects which help Victorians understand their law and use it to improve their lives. Some projects were designed to fill a gap in services or solve a problem, while others trialled a new way of reaching people with a legal problem.

When the final General Grant projects concluded in late 2020, the Foundation approached the 34 organisations which had received grants between 2014/15 and 2018/19 inviting them to participate in this review. We thank those organisations for sharing their experiences.

These insights and lessons come from people in the legal assistance sector. We hope that it is useful to those continuing to look for ways to reach the most vulnerable Victorians and improve their access to justice.

Understanding shared insights - key enablers and practical tips

The first section details the factors that fostered project success. Together they provide important insights for community legal information and education initiatives, especially when funding is scarce, resources are stretched, and services are looking to make effective and lasting change.



Five key enablers were identified:

- A clear purpose aligned with strategic priorities
- Form partnerships
- Reach your audience
- Adapt resources for different purposes
- Use knowledge and learning

The second section provides practical tips for those developing community legal information and education projects, from developing resources, planning events, disseminating materials, and reaching target audiences and users.



Factors enabling success

Five key factors that foster project success were identified. These crossed all types of projects, target user groups and areas of law.

A clear purpose aligned with strategic priorities

Project funding allows an organisation to take a risk and pilot a program or new way of working. To ensure enduring commitment and sustainability though, it is critical that the project aligns with organisation's strategic direction and values.

- A clear purpose can reduce wasted time and resources.
- The project should advance the work of the organisation.
- A project is more likely to be sustainable where there is ongoing commitment and resources allocated.



Form partnerships

Good partnerships are vital. They enhance project development, reach and sustainability.

- It's important to ensure each partner has a clear understanding of the project aims, implementation and outcomes.

- Partnerships formed as part of the project can foster long-term positive relationships and collaboration between organisations.
- It can take time to build, manage and develop relationships which can add to the duration and cost of a project. However it's an investment worth making as it can support positive project outcomes.



Reach your audience

Knowing about the needs of your target audience, their legal confidence and capability, and what other supports they may need can help to successfully reach those people and improve engagement and use of the material.



- Often you will have to make efforts to go to your target audience rather than waiting for them to come to you.
- Online, digital and social media can work to reach some groups when you need to reach more people with limited funding, but you will need to carefully consider how to engage them and get them interested in the material.

Adapt resources for different purposes after the funding finishes

A lot of work goes into developing a project. They often cost more and take longer than expected. To get the most out of the project and extend its life, consider how resources or materials might be used in a different format or for a new audience.

- While the project may not be sustained, there are sometimes 'spin off' projects that stem from the original project.



Use knowledge and learning wherever you can

Success in the project may generate improvements or learnings elsewhere in the organisation. This might include new methods of working, new ways to reach or respond to target groups, expertise in an area of law, upskilling staff, or identification of a new role.

- Unintended consequences can have long lasting and positive impact.
- Acknowledge that sometimes projects turn out differently to what was initially envisaged.



Practical Tips

This section includes lessons for those developing resources, legal education programs and events for the community. These are set out below in order of project development, from planning to presentation and dissemination.

Development and planning



Consider:

- if the resource is new and different to things that already exists
- partnering with an organisation if the partner provides expertise which you lack
- making use of a partner's resources
- asking a non-legal organisation to test that your messaging is clear and simple
- creating a steering committee or reference group to inform the resource development
- adopting a collaborative approach, with input from the target audience about what their problems are and how best to resolve them
- how resources may be paired with other organisational activities such as workshops, legal education and advice
- how to direct funding to where you can get the best reach
- if the organisation has capacity to keep resources up to date if necessary.



Example: Council on the Ageing (Victoria) developed a toolkit about the administrative processes to be followed after the death of a partner. The organisation took a collaborative approach - empowering their audience of older people to help identify the issues they face.

Design and Format

Consider:

- if the material you are producing is relevant and ongoing
- including examples and case studies from the target user group's own experience
- the purpose of the resource – is it something that 'centralises' information, offers answers to problems; or works as a 'toolkit' for the user to help themselves or solve problems
- defining what the resource can and can't do.



Presentation and accessibility



Consider:

- how you can communicate in plain language
- using a clear font, headings and bullet points
- if resources need to be translated
- if material meets the audience literacy levels and that information is presented in a culturally sensitive way.



Example: Refugee Legal made videos to assist women on migrant visas who were experiencing family violence. They partnered with a video producer, who helped them clarify messages and prioritise which content needed to be covered.

Legal and regulatory concerns



Consider:

- any legislative, bureaucratic or regulatory 'red tape' that may hold up the resource development
- how the resource might be used and accessed – are there intellectual property and copyright issues?

Reaching audiences and dissemination



Consider:

- different channels to distribute resources - online, social media, conferences, radio, launch events, information sessions, emails, newsletters, hard copy, mailing lists, word of mouth
- if social media is a useful channel to reach your audience. Online resources are accessible and cost effective but if the audience is not computer literate, hard-copy materials may be preferable
- advertising through key stakeholders or peak bodies
- going to where the target community is likely to be (eg, schools, libraries, senior centres etc).



Example: Through Espresso Legal, Whittlesea Community Connections, provides coffee and legal advice to engage the general public informally in their neighbourhood and the places they meet – for example outside schools or sporting facilities. Lawyers connect with the local community, and the justice system is presented in a friendly and accessible way.

Formats

Videos



Consider:

- development may take longer than expected – recognise that there is a learning curve
- simplifying the messaging to make it clear, and better target audiences
- using examples and scenarios based on the life experiences of the target audience
- naming characters to help tell the story
- breaking content into multiple shorter videos
- what other materials, training or events the videos might be used to enhance
- who else can host and/or distribute the material
- how the videos may be adapted or translated for different audiences in future
- inviting partner organisations to review content to clarify the messaging and disseminate the resources.

Community engagement & events

Consider:

- accessibility – interpreters, translators
- how to reach the audience and let them know it's on
- telling stories and drawing examples from the audience's lived experience
- how to establish a link with the audience and promote ongoing engagement
- if community leaders can advise how best to get members of the community involved and engaged
- how to communicate in ways meaningful to the audience
- if adequate resources and training have been allocated to the project.



Website

Consider:

- incorporating additional functionality as part of a new website development even if not initially used. This can be capitalised on later more easily and cheaply
- where content is housed - decide whether to embed content into main website or have a standalone site
- how you will drive traffic to the site.

