

Lessons from practice

Shared insights from grant funded projects

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Introduction

For more than 50 years Victoria Law Foundation's Grants Program has funded organisations to deliver diverse projects that support Victorians to understand the law and use it to improve their lives.

Priorities have shifted over time, creating opportunities to fund a variety of projects including the establishment of legal services, legal research, the development of legal information and resources, education programs and Victorian Law Week events.

With the introduction of the research function in 2018, we reoriented the grants program to support the better use of data across the sector. As a result the General Grants round was discontinued and replaced with Knowledge Grants. We continue to offer Community Legal and Small Grants to support the development of legal information, education and resources for the community.

We took the opportunity to look back over the last five years of General Grants. This document shares the insights from 22 projects run by 20 organisations funded through the General Grants program. Some projects were designed to fill a gap or solve a problem identified through service delivery, while others trialled a new way of reaching people with a legal problem.

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

What we did

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.

The review was conducted in two stages. First, data about all the 34 grants was collated and analysed by project type, audience group and area of law. You can find this information in the **By the numbers** section.

The second stage involved interviews to uncover what worked and the challenges for each project. Twenty organisations participated in this interview stage, with three sharing experiences about a second project which was funded in the period.

Interviews were conducted over the phone and questions focused on:

- perceived success of the project
- factors that enabled success
- sustainability of programs and resources
- project design
- reaching target user groups and dissemination strategies
- learnings for the organisation.

The feedback and insights were categorised under broad themes which emerged throughout the process. These are set out below in Lessons from Practice.

Lessons from practice

The first section details the factors that fostered project success. Five key enablers were identified, and these crossed all types of projects, target user groups and areas of law.

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.

The second section provides practical tips for those developing community legal information and education projects. Participants were eager to share their lessons from developing resources, planning events, disseminating materials, and reaching target audiences and users.

Factors enabling success

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. For enduring commitment and sustainability though, it is also important that the project aligns with the organisation's strategic direction and values.



Insights

- 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.

Key steps

- Take adequate time to build and plan the project.
- Be able to pivot and adjust when necessary – be adaptive when something isn't working.
- Ensure staff have adequate resources and training.
- Have a clear idea of what you want to achieve within the project parameters, and a vision for how to sustain the project if it is successful.
- Check that organisational priorities are aligned and that all levels of staff are unified.

Partnerships

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



Insights

- 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.

Key steps

- Outline the aspects of the project where parties have shared interests and goals, the contribution each party must make for outcomes, and where interests and priorities differ.
- Formalising project partnerships through a well-constructed reference or steering group can help develop better materials and provide valuable feedback on development and dissemination.
- Consider a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU'S) and other formal mechanisms. They can help clarify partner interests, commitments and responsibilities. They can also foster wider ownership of project materials and outcomes and help avoid or manage conflicting views.

Reaching your audience

Careful consideration of who the target audience is and what you want them to do with legal information and education material can help define project purpose. This can focus attention and effort on:

- understanding what is important to the target audience
- consideration of how they like to receive and use information
- and what format and communication style will be most effective.

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



Insights

- Often you will have to make efforts to go to your target audience rather than waiting that they 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.

Key steps

- Go to where the audience is – approach them in their neighbourhood, at the places or services they use, in the groups they are already involved in.
- Develop strategies and mechanisms to get the word out to your target audience, use appropriate channels and intermediaries (eg, social media, emails, health-justice partnerships, targeting organisations/forming partnerships, phone calls etc).
- Be flexible where you can – be responsive to requests from users or see clients at times that suit them.
- Tailor the legal topics to the needs of the audience. Provide practical examples and solutions.
- Tell stories and draw from examples of the audience's lived experience.
- Community leaders, stakeholders and target audience groups may be able to advise on how best to get members of the community involved and engaged.
- Events may help raise awareness of organisations that can help disseminate information and create pathways to further help with legal problems.
- Be aware of different cultures and preferences and how this may impact their relationships and understanding of the legal system.
- Get people from the target audience or a reference group involved and ask them how this group usually engages this type of material. They are the experts about their lives and preferences, even when the subject matter experts. This can also help to ensure the content is appropriate and clear, improve relationships and build 'champions' and 'disseminators' who can help improve relationships with the audience.

Example: The Office of the Public Advocate delivered a project about increasing understanding about enduring powers of attorney in culturally and linguistically diverse communities. They invited a range of multicultural organisations to be involved with their steering committee to develop content and reach their audience. They used interpreters to deliver workshops to better communicate with their audience.

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.

Use, add value and 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.



Insights

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

Example: Mallee Family Care Community Legal Centre developed videos on consent and sexting for young people with a disability. The videos have since been used by other community organisations and groups including people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities, adults with disabilities and secondary school students.

Key steps

- Identify other groups who might find the program or resource useful and relevant.
- Allow the project to evolve, adapt and respond to new conditions. Use resources or presentations as an annual refresher or during inductions for new staff internally or with partner organisations.
- Identify partner or stakeholder organisations which might be able to use the resources with their clients or community groups.
- Consider using resources in different areas of practice.

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.



Insights

- 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 covers lessons from interview participants 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 booklet about the administrative processes to be followed after the death of a partner. The organisation took a collaborative approach, empowering their audience - older people - to help identify the issues they face, and work with them to gain systemic policy change.

Design and format

Consider:

- if the material you are producing is relevant and ongoing
- defining what the resource can and can't do
- 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.

Example: Youthlaw developed factsheets and delivered webinars for community and housing sector professionals who work with young people. They found that using case studies from real life and discussing these as a group engaged the audience effectively.

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 developed sketch videos for women on temporary visas or without visas who are experiencing family violence to ensure they have an understanding of their legal rights and know how to access them. They worked with a sketch video producer, who helped them clarify and design the message 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).

Formats

1. 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
- invite partner organisations to review content to clarify the messaging and disseminate the resources.

2. 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.

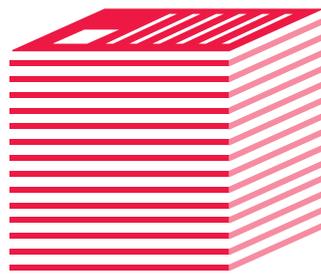
3. Community engagement and events

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

By the numbers

Data about the projects funded between 2014/15 and 2018/19.



34

Number of grants

\$1,106,932

Total amount awarded



\$111,000

Highest grant awarded



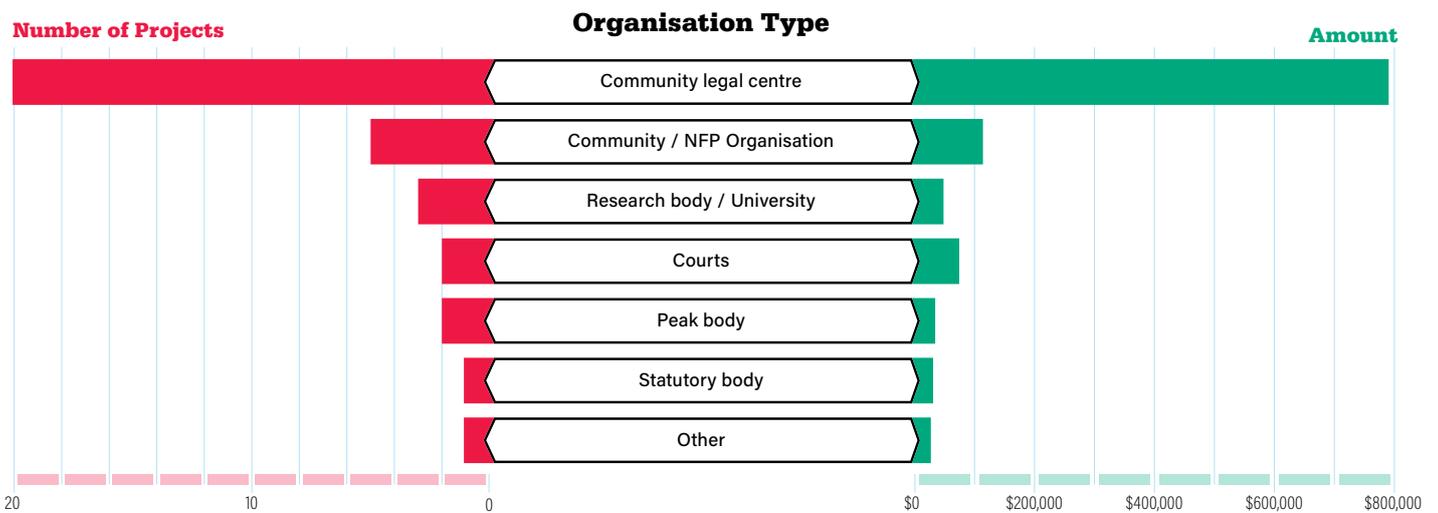
\$32,556

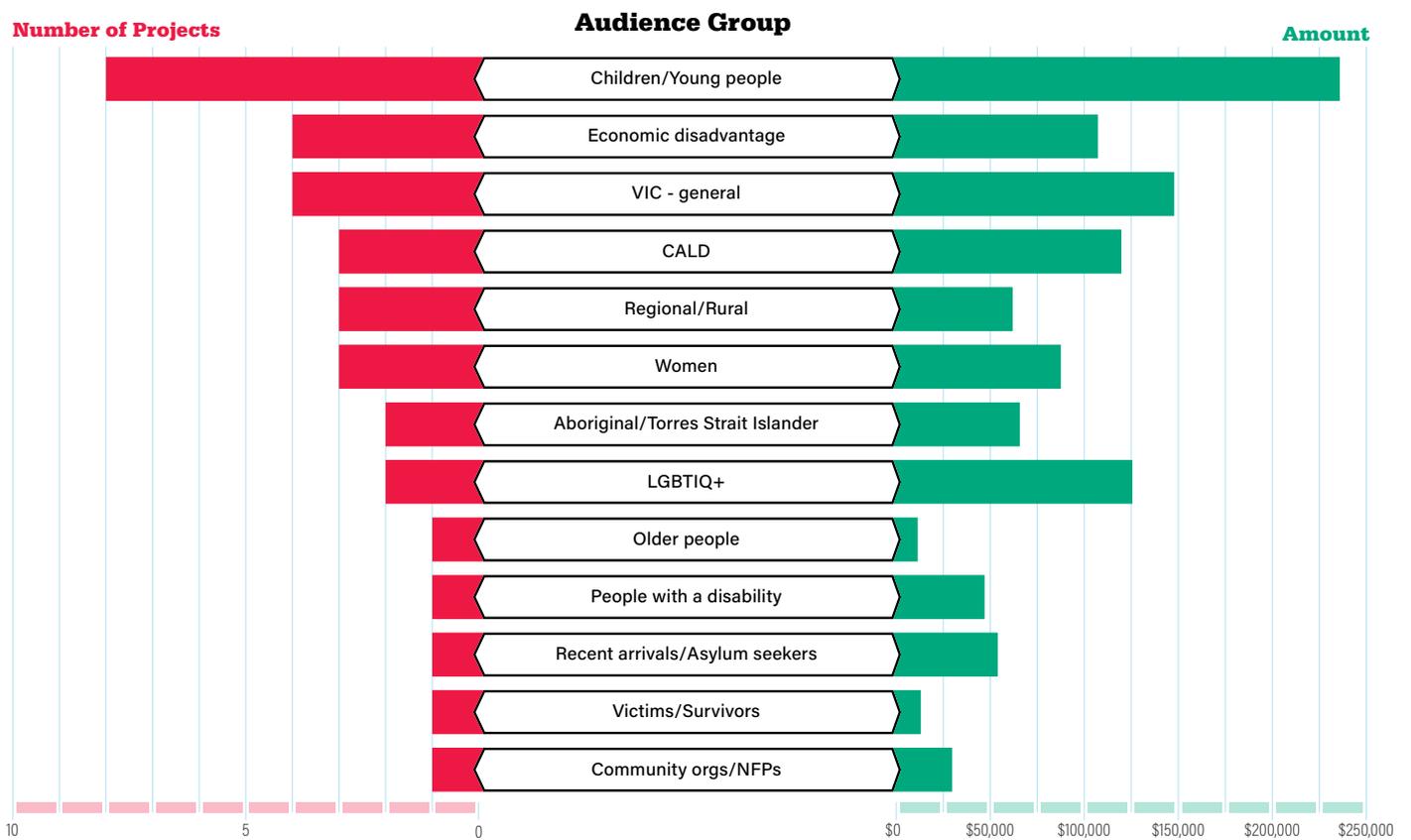
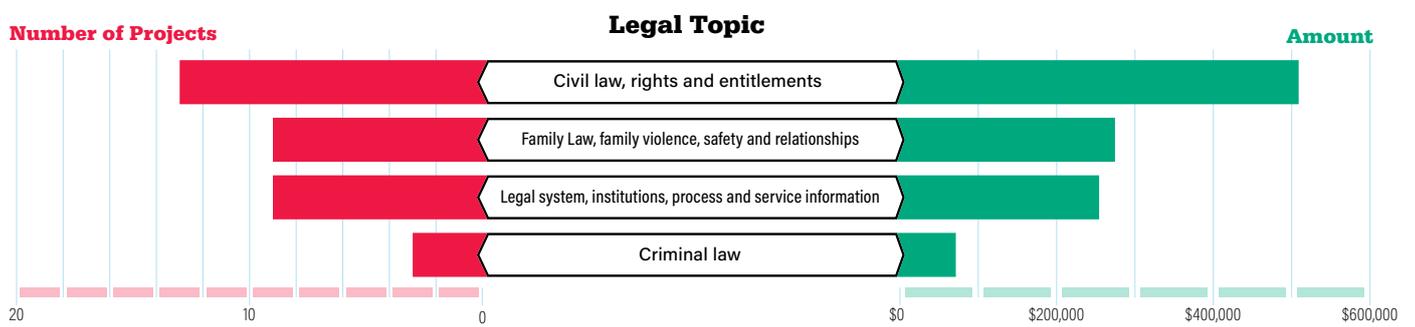
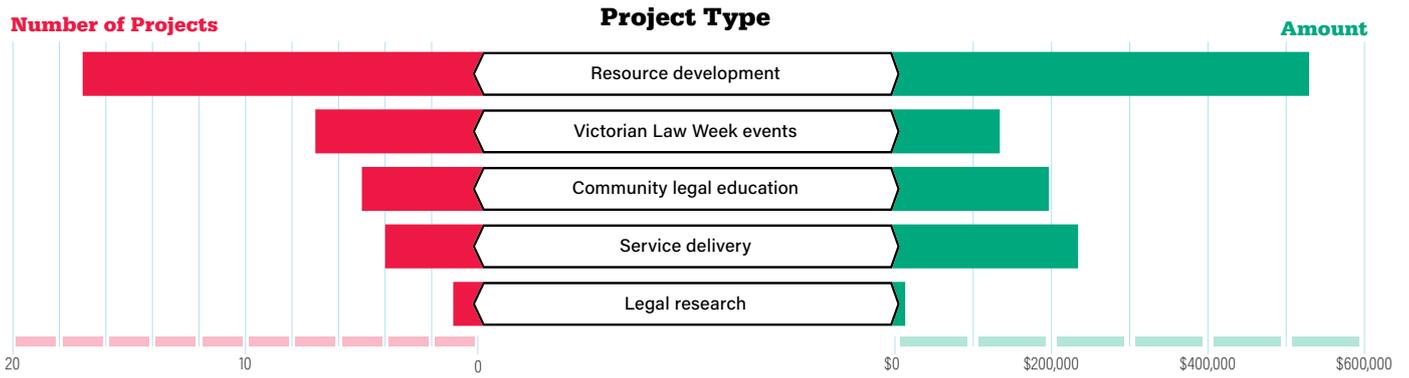
Average grant awarded



\$7,500

Lowest grant awarded





Most grants were awarded to projects which support the most disadvantaged Victorians and mirror priority client groups for the legal assistance sector.



Thanks

Our thanks to the following organisations for their time and reflections, which will assist others working in the legal assistance sector.

- ARC Justice
- Council on the Ageing (Victoria)
- Eastern Community Legal Centre
- Federation of Community Legal Centres
- Gateway Local Learning and Employment Network
- Inner Melbourne Community Legal
- Justice Connect
- Law and Advocacy Centre for Women
- Mallee Family Care Legal Service
- Office of the Public Advocate
- Refugee Legal
- Sir Zelman Cowan Centre, Victoria University
- Snodger Media
- Social Security Rights Victoria
- St Kilda Legal Service
- Supreme Court of Victoria
- Whittlesea Community Connections
- WIRE
- Youthlaw.

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