

Institute for
Public Policy
and Governance



How local governments can increase the social and economic participation of people with disability

Build capability and
capacity



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Overview

Many local governments struggle to resource actions to increase social and economic participation of people with disability. This is both in terms of the capacity of local government (money, time, and people) and also the capability of the workforce. There are always competing priorities and, especially for rural and remote local governments, budget constraints and few resources. Making social and economic inclusion a priority requires leadership at all levels within local government to recognise the benefits to not only people with disability but also the whole community.

This section provides information about how local governments increase social and economic participation by investing in people and in sourcing appropriate resources.

Drive strong leadership

Strong leadership ensures that access and inclusion are embedded across local government strategies, plans and programs. The starting point for many local governments is often strong advocacy from elected members with either a lived or personal experience of disability. This is then supported by executive and senior staff. Senior planning and infrastructure staff often drive universal

access but this needs to be supported at an executive level to ensure a broader commitment to social and economic participation is embedded across the whole organisation.

Strong leadership from executive staff and elected members promotes a culture where access and inclusion are prominent in decision-making. This can mean having one or more elected member and senior council staff on disability advisory committees (the national survey showed that over three-quarters of disability advisory committees include one or more elected member) or creating more formal civic structures which recognise disability in decision-making.



CITY OF WHITTLESEA, VICTORIA – LEADING FROM THE TOP (Urban Fringe)

The Whittlesea Disability Network is a forum of community members with disability, carers, local service providers and others that have an interest in disability, that meet monthly to discuss local, regional, state, national and

international issues that are relevant for people with disability. Council convenes the network and importantly the terms of reference state that the Mayor and at least one other elected member are involved in the group. The participation of elected officials in the network ensures that outcomes from discussions are considered and/or followed through by Council. It provides a regular, informal platform where disability related issues in the community can be raised and followed up. In addition, elected member participation demonstrates Council's commitment to addressing disability related issues and increases awareness and engagement from Council staff and the community.

The network is consistently used by the community to raise concerns or propose ideas and used by all Council departments (from engineering to marketing) to consult people with disability, their families and carers and local service providers on projects, plans and policies.



BRISBANE CITY COUNCIL, QUEENSLAND – CREATING CIVIC STRUCTURES WHICH SUPPORT DISABILITY

(Capital City)

Council has focused on access and inclusion for more than a decade. Over this time, disability has been a dedicated portfolio in the civic cabinet structure, ensuring access and inclusion issues are always considered at highest levels of Council. In 2015, the Mayor was elected on a policy platform which continued Council's strengths in disability. Longstanding and strong political leadership in access and inclusion has spread throughout the organisation and there is strong alignment on access and inclusion between Council's elected representatives, executive team and staff.

Build staff capacity

Sufficient staff awareness, understanding and knowledge are essential to increase the social and economic participation of people with disability. At the compliance level, this means ensuring that staff understands their obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act and the relevant access provisions in the Building Code of Australia and the Disability Discrimination Act. Many local governments go beyond compliance to provide disability awareness training and other resources for staff.



MAROONDAH CITY COUNCIL, VICTORIA – GUIDE FOR COMMUNICATING WITH PEOPLE WITH DISABILITY (Urban Developed)

Maroondah City Council in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne has a guide for communicating with people with disability. The Guide was originally developed for employees, including customer service and community liaison staff. There are specific guidelines for communicating with people who have:

- A hearing impairment or are deaf
- Low vision or are blind
- A physical disability
- A cognitive impairment
- An Autism Spectrum Disorder
- A mental health issue.

The Guide also includes case studies and where to go for additional resources. The guide is available on Council's website and in customer service centres to help build the capacity of other organisations in the community. See: Communicating with People with Disabilities (www.maroondah.vic.gov.au/common/files/CommunityHealthServices/Communicating_with_People_with_Disabilities.pdf)



GLENORCHY CITY COUNCIL, TASMANIA – BUILDING STAFF CAPACITY (Urban Fringe)

Council's Access Officer has created a set of procedures to build the capacity of staff to create accessible documents. This includes guidelines about formatting, using colours and contrasts, creating PDFs, writing in plain English, and using alternative formats such as Easy English, Braille and captioning.

The Access Officer has also developed a process to make Council meetings inclusive, including specific communication methods, the timing of meetings and ensuring venues have an accessible bathroom.

One effective method to build capacity is to provide elected members and staff with a real-life experience of what it is like to have a disability. The national survey showed that many disability advisory committees help design and deliver such training. This allows others to experience the barriers people with disability face in social and economic participation and can significantly influence operational and strategic decision-making.



GLENORCHY CITY COUNCIL, TASMANIA AND TOOWOOMBA REGIONAL COUNCIL, QUEENSLAND – BUILDING STAFF CAPACITY USING EXPERIENTIAL DISABILITY AWARENESS TRAINING

(Urban Fringe and Urban Regional)

The Glenorchy City Council Access Committee offers annual, one-day disability awareness training for all new staff. Participants are led through a discussion about what disability is, attitudes and assumptions about people with disability and what constitutes discrimination against people with disability. Participants are then given props to understand a particular disability and then undergo a series of everyday tasks in the community.

This training is compulsory for all staff. The training creates a culture of embedded thinking about how to respond to the needs of people with disability. The Access Committee has provided this training to other organisations.

Toowoomba Regional Council offers staff and/or elected members experiential disability training to build their capacity to understand and meet the needs of people with disability.

A member of Council's Regional Access and Disability Advisory Committee offers annual disability awareness training for customer service and community development staff which includes

replicating the experience of accessing Council services for people with disability.

In addition to organisation-wide capacity building, some local governments provide targeted training to some of their staff; for example, National Relay Service course for customer service staff. Other local governments provide tailored training to some of their staff around specific identified needs.



BRISBANE CITY COUNCIL, QUEENSLAND – TRAINING FOR ACCESSIBLE AND INCLUSIVE PLANNING

(Capital City)

Staff from the Planning Team wanted increase their existing capacity to plan for accessible and inclusive precincts and communities and asked Council's Access and Inclusion Team to develop a survey to test their knowledge of what accessible and inclusive planning requires.

The survey confirmed what the Planning Team believed 'they didn't know' and has been used to develop tailored training to build the capacity of the team for the future.



BASS COAST SHIRE COUNCIL, VICTORIA – BUILDING STAFF CAPACITY THROUGH DISABILITY AWARENESS AND TECHNICAL ACCESS TRAINING (Rural and Remote)

Council provides the opportunity for new and existing staff to participate in disability awareness training. Council supported staff from a range of teams to undertake specialist access training around the built environment. These staff members are now accredited to carry out access audits and have a greater understanding of the importance of access in all forms.

Council partners with neighbouring South Gippsland Shire Council to procure specialist access training in-house. This allows a greater number of staff in both councils to receive the training without having to travel to Melbourne.

Overall, staff credit disability awareness training with increasing their understanding of how their work intersects and impacts on the lives of people with disability. The training also linked the Strategic Planning and Infrastructure Team with the Community Development Team who, with their level of expertise around disability access, now provide advice on planning and infrastructure projects.

Universal design training

The Institute for Access Training Australia runs the following courses:

- ◆ Diploma and Certificate IV in access consulting
- ◆ How to conduct a building access audit
- ◆ Understanding access legislation and universal design in buildings
- ◆ Understanding access and universal design in parks and outdoor spaces
- ◆ Addressing access in transport infrastructure and conveyances
- ◆ It also offers a range of access awareness handbooks, for example to:
 - ◆ Make businesses and tourist services more accessible
 - ◆ Make leisure and entertainment activities more accessible
 - ◆ Provide better access to community facilities
 - ◆ Understand access obligations for councillors, CEOs, managers and committees
 - ◆ Make outdoor spaces more accessible.

See: Access Audit Australia (www.accessauditsaustralia.com.au)



CITY OF MELBOURNE, VICTORIA – DEAF AND DEAF-BLIND ACCESS TRAINING

(Capital City)

The City identified the need to better understand the access needs of people with sensory disabilities. It partnered with Vicdeaf, Deaf Blind Victorians and Blind Citizens Australia to commission Studio Thick to undertake qualitative research to identify unmet needs and opportunities for improving the experience and accessibility for people who are blind, deaf, and deaf-blind.

City walkthroughs and two-hour filmed workshops were undertaken with deaf, deaf-blind and blind community members to identify and understand the 'pain and delight' points and the processes, strategies and barriers they face while trying to navigate the city. The videos have been used with staff to highlight planning considerations for people with a sensory disability and have been used for specific deaf and deaf-blind awareness training for City Ambassadors and customer service staff.

Allocate resources

Many local governments have relatively low levels of discretionary spending available to allocate for non-mandatory services. However, outcomes for social and economic participation appear to be most effective where local governments can prioritise resources to:

- Drive disability access and inclusion plans
- Convene disability advisory groups
- Enable staff to work together across departments
- Advocate for greater disability access and inclusion.

The disability access and inclusion 'role' in most local governments sits within the community services/development team. In metropolitan and larger regional local governments, these teams often have several staff, with one or more at least partially dedicated to disability. In smaller regional, rural and remote local governments, there is often only one staff member who covers disability, ageing, multiculturalism, diversity, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and sometimes also youth.

Where dedicated resources exist, local governments are able to provide a stronger response to access and inclusion. Since 2006, local governments in Victoria have received state funding to employ full-time or part time Disability Access Officers under the Building Inclusive Communities program. Overall, this has meant that local governments in Victoria are generally able to deliver a broader range of activities to support disability inclusion than local governments in other states.



CITY OF PLAYFORD, SOUTH AUSTRALIA – ALLOCATING RESOURCES TO DRIVE ACCESS AND INCLUSION (Urban Fringe)

The City is a very large, growing council with a higher than average percentage of residents who need assistance with core activities, despite having a younger age profile than the rest of Greater Adelaide. The area also has a lower SEIFA Index of Disadvantage compared to Greater Adelaide.

The City has a vision to becoming the 'second CBD' in Greater Adelaide and has developed a strategic directions plan for disability access and inclusion which aims to create a socially and economically accessible and inclusive community. To drive this, the City has funded a full-time Disability Access and Inclusion Coordinator to increase awareness of disability in the community and ensure access and inclusion are planned and integrated into projects and services. The City also funds a part-time Community Programs Officer to coordinate a program of activities for people with disability and their carers.



CITY OF WHITTLESEA, VICTORIA – BUILDING UP THE SIZE OF THE ACCESS TEAM

(Urban Fringe)

The City has a rapidly growing population and a higher proportion of people with disability (compared to the Victorian average). Council is committed to being a leader in disability access and inclusion and has established a larger Access Team (one Team Leader with four staff) which has built on the current state government funding of the Building Inclusive Communities (MetroAccess) program.

The team plays an important role in driving Council's Disability Action Plan and provides support and advice to staff in other divisions. The size of the team enables the City to engage the community and disability sector through the Whittlesea Community Futures Disability Network and Whittlesea Disability Clusters.



CITY OF WAGGA WAGGA, NEW SOUTH WALES – ALLOCATING ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR PLANNING

(Urban Regional)

The City of Wagga Wagga does not have a dedicated Disability Access Officer, but a Social Planning Team that includes two Regional Support Officers. The team is responsible for addressing social justice and community wellbeing issues in the community and has previously been responsible for developing Social Plans for Council which identify the wellbeing needs and priorities of the community, including people with disability.

With the introduction of the New South Wales Disability Inclusion Act 2014, Council committed temporary additional resources to expand the Social Planning Team to ensure sufficient capacity exists to engage people with disability, the local disability sector and staff. This ensures Council better understands the needs and priorities of people with disability and that the disability access and inclusion plan responds accordingly.

Despite resource constraints, other smaller rural and remote local governments have also dedicated staff to drive access and inclusion.



BREAK O'DAY COUNCIL, TASMANIA AND COONAMBLE SHIRE COUNCIL, NEW SOUTH WALES – RESOURCING IN RURAL AND REMOTE LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

(Rural and Remote)

Both councils have small Community Services Divisions and staff share responsibility for multiple areas, including access and inclusion. Whilst this does not provide for a continuous focus on access and inclusion, it has provided sufficient resourcing to recently drive the development of their first disability access and inclusion plans.

Source grant funding

Local governments often lack sufficient discretionary funding to establish new facilities, activities, projects and programs which promote the inclusion of people with all abilities and increase the social and economic participation of people with disability. This means they need to proactively source funds from grants either on their own or in partnership with others. However, where disability action plans are mandatory, local governments are more likely to allocate funds and proactively source grants to ensure the actions are implemented.

Sources of grant funding

NDIS Information, Linkages and Capacity Building (ILC) funding

Some actions to support the elements of the place-based framework may be eligible for the NDIS Information, Linkages and Capacity Building (ILC) funding. This grant program funds activities which deliver clear benefits for people with disability their families and carers.

ILC funding is available through an open competitive grants process and is being progressively rolled out across all States and Territories.

See: Information, linkages and capacity building (www.ndis.gov.au/communities/ilc-home.html)

Australian Government Employment Assistance Fund

This provides employers with funding to cover the cost of modifying workplaces to support employees with disability.

See Funding Workplace Changes (www.jobaccess.gov.au/employers/funding-workplace-changes)

The Australia Council Artists with Disability Funding

This provides support for individual and groups of artists with disability.

See: Arts and Disability Funding (www.australiacouncil.gov.au/funding/arts-and-disability-funding)

Grants not specifically targeting improved services or opportunities for people with disability can help improve access and inclusion. For example, the Australian Government Building Better Regions Fund provides grants for rural and remote areas in two funding streams:

- The Infrastructure Projects Stream for the construction of new infrastructure or the upgrade or extension of existing infrastructure
- The Community Investments Stream for community building activities including, but not limited to, new or expanded local events, strategic regional plans and leadership and capability building activities.

See: Building Better Regions Fund (www.business.gov.au/assistance/building-better-regions-fund)



PENRITH CITY COUNCIL, NEW SOUTH WALES– ILC FUNDING TO SUPPORT ACTIONS FOR INCLUSION

(Urban Fringe)

Penrith City Council was funded to implement the Nepean Jobs for All project which aims to raise awareness and support for local businesses to employ people with disability. This initiative is described in more detail in section 6.

Each State and Territory government also has infrastructure and facilities grants to improve the accessibility of public facilities and infrastructure and many offer a range of sports and recreation grants for programs and facilities upgrades. Although not disability specific, these grants often target projects to grow sports and recreation activities in communities and also address barriers to inclusion.



THE DISTRICT COUNCIL OF THE COPPER COAST, SOUTH AUSTRALIA AND CAMPBELLTOWN CITY COUNCIL, SOUTH AUSTRALIA – FUNDING TO IMPROVE ACCESSIBILITY OF SPORTS AND RECREATION FACILITIES

(Rural and Remote and Urban Developed)

The sports and recreation centre at the District Council of the Copper Coast is used by more than 1,300 members, local schools and for vacation care. Recent increases in use led to the development of a Master Plan for a replacement centre. The plan responds to specific actions in Council's Disability Discrimination Act Action Plan, including incorporating access and equity needs for people with disability.

Council did not have the sufficient budget to fully fund the redevelopment and successfully applied for a number of Australian and South Australian Government grants to meet the shortfall. These included:

- A grant from the National Stronger Regions Fund (now superseded by the Building Better Regions Fund)
- State government grants from the Office for Recreation and Sport Community Recreation and Sports Facilities Program and the Department of Education and Child Development.

These grants are almost 75% of the total cost and will allow Council to proceed with the redevelopment.

Similarly, Campbelltown City Council secured \$3m in New South Wales government funding and \$7.5m in Australian Government funding to upgrade the Sports and Recreation Centre to universal design principles.



PENRITH CITY COUNCIL, NEW SOUTH WALES – FUNDING TO PROMOTE DISABILITY INCLUSION (Urban Fringe)

Council's Toy Library specialises in toys for children with disability and high support needs and features adapted, sensory and educational toys to build problem-solving, coordination, reasoning, numeracy, literacy and fine motor skills. The Toy Library is coordinated by a Library Children's Inclusion Officer, funded by the New South Wales Department of Education.



COONAMBLE SHIRE COUNCIL, NEW SOUTH WALES – FUNDING AND SUPPORT FOR PEDESTRIAN ACCESS AND MOBILITY PLANS (Rural and Remote)

The Shire and the NSW Roads and Maritime Services (RMS) jointly funded the development of Pedestrian Access and Mobility Plans (PAMPs) for the Town of Coonamble and the Village of Gulargambone and engaged an Access Consultant to assist.

The ultimate aim of the PAMPs is to deliver safe, equitable, connected and dignified paths of travel for pedestrians of all ages and abilities. As part of the PAMP development, Council and the RMS conducted an Access Audit Report which identified issues with paths of pedestrian travel and other facilities. Council then committed to upgrade infrastructure in line with the Australian Government Access to Premises and Accessible Public Transport Standards.

Coonamble residents with disability and their carers feel the upgrades have positively impacted on their every-day activities and those in the pedestrian areas now allow them to access the whole town centre.



MOUNT ALEXANDER SHIRE COUNCIL, VICTORIA – IMPROVING PEDESTRIAN ACCESS

(Rural and Remote)

Mount Alexander Shire Council has submitted a federal funding application for 'Building Better Regions Fund' for almost one million dollars' to improve pedestrian access and useability across Mount Alexander Shire.

Council has collated feedback from the community, and the key message that came through this consultation process was the requirement for improved pedestrian pathways and crossings in the Shire to address access for young families, older people and people with disability living in the community.

One component of the Building Better Regions funding application focused on addressing documented problematic hot spots considered by the Mount Alexander Shire Disability Advocacy Group. The proposed solutions presented will ensure disability access compliance in key locations across the Shire.



BASS COAST SHIRE COUNCIL, VICTORIA – ENSURING INCLUSION IN ALL INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENTS

(Rural and Remote)

Council operates on a limited budget and often does not have funding to invest in major, new or upgraded infrastructure to improve accessibility. When any infrastructure grant is received, staff ensure that the project meets the latest access standards.

Council received funding from the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning to undertake major repairs to damaged coastal infrastructure and took this opportunity to improve access at the same time. The coastal management team worked with the community development team in the planning process and as a result of the upgrade, this coastal region became the site of an accessible event which would not have been possible otherwise.



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