



2020
MORELAND
DEMOCRACY LAB
HIGHLIGHTS
REPORT

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Democracy Lab is a project funded under Moreland City Council's Social Cohesion Plan. It focuses on engaging a broad section of community members, who otherwise do not engage with Council's initiatives, and strengthening their civic participation and capacity for community-led action in Moreland.

The 2020 Moreland Democracy Lab ran in two parts, beginning with three online Forums on the 15, 22 and 29 June followed by a seven-week Program for a select group which ran from 4 August to 15 September.

The program was designed and delivered collaboratively between The Public Value Studio, Moreland's Community Development and Social Policy team and a Community Reference Group which comprised community leaders and members from the 2019 Democracy Lab.

The 2020 Lab was highly successful in building capacity for civic participation with a range of community members from key priority groups in Moreland. Participants expressed being more aware of opportunities to have a say about issues that are important to them, being more confident in engaging with Council and having built the skills and connections to lead community-led action. This capacity building contributes to the social cohesion of Moreland by enhancing people's ability to influence the issues that impact on their lives and providing opportunities for people to build networks that support their sense of belonging and empowerment.

For the second year, the Moreland Democracy Lab was successful in harnessing and connecting Council with a group of community members who are dedicated to making positive contributions to their local community. The Lab has continued to create an evolving Community of Practice which is well positioned to bring further outcomes to Moreland in years to come.

92 % of participants stated that they were more aware of opportunities to have a say about issues that are important to them through the Democracy Lab

Democracy Lab has been a great journey of learning for us and a very important source of finding like-minded supporters of the initiative within council staff.

2020 Lab Participant

92 % of participants stated the Lab had built their knowledge around developing community-led activities and more confidence engaging with Council or issues that are important to them



2020 MORELAND DEMOCRACY LAB

FORUM SERIES

A three-part forum series was the first part of the 2020 Democracy Lab. The series ran for three consecutive Mondays with the topics 'New Normal' 15 June, 'Collective Action' 22 June and 'Radical Change' 29 June. More information about the forum topics, speakers and what was discussed can be found in the Moreland Democracy Lab Forum Series Outcomes Report and the [Graphic Recording and Chat Highlights](#) document.

PROGRAM

The Moreland Democracy Lab program ran for seven weeks from 4 August to 15 September. The following is a brief description of each of the program sessions:

Week 1 - Welcome

Welcome from Council's Mayor and Director Community Development, then an opportunity for participants to get to know each other. Tracey Evans, First Nations and Traditional Owner, from the First Peoples Assembly shared her experiences, particularly focusing on the importance of community-led action and systems that support self-determination.

Week 2 - Knowing the 'Why'

Eyal Chipkiewicz (Casa Cultura, The Boite & 2019 Moreland Democracy Lab) shared his insights into working in a way that responds to community's interests, values and with a shared sense of ownership. We also explored the importance of framing the purpose and impact of community-led action in a way that resonates with stakeholders or decision-makers.

Week 3 - Collaborate and Mobilise

Sally Beatie (Fawkner Food Bowls and Fawkner Commons) gave participants strategic insights into developing partnerships and collaborating with organisations like Moreland City Council as well as smaller community groups and community members. This was followed by a mapping activity to identify and create strategies for engaging key stakeholders.

Week 4 - Advocacy and Action

Christian Astourian (Diversity and Disability Program Migrant Resource Centre) discussed the different ways community can shape social outcomes and the societies that we live in. The session provided an overview of the many roles and avenues there are for becoming part of advocacy initiatives or creating community-led change.

Week 5 - Understanding the System


Nalika Peiris (Moreland City Council) provided insights into understanding Council, its systems and decision-making processes with a particular focus on how community members can become involved in decision-making processes of interest to them.

Week 6 - Building connections

An online networking event where participants met various people from across Moreland to discuss their ideas for community-led activities or areas of interest. Some participants also gave brief presentations about their work or project ideas.

Week 7 - Reflect and Evaluate

Ange Stock (Merlynston Progress Hall) reflected on the strategies used to keep community members engaged and connected to the advocacy for Progress Hall's refurbishment over almost 10 years. Lab participants were also asked to reflect on the program and provide feedback on its strengths and areas for improvement.



DEMOCRACY LAB PARTICIPANTS

FORUM SERIES

There were almost 100 attendees to the Democracy Lab Forum Series. These attendees were mostly community members (47%), some came from community organisations as either employees (24%) or volunteers (25%) and a smaller percentage were employees of government (15%) or from local businesses/private sector (3%). The highest percentage of attendees were from Coburg (29%), followed by Brunswick (27.6%), then Fawkner (17.6%).

PROGRAM

There were 32 applications to the Moreland Democracy Lab and 17 participated in the 7-week program. Participation throughout the program was consistently strong with a 91% attendance rate and the majority of participants (65%) attending all 7 sessions.

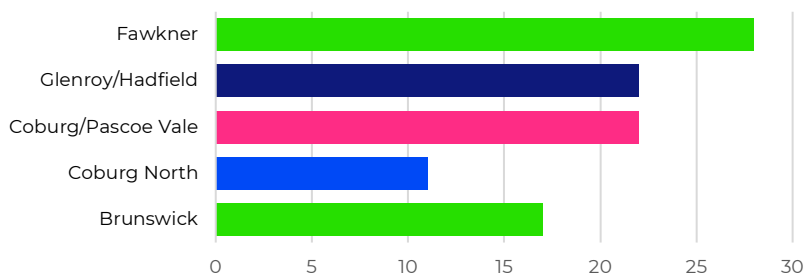
Demographic data collected at the beginning of the program shows that:

- 62% identified as a woman and one person selected 'Self-described' for gender
- 68% were from a culturally diverse background
- None identified as being Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders
- 31% identified as being a person with a disability
- 25% identified as being part of the LGBTQIA+ or Queer community

Of note, nearly half of the 2020 Lab participants were under 34 years of age with the largest age group 15-24 years (31.25%). Given that it is usually harder to engage younger people in these types of activities, this is a strong outcome.

There was also a marked increase in participation from people with a disability and who are part of the LGBTQIA+ or Queer community compared to the 2019 Democracy Lab cohort.

In terms of which area of the municipality participants lived in, the majority were from the northern suburbs of Moreland as the table below demonstrates:



The cohesion amongst the group was very high. There were differences of opinion expressed and members brought into the discussion their various lived experiences which created dynamic and rich conversations. The survey found that 84% of participants agreed that 'they had learnt a lot' from fellow Lab participants.

I value every individual's passion and it's amazing to be a part of such a dynamic group.

DEMOCRACY LAB OUTCOMES

FORUM SERIES

Both survey and anecdotal evidence show that the Forums were an effective way for community members to engage with each other on topics of interest, learn from each other to build their community-led practice and make meaningful connections that participants might not otherwise have made.

Below are some of the survey responses of Forum attendees:

100% said they were able to hear from people, and different viewpoints, that they might not otherwise have heard

77% said they have a broader understanding of issues that relate to their work/community participation

70% agreed they are likely to make changes to the way they approach their work or community participation

PROGRAM

Participants overwhelmingly felt their skills in developing community-led activities were improved.

Below are some of the survey responses of program participants:

92% agreed they have more knowledge around developing community-led activities

92% agreed they are more aware of opportunities to have a say about issues that are important to them

77% agreed they connected with local people that are relevant to their interests

92% agreed they connected with Council staff that are relevant to their interests

92% agreed they have more confidence to participate and engage with Moreland Council

70% agreed they are more aware of how Council works and how local decisions are made

When asked what the most valuable aspect of the program was, 92% of participants said it was 'connecting' with either Council staff, speakers, community members or each other

84% agreed they developed skills in how to identify and connect with stakeholders in their area of interest

Meeting so many different people from my community, outside of circles I normally socialize or work in.

Response to question around what 'valued most'



KEY LEARNINGS 2020

The following is a summary of considerations for any future iterations of the Moreland Democracy Lab program, or other relevant programs that Council may deliver.

Online and In-person Delivery

The adaptation of the program to an online delivery model was overall positive and made the program more accessible to people with diverse needs. However, conducting the whole program online also has limitations as the group was not able to get to know each other in the same way they would have in person, and sometimes group dynamics were harder to address. In future, although online delivery is recommended as it is more accessible, it would be beneficial to deliver at least one in-person session and ensure there is more time for connection and discussion amongst the group.

More connection and collaboration

Although one of the stronger outcomes, some consideration should be given to building more opportunities for the participants to get to know each other and work collaboratively. In future, more time could be dedicated to the initial stages of getting to know each other and there could be more opportunities for working in small groups, and more time dedicated to the Breakout Rooms. A buddy or mentoring program with Council staff could be scoped and introduced if feasible.

Building Civic participation

The Democracy Lab was created as a way to increase community members' level of participation with Council and community decision-making, as well as build social capital by enabling community-led initiatives. It has become increasingly clear that building this civic participation and supporting community-led action are strongly interrelated. To explain, whilst the outcomes for community engagement are strong (92% of participants stating they are more aware of opportunities to have a say about issues that are important to them and more confident to participate and engage with Council), most participants are actually motivated to become part of the Lab because they have a project idea or area of interest they would like to pursue. The Lab needs to balance both aspects to ensure that community members remain motivated to participate and can accomplish what they set out to achieve from the Lab. It puts the participants' interests at the centre, but it also ensures that the objective of building civic participation is met.

A growing Community of Practice

Now into its second year, the Democracy Lab has a growing Community of Practice which offers an opportunity to further expand on the outcomes of the program. This aspect will be further explored in 2021 by The Public Value Studio to build on the outcomes of the previous two Labs and also ensure further connection amongst participants.

