



VCOSS Strategy 2025-2028

Building a
Powerful Future



About VCOSS

The Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS) is the peak body for Victoria's social and community sector and the state's premier social advocacy body.

VCOSS exists to end poverty and disadvantage in Victoria. We do this by supporting organisations and activities, through research and advocacy, and by connecting, convening, and working with others.

VCOSS' strength comes from our members and the people at the heart of their work. VCOSS members include frontline service organisations, peak bodies and advocacy groups, working across a wide range of areas including health and wellbeing, children and family services, family violence, early childhood, housing, food systems, economic and civic participation, justice, disability, and disaster response.

Collectively, Victoria's social and community sector generates approximately \$18 billion a year, employs over 200,000 people and engages more than 427,000 volunteers.* Across this diversity in size and services, VCOSS members share our ultimate goal to eliminate all forms of social and economic disadvantage in Victoria.

* Counting only ACNC registered charities in Victoria.



Acknowledgement of Country

VCOSS proudly acknowledges Victoria's First Peoples and pays respect to their Elders and Ancestors.

We acknowledge Victoria's First Peoples as the Traditional Owners of the lands, air and waters on which we rely. We recognise and value the ongoing contribution of First Peoples' communities, languages and culture that enrich the lives of all Victorians.

We respect and support Aboriginal self-determination, recognising that Aboriginal communities must lead decision-making about their own futures. We commit to working in ways that strengthen Aboriginal-led solutions and challenge systems that perpetuate colonial injustices.



Aboriginal Languages of Victoria

Source: Victorian Aboriginal Corporation for Languages

A message from the Board President and CEO

Too many Victorians lack the essentials for a safe and healthy life. At VCOSS, we exist to change that. For 80 years, we've driven systemic reform, amplified voices for change, and worked to achieve our vision of a Victoria free from poverty and disadvantage.

Our power lies in our deep connections with the Victorian social and community sector. These relationships keep our work grounded in reality, providing a source of rich insights and giving us legitimacy and momentum as we push for meaningful change. Working with our members and partners, we strengthen the social fabric of communities and use our collective influence to shape policy and practice.

Positive change is never linear. Sometimes, we must act as catalysts, sparking new conversations and coalitions. At other times, we are steadfast contributors, supporting long-term movements for justice. Whether engaging with government or business interests, or enabling our own sector, we remain unwavering in our pursuit of social justice, equity and inclusion.

This strategic plan sets out our priorities for the coming four years, guiding us to activate collective power and drive real and lasting change for Victorians in need.

Sue White
President

Juanita Pope
Chief Executive Officer



Understanding our external context

Poverty and disadvantage are eroding opportunities and hindering wellbeing...

... and shifting norms suggest social and economic inequity will worsen without systemic intervention

<p>"More disaster risk? Up go premiums. We're a low income area and people can't afford insurance anymore." Community member</p>	<p>"Specially when you don't have a job or you have a disability, how are you supposed to get a house? They only want full-time workers and there's not enough housing commission places." Community member</p>	<p>"Funding is a huge challenge. All of us share this frustration. So much of the funding is tied to specific projects and is short term. It's not sustainable and it's not a good way to run any organisation." Sector worker</p>
<p>"As I get older, I get more heat stress. I can't hack it." Community member</p>	<p>"The complexity of clients has grown. People used to come to us with one or two issues, now it's five or six." Sector worker</p>	<p>"If the power goes out, you miss out on internet for education and social opportunities." Community member</p>
<p>"The food banks cannot keep up." Community member</p>	<p>"The hardest thing about working in the sector is how incessant it is. We're never able to come up for air. We're constantly feeling like we're facing a tsunami. It can be exhausting." Sector worker</p>	<p>"I'm worried about my grandchildren. I'm anxious about their futures. Will their lives be inhibited. Will they have a lesser life than what we had?" Community member</p>

 <p>Widening economic inequity</p> <p>The rising cost of living is placing immense strain on Victorians. Many people are being pushed to the brink, an increasing number skipping meals to pay the rent. This is compounded by a lack of affordable and secure housing, with Victoria having the lowest percentage of social housing in the nation. Widening economic inequity is fuelling a sense of discontent and disenfranchisement.</p>	 <p>Social disunity and eroding trust</p> <p>Social participation and volunteering are declining, as global instability is challenging our local social fabric. Public trust in governments, businesses and media has eroded sharply in recent years, although research shows that many Australians still have trust in non-government organisations.</p>	 <p>Impacts of a changing climate</p> <p>Climate impacts are deepening existing inequalities and creating new forms of disadvantage. Climate change and biodiversity loss are existential threats to human life, requiring ambitious long-term focus on systemic transformation, community disaster resilience and intergenerational wellbeing.</p>
 <p>New technologies and digital disruption</p> <p>Technology and AI are reshaping service delivery, disrupting social and economic systems, creating new forms of knowledge, and widening the digital divide.</p>	 <p>Changes in organisational and funding models</p> <p>Constrained public budgets are increasing the need for government-funded services to demonstrate impact and avoided costs. The community sector will need to look beyond government funding to support transformative change, while navigating sector evolutions, new markets and models, ongoing compliance burden and rising costs of operation.</p>	 <p>Undervaluation of community services and workforces</p> <p>The complex, resource-constrained operating conditions of community organisations are making it increasingly difficult to attract and retain skilled workers and volunteers. This will worsen without improvements to funding, job security, pay equity and wages, skills recognition and career pathways.</p>

Principles can help focus our efforts in these uncertain times

People don't live in isolation – they live in families, neighbourhoods and communities. When communities are strong, people are strong too. Inclusive and well-resourced communities are an essential aspect of addressing poverty and disadvantage.

At VCOSS, we recognise the power of place-based, community-led and co-designed solutions.

Technology is rapidly changing our world – we need to make sure that everyone benefits.

At VCOSS, we support people and organisations to explore how technologies can be harnessed to improve lives, as well as addressing risks like mis/dis-information and digital profiling.

Public trust in the community sector is a source of power and privilege – and should never be taken for granted.

At VCOSS, we take care to listen to communities and speak truth to power in pursuit of our purpose. We partner across and beyond our sector to leverage resources and expertise to drive systemic change.

People are the experts in their own lives. Sustainable solutions emerge when people affected by issues are central to developing responses to them.

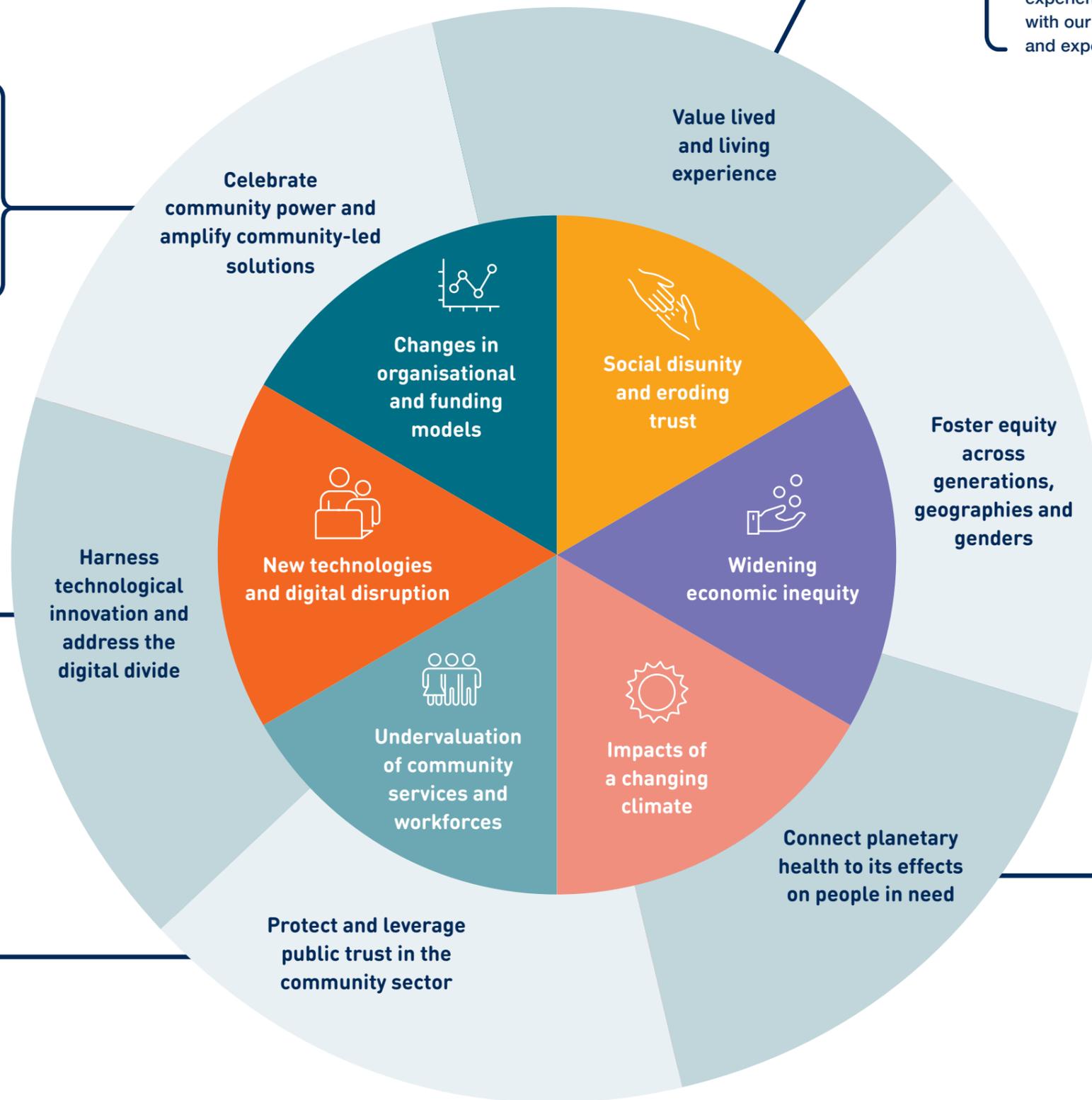
At VCOSS, we value and respect people with lived and living experience of the issues at the heart of our work. We partner with our members and work to ensure their voices, knowledge and expertise shape systemic change.

There are cycles of disadvantage that persist across generations, geographies and genders. To break these cycles, we need to respond to immediate needs as well as investing in transformational change to address social and economic problems before they start, escalate, or become entrenched.

At VCOSS, we work to create the foundations for intergenerational equity and the elimination of all forms of poverty and disadvantage. This drives our work on prevention and early intervention.

Changes to our climate and biodiversity loss have a disproportionate impact on people experiencing poverty and disadvantage. How we transition to a safe climate future matters – we can't leave those with the least behind.

At VCOSS, we are motivated to act on climate change and biodiversity loss in a way that recognises and addresses the adverse impacts on those experiencing poverty and disadvantage.

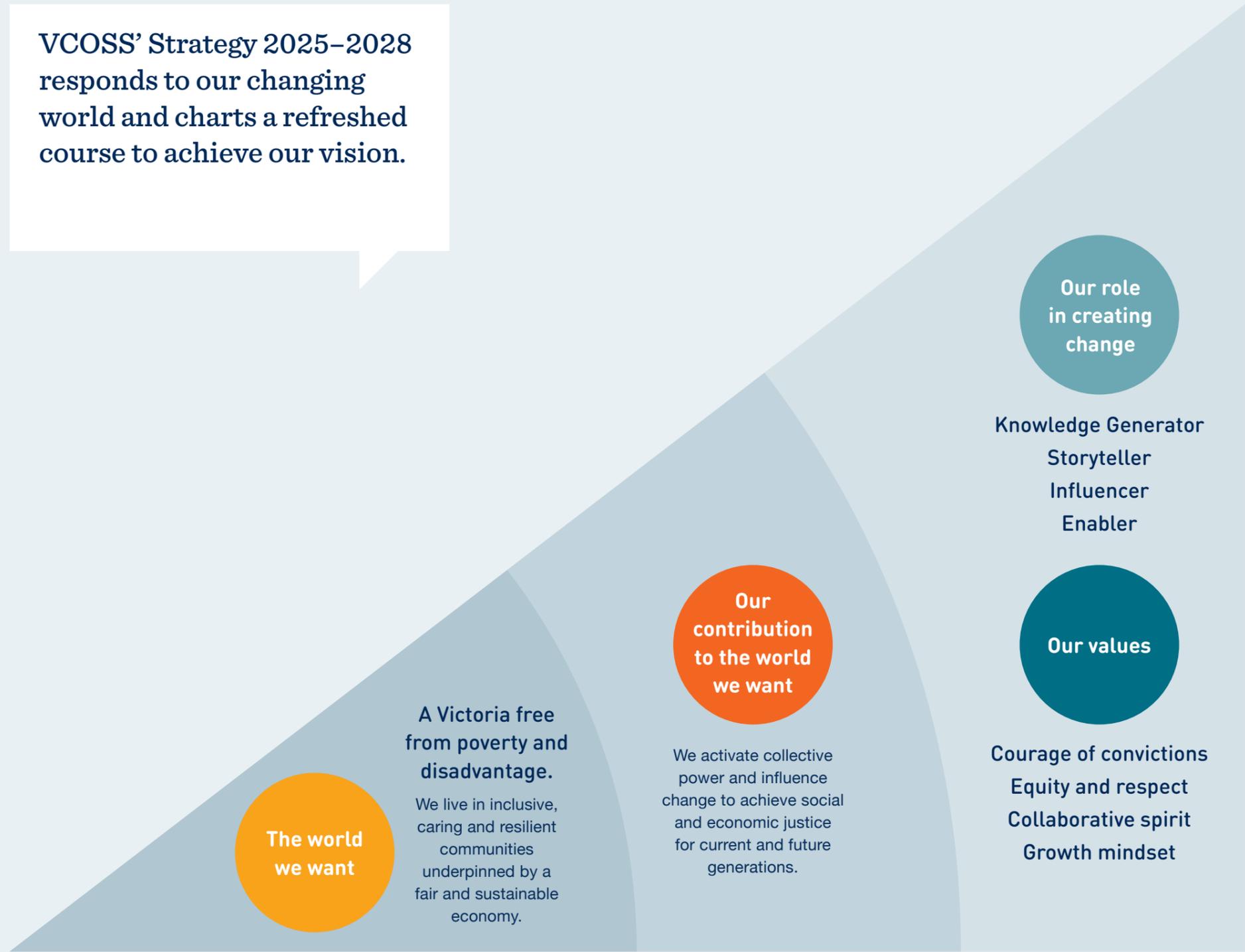


Our Strategy



Strategy on a page

VCOSS' Strategy 2025-2028 responds to our changing world and charts a refreshed course to achieve our vision.



Strategic outcomes	Focus areas
1 Shift the system	Strengthen relationships and build coalitions 
	Produce targeted policy and advocacy outputs that 'join the dots' and compel decision-makers to act 
	Encourage public to participate in positive social change 
2 Communities in control	Convene government, business, and community sectors 
	Advocate for fair funding and other systemic changes 
	Respect and support Aboriginal self-determination 
3 An impactful VCOSS	Expand VCOSS member services and engagement 
	Strengthen financial and operational sustainability 
	Enhance VCOSS' continuous learning framework 

Breaking it down

Our vision and aim

A Victoria **free from poverty and disadvantage**. We live in **inclusive, caring and resilient communities** underpinned by a **fair and sustainable economy**.



We **activate collective power and influence change** to achieve social and economic justice for current and future generations.



Our role

We generate compelling, evidence-based expertise and insights, leveraging our partnerships across services, sectors and communities to advocate for systemic solutions to complex social and economic problems.



We leverage and share stories from across our networks to identify and communicate emerging needs, priorities and opportunities. We celebrate the community sector's success and learn from our failures. We create identity by fostering collectivism, innovation and impact.

We influence change in policies, systems and narratives that cause poverty and disadvantage, working across parliament, government, the community sector, business and media.

We connect, strengthen and champion the organisations and workforces across Victoria that share the goal of working towards an inclusive, just and equitable society.

Our values

We speak truth with conviction and courage. We care deeply about what we do. We pursue our ambitious goals with energy and wisdom.



We take care of ourselves and others in how we work. We value honesty, integrity and trusted relationships.

We bring people together, build momentum and create lasting change through meaningful relationships and collective action. We lead through listening and inclusion, creating spaces for diverse voices to be heard.

We strive to work in the most impactful ways. We are always learning. In the face of entrenched problems, we bring imagination, persistence and pragmatism to forge new paths forward.

Strategic objectives

We activate collective power and influence change to achieve social and economic justice for current and future generations.

Outcomes we will achieve



Shift the system

Strategic outcome

1

Victoria's social and economic policies and systems work better for people facing poverty and disadvantage.

Focus areas



Strengthen relationships of influence and build coalitions to reduce poverty and disadvantage

Under this focus area, we will:

- Maintain strong engagement with Victorian MPs, government departments and statutory bodies, and deepen connections with central agencies
- Strengthen collaborations with philanthropy and other peak bodies including COSSs in other jurisdictions
- Foster stronger relationships with the business sector to drive coordinated action for system change



Produce targeted policy and advocacy outputs that 'join the dots' and compel decision-makers to act

Under this focus area, we will:

- Create a framework for prioritising issues for targeted advocacy on an annual basis or as needed
- Produce intersectional policy research and insights that drive decision-makers towards positive change
- Enhance frameworks for engagement with the expertise and advocacy of people with lived and living experience



Encourage public support for, and participation in, positive social change

Under this focus area, we will:

- Develop and implement a refreshed communications strategy
- Support the public to defend against misinformation and 'fake news' by promoting critical thinking and media literacy, recognising that it's a shared responsibility
- Lead and collaborate on targeted media engagement and campaigns that build public support for priority issues

If we are successful, we will see:

- Measurable **policy shifts** in at least two priority areas (such as poverty reduction, housing, sector workforce conditions) consistent with VCOSS policy positions.
- Demonstrated **public support** for VCOSS policy positions with a focus on mobilising target stakeholder groups.
- Stronger and new **partnerships** across government, peak bodies, philanthropy and the business sector.
- Enhanced frameworks for engagement with **lived and living experience** to ensure the voices of people affected are centred in relevant practices and outputs.



Strategic outcome
2

Communities in control

People and communities underserved by current policies and systems step into their power, bolstered by an effective, innovative and well-resourced community sector.

Focus areas



Convene high-impact forums bringing together government, business, and community sectors

Under this focus area, we will:

- Convene vibrant, thoughtful spaces for community sector leaders and workers to share knowledge and design collective solutions
- Explore opportunities to enhance the community sector's ability to use collective data and evidence to drive better outcomes



Advocate for fair funding and other systemic conditions required for community organisations to thrive

Under this focus area, we will:

- Undertake research and advocacy to improve the systemic conditions (including funding, regulation, job security and pay equity) required for community services to be effective, impactful and sustainably delivered
- Collaboratively lead initiatives to address workforce development needs and achieve a strong, skilled and healthy community services workforce



Respect and support Aboriginal self-determination, emphasising that Aboriginal communities should lead decisions about their futures

Under this focus area, we will:

- Strengthen relationships with Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations and First Nations community leaders to advance self-determination, truth-telling and Treaty for Victoria's First Peoples
- Support Aboriginal-led solutions and undertake work that challenges systems that sustain colonial injustices

If we are successful, we will see:



- High rates of **participation in events, networks and communities of practice** that advance holistic solutions to Victorian community need.
- Meaningful progress on First Peoples' self-determination through **strong ACCOs and mainstream organisations in active allyship**.
- Measurable **shifts in policy and funding practices** that enable communities to access trusted, reliable, high quality community services and supports.
- Enhanced sustainability for the **community services workforce**, with measurable improvements in job security, remuneration, career pathways and support.
- An **increase in data sharing and evidence use** by the community sector, enabling more informed decision-making

Strategic outcome
3

An impactful VCOSS

VCOSS is impactful and future-focused, strong in its membership and a great place to work.

Focus areas



Expand VCOSS member services and engagement, ensuring more opportunities for collaboration, advocacy and knowledge sharing

Under this focus area, we will:

- Strengthen VCOSS member and supporter engagement and value through a strategic review
- Enhance systems for member feedback and targeted engagement with subject matter expert (SME) cohorts
- Improve VCOSS insights on member priorities, activities and feedback through enhancements to our CRM



Strengthen financial and operational sustainability through revenue diversification, good governance and strategic partnerships

Under this focus area, we will:

- Develop and implement a plan to retain existing funding and diversify revenue sources
- Review VCOSS' investment strategy and strengthen Environment, Social and Governance (ESG) targets and performance



Enhance VCOSS' continuous learning framework embedding reflective practice, staff development and organisational improvements

Under this focus area, we will:

- Enhance how we measure, evaluate and learn from our work and report learnings to staff, members and partners
- Strengthen VCOSS' people and culture capability and offer thoughtful, enriching development opportunities

If we are successful, we will see:



- Benchmarking and enhancements in **member engagement** demonstrating that VCOSS provides valued and effective support to the sector.
- Strengthened **financial and operational sustainability** through revenue diversification, contemporary governance practices and strategic partnerships.
- **Organisational improvements** driven by enhanced processes for staff learning, skills sharing and professional development.



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