



Geelong Sustainability

Activating local connection for global change





Acknowledgement of country

The Geelong Sustainability Project Team (“the Project Team”) acknowledges the Wadawurrung People as the Traditional Owners and custodians of the land on which we live, work and play and on which this project was completed. We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging. We acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as Australia’s First Nations people.

Foreword from Geelong Sustainability Group

Geelong Sustainability is a not-for-profit environmental organisation established in 2007. Our work is driven by the global climate emergency. We want to empower the bold transformative action required to become a net zero carbon city region by 2035. We also know that a fast and fair transition will deliver economic opportunities and ecological benefits for Geelong and its community.

The Leaders for Geelong Project team have been tasked with the development of a Membership Growth Strategy to help Geelong Sustainability reach new members and empower more people to transition to a clean energy circular economy.

We are truly grateful for the skill and expertise the Leaders brought to this project. The research and recommendations contained in this report are extremely valuable to Geelong Sustainability, the project will help us greatly to grow our membership and build a movement that supports enhanced sustainability outcomes across the region.

Dan Cowdell

Executive Officer, Geelong Sustainability

The Leaders for Geelong Program is made possible through the support of our generous Program Partners and Scholarship Providers

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Kate Archbold



Attracted to the Surf Coast region in 2003 by the stunning natural beauty and outdoor lifestyle, Kate is passionate about ensuring that this environment is protected and nurtured for future generations.

Kate is currently a Nurse Manager with Barwon Health Community Nursing.

Sienna Mallon



A Geelong resident since 2020, relocating to undertake a position at Incitec Pivot Fertilisers, a role which provides valuable insight into the potential negative impacts' fertilisers can have on the environment.

Sienna is passionate about agriculture and the challenges of utilising Australian land to continue to be viable for growers whilst preserving the current natural landscape.

Renee Zebic



Grew up around the Bellarine Peninsula, is very passionate about the ocean, wildlife, and everything nature has to offer. Renee has an eagerness to learn and help create awareness for marine life.

A manufacturing supervisor at Carbon Revolution, keen to grow female representation within the industry.

Chris Dewhurst



An Ocean Grove resident since 2013 and originally from the UK. Passionate about volunteerism in general and progressive action to address the current climate crisis.

A volunteer firefighter/officer with the local CFA who provided the opportunity to undertake the LfG 2022 program. Currently a Senior Manager in Deloitte's actuarial consulting practice.



Project Team

Acknowledgements

We would like to acknowledge and thank all the Geelong Sustainability members and individuals in the community who completed our survey. We would also specifically like to thank the following individuals and organisations for their support, expertise, resources and sponsorship.

Geelong Sustainability

Dan Cowdell – Project Champion, Executive Officer

Merilyn Harris – Secretary

Vicki Perrett – President

Vivienne Burke – Acting Treasurer

Jonathan Wright – Committee Member

Emilie Flynn – Executive Assistant

Project Support

Joanne Jenkins – Project Mentor; Regional Manager, AimBig Employment

Catherine Bell – Leaders for Geelong 2022 Program Facilitator and Tutor; Director, Bell Training Group

Karen MacAdie – Leaders for Geelong Leadership Portfolio Coordinator, Committee for Geelong

Jennifer Cromarty – Chief Executive Officer, Committee for Geelong

Organisational Research:

Tim Baxter – RENEW, Melbourne

Rhiannon Boyd – Australasian Campuses Towards Sustainability (ACTS), Melbourne

Online research – Environment Victoria, Melbourne

Darren McCubbin – Gippsland Climate Change Network (GCCN), Gippsland Victoria

Colin Lambie – Bendigo Sustainability

Leaders for Geelong Program Sponsors for the Project Team Members:

Barwon Health – sponsoring Kate Archbold

Agriculture Victoria / Incitec Pivot – sponsoring Sienna Mallon

Committee for Geelong / Carbon Revolution – sponsoring Renee Zebic

Country Fire Authority – sponsoring Chris Dewhurst



"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."

Margaret Mead



Executive Summary

Geelong Sustainability (GS) is a membership-based organisation that until recently, has been entirely driven by volunteer effort with no staff support for its core operations and no capacity to run membership drives. In 2021 an internal human resources audit, identified that a shortage of skilled volunteers was impacting the organisation's current and future work and was severely overloading existing volunteers.

The objective for the Leaders for Geelong project team was to develop recommendations that will support membership growth for Geelong Sustainability.

By increasing membership growth Geelong Sustainability will have:

- A larger voice for advocating on sustainability issues for Geelong and the G21 region.
- Additional funds to support GS' activities (campaigns, events, projects and activities)
- Increased access to volunteers and community members to contribute to GS' work.
- New members with fresh ideas and skills that can leverage existing members' passion, knowledge and experience.
- Greater diversity and potential future champions and leaders of GS into the future.

To develop recommendations that would support membership growth, the project team conducted research through a review of the literature, a community survey, interviews with similar organisations and a review of current GS membership data. The purpose was to ascertain key themes to build a solid foundation for the recommendations.

The topic of membership growth is multi-faceted and complex, so the project team elected to display the research findings in four key inter-related areas that are all significant considerations for sustainable membership growth (see boxes)

Growth Influences

Why growth is important, factors that impact growth, barriers to growth

Value Proposition

Why value proposition is important, what is currently valued, value proposition opportunities

Target Market

Current target market, opportunities to identify and engage other markets

Engagement

Why engagement is important, effectiveness of current engagement strategies, opportunities to increase engagement

The **22 recommendations** outlined in this report capture the important factors Geelong Sustainability will need to focus on in the short and medium term as they work towards building a sustainable membership base. The project team are optimistic that the recommendations outlined, if implemented, will contribute to the success of Geelong Sustainability into the future.



Project Purpose and Objectives

Geelong Sustainability (GS) are seeking to grow their membership.

Growing their membership will lead to:

- A larger voice for advocating on sustainability issues for Geelong and the G21 region.
- Additional funds to support GS' activities (campaigns, events, projects and activities)
- Increased access to volunteers and community members to contribute to GS' work.
- New members with fresh ideas and skills that can leverage existing members' passion, knowledge and experience.
- Greater diversity and potential future champions and leaders of GS into the future.

The objectives of the Leaders for Geelong project are to develop recommendations that support:

- Evolving the GS value proposition for members
- GS to identify and engage with potential target markets
- Develop effective member engagement strategies



Overview of Geelong Sustainability

Geelong Sustainability Group Incorporated (GS) was originally established in 2007. It became a Registered Environmental Organisation with DGR (Deductible Gift Recipient) status in 2013 and a registered Charity in 2016. [GS model rules](#) state its purpose is ***“to protect and enhance the natural environment and increase the environmental sustainability of our region”***

The [Strategy 2025 & Action Plan 2020-25](#) published in May 2020 outlines four strategic priority areas: Climate Action, Renewable Energy, Circular Economy and Sustainable Cities.

Organisational priorities central to the successful implementation of the strategy are:

- To advocate for urgent action on climate change and sustainability issues
- To build an active, articulate, objective and informed community
- To establish and leverage mutually beneficial partnerships
- To strengthen our capability and deliver projects with impact

In order to strengthen capability and deliver projects with impact, GS identified the need to recruit and train volunteers and grow their membership and network (action plan item A10).

Until recently, GS has been entirely driven by volunteer effort with no staff support for its core operations and no capacity to run membership drives.

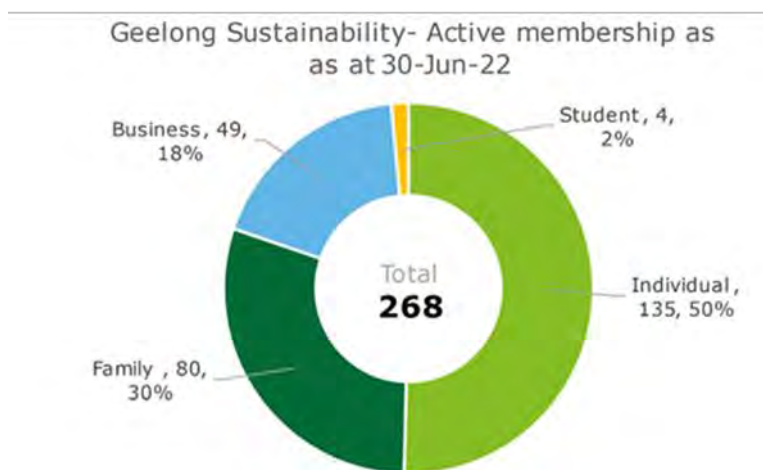
In 2021 an internal human resources audit, identified that a shortage of skilled volunteers was impacting the organisation’s current and future work and was severely overloading existing volunteers. Their first employee at 0.6 FTE began work on 1 February 2022.

In May 2022 GS ran a volunteer information session with the aim of recruiting more volunteers. However, a 0.6 FTE and volunteer effort alone is unlikely to be a sustainable and reliable model. Current volunteers are facing burnout.

For GS to maximise its impact and achieve its mission, membership growth is essential.



Current Membership Structure



A member pays an annual subscription which contributes to the work of GS. As at 30 Jun 2022 GS had 268 members; 80% were individuals/families, 18% were business members and 2% were students.

There are currently 4 categories of membership:

Individual membership - \$30

Family membership - \$40. Covers two adult members of the immediate family. The name and email address of the second person is captured in the 'notes' section of the application.

Student membership - \$10

Business membership - \$100. The business activity must align with GS' objectives to transition the region to a climate resilient, clean energy and circular economy.

**Annual memberships correct as of the date of this report*

A **volunteer** provides their time in support of GS activities and may or may not be a member. However, most current GS volunteers are also members.

An **email subscriber** has signed up free of charge to GS' mailing list receiving the free monthly newsletter and updates in relation to GS activities, events and campaigns. As at 30 Jun 2022 GS had 6,664 email subscribers.

GS is also active across several **social media** sites:

Twitter - 783 Followers

Facebook - 1,600 members

Instagram - 3,788 followers

LinkedIn - 807 followers

Project Approach

The topic of membership growth is multi-faceted. The project team recognised that to provide a reliable foundation to inform recommendations that will ensure sustainable membership growth, the project required four main diagnostic elements:

1. Literature Review

To explore key considerations and strategies for growing member-based organisations, particularly in the areas of value proposition, target market and engagement.

2. Review of current GS membership/ website data

To identify and analyse any existing GS data to, where possible, understand current GS member demographics, attrition/retention rates, recent membership growth patterns and website/newsletter interactions. A meeting was held with the GS webmaster and project sponsor to explore what data was available and potentially valuable for the project team. Internal GS membership data was provided, including data available from the GS website.

3. Research other sustainability/ volunteer/not for profit membership-based organisations

To understand the value proposition, membership management, membership engagement and marketing approach that other organisations have developed and implemented, presented an opportunity to utilise their learnings to inform recommendations for GS. The following approach was taken:

1. Identify organisations

In collaboration with the Project Sponsor and utilising Project Team networks several organisations were identified that met the 'similar organisation' criteria. These were: Renew, Environment Victoria, Bendigo Sustainability, Gippsland Climate Change, Australasian Campuses Towards Sustainability, Permaculture Australia

An introductory email was sent to each of the identified organisations to request their involvement.

2. Develop research questions and template:

Research questions for organisations were developed (see [Appendix 1 – Research Questions for Organisations](#)). The question template ensured a consistent approach to the interviews and structured commentary. The key focus areas were; organisation purpose, target market, membership, value (to members), engagement and retention, financial, membership management, marketing. Questions were reviewed by GS prior to commencement

3. Desktop research & Interviews

The websites of the six organisations were used to conduct desktop research. Desktop research was done prior to the interviews to collect as much information as possible and facilitate a more targeted interview.

An online meeting was arranged with a representative from four organisations. The meeting involved one project team member and the organisations representative. Feedback was recorded using the question template as a guide

The project team greatly appreciated the time and information provided by the organisations that participated in this research.



4. Community Survey

To understand the 'current state' as identified by the existing GS members, newsletter subscribers and residents in the region, the project team determined that it was essential to gather information via a community survey.

The project team discussed the approach to the community survey with GS who were familiar with conducting surveys and had considerable experience with the SurveyMonkey platform. There were some member specific questions however these were intentionally limited. The structure of the questions was also considered to ensure optimization of the value of responses. The project team worked with GS to refine the draft questions.

GS built the survey in SurveyMonkey which was greatly appreciated by the project team who reviewed and tested the survey prior to distribution.

The final survey contained 36 core questions, some with sub-questions (see [Appendix 2 -Community Survey Questionnaire](#)).

The survey was distributed through a variety of existing GS channels (i.e social media platforms and email) and promoted by project team members within their organisation and personal social media platforms. It remained open for completion for 3 weeks between 21st July and August 11th, 2022.

As GS regularly undertakes surveys, the survey distribution date was scheduled into the existing GS communications plan. Advanced planning was important to reduce 'survey fatigue'. The survey remained open for 3 weeks based on GS' experience of declining response rates after this time period.

The Project team were delighted with the 190 survey responses received. Participant demographics are summarised in the [Appendix 3 Survey Demographics](#).


Data confidentiality

All data was accessed and shared via a secure/restricted Google Drive. The project team members signed and agreed to GS terms for non-disclosure through a formal agreement (NDA).

All current membership and survey data provided to the project team will be returned to GS at the conclusion of this project. No personally identifiable information is included in the report.



The target audience for the survey was broad to ensure feedback was gathered from both members and non-members (i.e. potential new members)

A photograph of a dense forest. In the foreground, there are several large, vibrant green ferns. The ground is covered with fallen logs and branches, some of which are covered in moss. The background shows a dense stand of tall, thin trees, likely conifers, with sunlight filtering through the canopy.

Humans are very adaptable; we can still fix this. But the opportunity to do so will not last for long. We must start today. We have no more excuses.”

Greta Thunberg

Research findings

Before we explore our research findings, it is important to highlight a key overriding message; *there is no silver bullet, or one size fits all approach to growing a member-based organisation.*

We have elected to display our research findings in four interrelated areas that are significant considerations for sustainable membership growth:

Growth Influences

Understand why growth is important, contextual factors that may impact growth, GS recent growth experience and any actual or perceived barriers to future membership growth for GS.

Value proposition

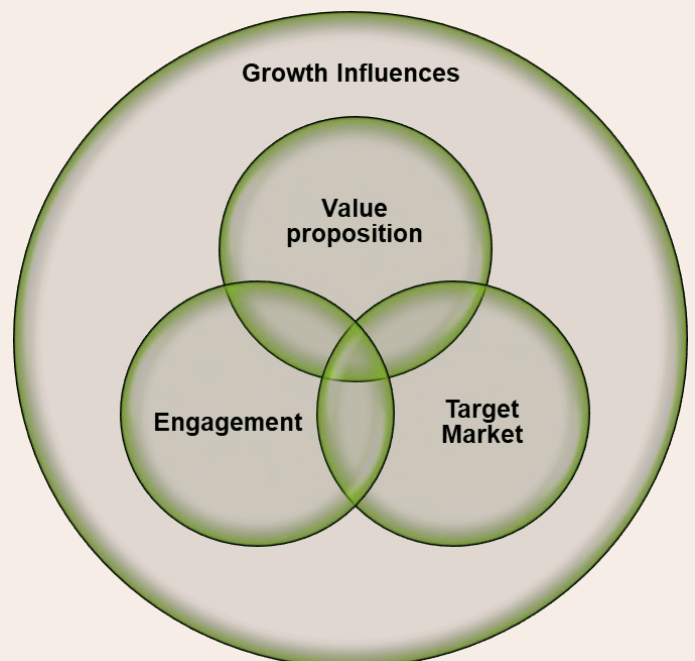
Understand why defining a value proposition is important, identify what is currently offered and valued by the community, consider other value proposition options and opportunities to refine current value.

Target Market

Understand current target market and opportunities for GS to identify and engage other target markets.

Engagement

Understand the value of engagement for current members and for acquiring new members. Understand current GS member engagement and the effectiveness of current engagement strategies. Consideration of other strategies and opportunities to increase engagement.





Growth Influences

We are living in extraordinary times, and thus it is important to acknowledge the current context in which GS are aiming to grow their membership base. There are a variety of key influencing factors to consider.

Context for growth

COVID

COVID-19 is still very much a feature impacting our everyday personal and professional lives. In recent months the BA.5 subvariant has produced another wave in Victoria.

The chart below highlights the 5 Local Government Areas (LGAs) in the G21 region in orange. At the time of writing Greater Geelong had the 3rd highest active case tally in Victoria and the 12th highest rate per 100,000 population.

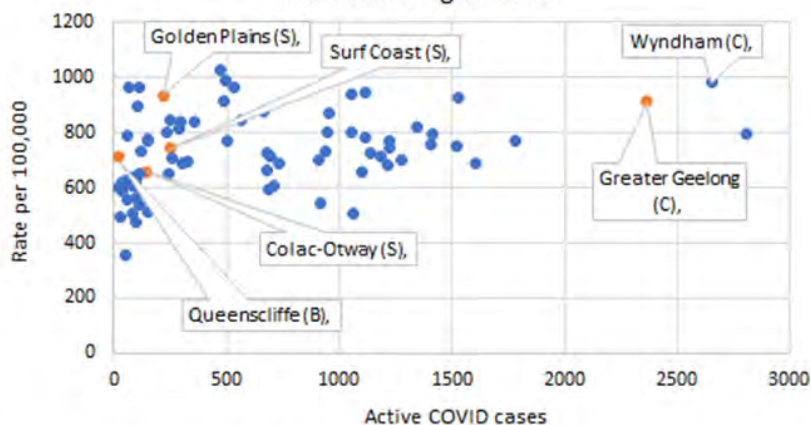
Golden Plains can also be seen to have one of the highest rates per 100,000. We have also noted Wyndham neighboring Greater Geelong with currently the 2nd highest active case tally and 3rd highest rate per 100,000 in the state. It is important to note that most people who fall sick will experience mild to moderate symptoms and recover without special treatment. However, some will become seriously ill and require medical attention including more vulnerable populations such as the elderly.

In May 2021 Volunteering Australia released an analysis of [Volunteering and the ongoing impact of COVID-19/](#). The report showed COVID significantly impacted volunteer programs and participation rates. Two thirds (66%) of volunteers are estimated to have stopped volunteering across Australia which is equivalent to 12.2 million hours per week. Volunteers over the age of 65 were more likely to have stopped and females were more likely to have stopped volunteering than males.

The importance of organisations offering opportunities for volunteers to contribute online was highlighted. Online volunteering was available to about one in five (21%) volunteers. Of those with access to this opportunity, three in four (76%) participated in online volunteering.

Our interviews with similar organisations found they had experienced varied impacts due to Covid-19. Some experienced significant drops in member engagement, particularly in historically face to face events, when they switched to online versions. For others, they experienced higher engagement during the Victorian lockdowns as there was an increased interest in greener living due to the requirement to be working from home.

G21 LGA's - Active COVID cases/rates
data as at 5 August 2022



Source: <https://www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au/victorian-coronavirus-covid-19-data>



Context for growth

New climate legislation

Following the Australian Federal election on 21 May 2022 and the election of an Albanese Labour Government, there has been a substantive and important change of direction for climate legislation.

In August 2022 a bill was passed to enshrine in legislation a 43% emissions reduction target by 2030 and net zero emissions by 2050. The new legislation tightens up reporting schemes that track progress towards the target obligations by placing increased responsibility on the Climate Change Authority (an independent statutory body that provides expert advice to the Australian Government). Whilst the 43% emissions reduction target was not as high as some wanted, amendments to the bill ensured it was a “floor not a ceiling”.

The Clean Energy Council endorsed the new climate bill saying ‘it represents significant progress in Australia’s climate-change strategy’. The legislation will first go to a Senate inquiry, where committee members will hear evidence on the impacts of the proposal. The inquiry will report back to parliament by the end of August.

This change in direction and renewed focus will ensure the current climate emergency is front of mind for people in our region.

Cost of living pressures

On 3 April 2022 interest rates were at 0.1% having tracked at these historically low levels for over 12 months. However, by June 2022 inflation had reached in excess of 6% ([rba.gov.au](https://www.rba.gov.au)).

This has been driven by a variety of factors including but not limited to the impacts of the COVID-19, the war in Ukraine, the NSW-QLD floods and an energy crisis in Australia.

To control inflation, by the 3 Aug 2022 the Reserve Bank of Australia (RBA) had announced a fourth consecutive increase to interest rates taking it up to 1.85% with an expectation of further rate rises for the rest of the year, though not at such a dramatic rate ([rba.gov.au](https://www.rba.gov.au)).

The rising cost of living is a consistent concern as prices for food, petrol, rent and more soar and is seen to be impacting non-profit and charitable organisations through a reduction in donations. It is also seen to be having an impact on the availability of volunteers who are having to work more (paid) hours resulting in less time out to do any sort of volunteer work.

To conclude, there are several external factors which will provide both challenges but also potential opportunities for growing GS’ membership base in the short (1-2 years) to medium term (3-5 years).



Geelong Sustainability Growth

GS has had strong and steady annual growth in their membership over the last few years (between 12-17%). In the most recent 12 months growth was positive but relatively modest when compared with previous years.

| Geelong Sustainability Annual Growth in Membership 12 months to: | | | |
|---|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| 30-Jun-19 | 30-Jun-20 | 30-Jun-21 | 30-Jun-22 |
| 12% | 15% | 17% | 4% |

A useful benchmark for membership growth comparison is [Wild Apricot's 2020 Membership Growth Report](#) which surveyed 1,231 organisations on how they fared at growing their membership and revenue in 2019.

There were a range of organisation types (associations, not for profits and clubs), sizes (large 1,000+ members to small with <50 members) and ages (older 20+ years to newer <1 year). 4% of the organisations surveyed were from Australia and New-Zealand.

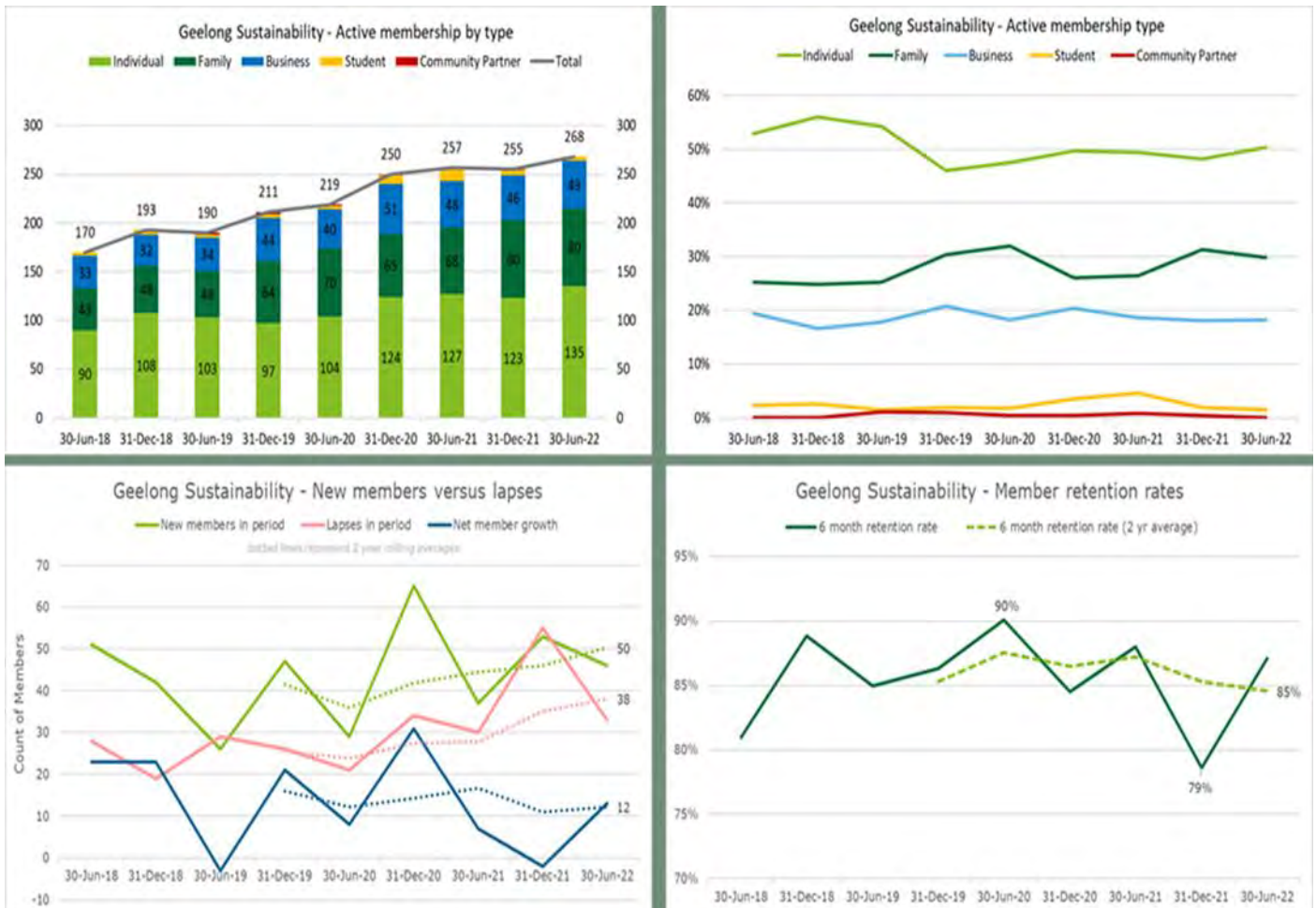
GS' membership growth in the calendar year 2019 (Jan-Dec) was 12% which would put it in the top 20% of organisations under this benchmark survey. This result is especially positive given that GS would be considered a mature organisation (>10 years old). Mature organisations were found to be less likely to grow compared to newer ones, simply because they had been around longer

Interestingly there had been no concerted effort/focus by GS on growing membership in that time.



Geelong Sustainability Growth

The graphs below look in more detail at GS' growth over the last 4-5 years and the nature of this growth:



Some key points to note from this data:

Evidence of a steady growth in the membership base in 8 out of 10 consecutive 6 monthly periods. The dip in the most recent 12 months to 30th Jun 2022 is driven by increased lapsing (non-renewal) of members in the 6 months to 31st Dec 2021.

Evidence of a strong retention rate averaging around 85%. It can be difficult to find suitable benchmarks for retention rates. According to the Association of Fundraising Professionals (AFP) [2019 Fundraising Effectiveness Report](#) the average donor retention rate in 2018 was just 43%. Since 2005, average yearly rates have fluctuated between 40-50%. By this measure at least, the current GS retention rate is very strong.

Evidence of a relatively stable balance of memberships. Individuals and families accounting for approximately 80% and businesses approximately 20%. Student memberships are offered but with little uptake.

Whilst there is no clear evidence to support this, the conclusion could be drawn that the dip in member retention in the second half of 2021, driven by an increased lapsing (non-renewal) of members, was almost certainly the impacts of lockdowns in Victoria.

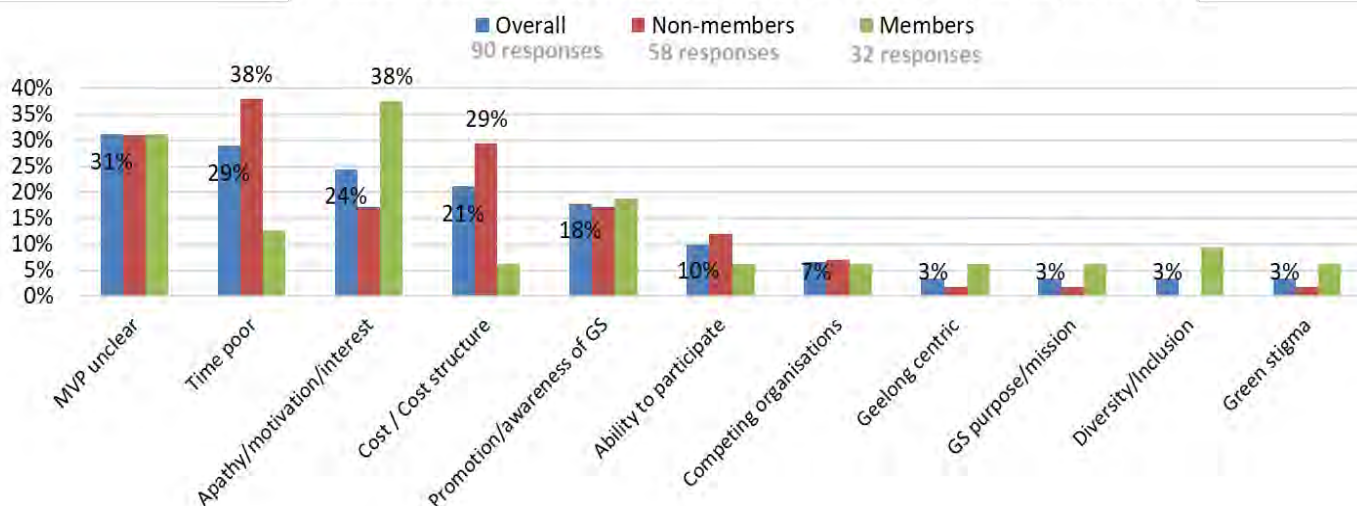


Barriers to GS membership growth

While GS are largely unable to influence contextual factors like COVID, government policy and cost of living pressures, they do have an opportunity to influence any actual or perceived barriers to becoming a GS member within our region.

Our community survey asked respondents to identify up to 3 potential barriers. Responses were free text to avoid bias, and all were individually reviewed. The following themes emerged:

What do you see as the top barrier(s) to becoming a Geelong Sustainability member?



The top barrier to membership cited by 1 in 3 of the 90 respondents was that the **member value proposition (MVP) was unclear**. This was true for both members and non-members.

Cost/cost structure was also a key barrier identified in 1 in 3 non-members. Both are considered in the [Member Value Proposition](#) section of this report.

Barriers such as **apathy/motivation/interest**, **promotion/awareness of GS** and **ability to participate** are considered in the [Engagement](#) section of this report.

A potential additional barrier to membership we noted from results in the graph above, and from additional community survey responses, was an uncertainty about what becoming a member involves. Nearly 40% of the 58 non-member responses cited being **time poor** as a barrier. Being time poor is not a barrier to membership per se but

to participation and volunteering. The following response captures the problem:

“I didn’t know membership was an option. I think I thought this meant you become a volunteer”



Barriers to GS membership growth

The GS website has options for joining as a member, donating or volunteering.

Options on the GS website



There is an opportunity to review and simplify the website options to provide greater clarity around becoming a member vs volunteering, differentiating the financial vs time commitment

It appears, that despite the factors that are likely to influence growth, the data reflects that GS membership growth in recent years has been steady, organic and strong compared to many similar organisations. Member retention is strong.



Recommendation: The website needs to clearly set out that membership is a financial commitment only. Perfect for those that are time poor. Individuals may also contribute their time (volunteer) if they wish





Member Value Proposition

The *Member Value Proposition (MVP)* is the incentive for members to join, belong, renew and participate. The *Member Benefit Statement (MBS)* is a short summary of the member benefits provided by a membership organisation or association.

The benefits to a member can be perceived or actual, tangible (e.g. a discount) or intangible (e.g. emotions). They can be delivered in any number of ways such as through quality content, connections with experts, webinar series, networking opportunities, being connected or feeling you are doing something to contribute to the greater good.

A clearly articulated value proposition and statement of benefits gives potential members a reason to sign up and current members a reason to stay engaged, therefore making member acquisition dramatically simpler.

The Member Value 2025 Project report by the MemberWise Network outlines 4 key elements for communicating a MVP:

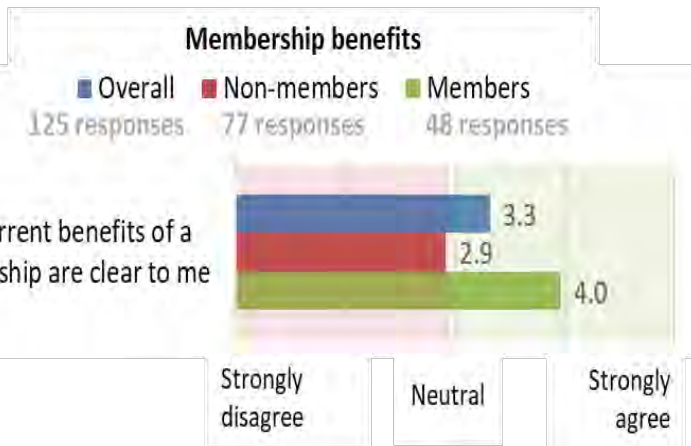
1. **Headline Statement** – An attention-grabbing headline that articulates the end benefit of membership.
2. **Member Value Explanation** – What is offered, why it is offered and for whom
3. **Member Benefit Statement** – Three or four key features or benefits of membership
4. **A link to further information**



Evolving the Geelong Sustainability MVP

Currently GS' website makes the following headline statement about member value:

“Join us today and contribute towards the campaigns, events and activities that will help achieve meaningful outcomes for our Geelong region and move us towards a low carbon future”.



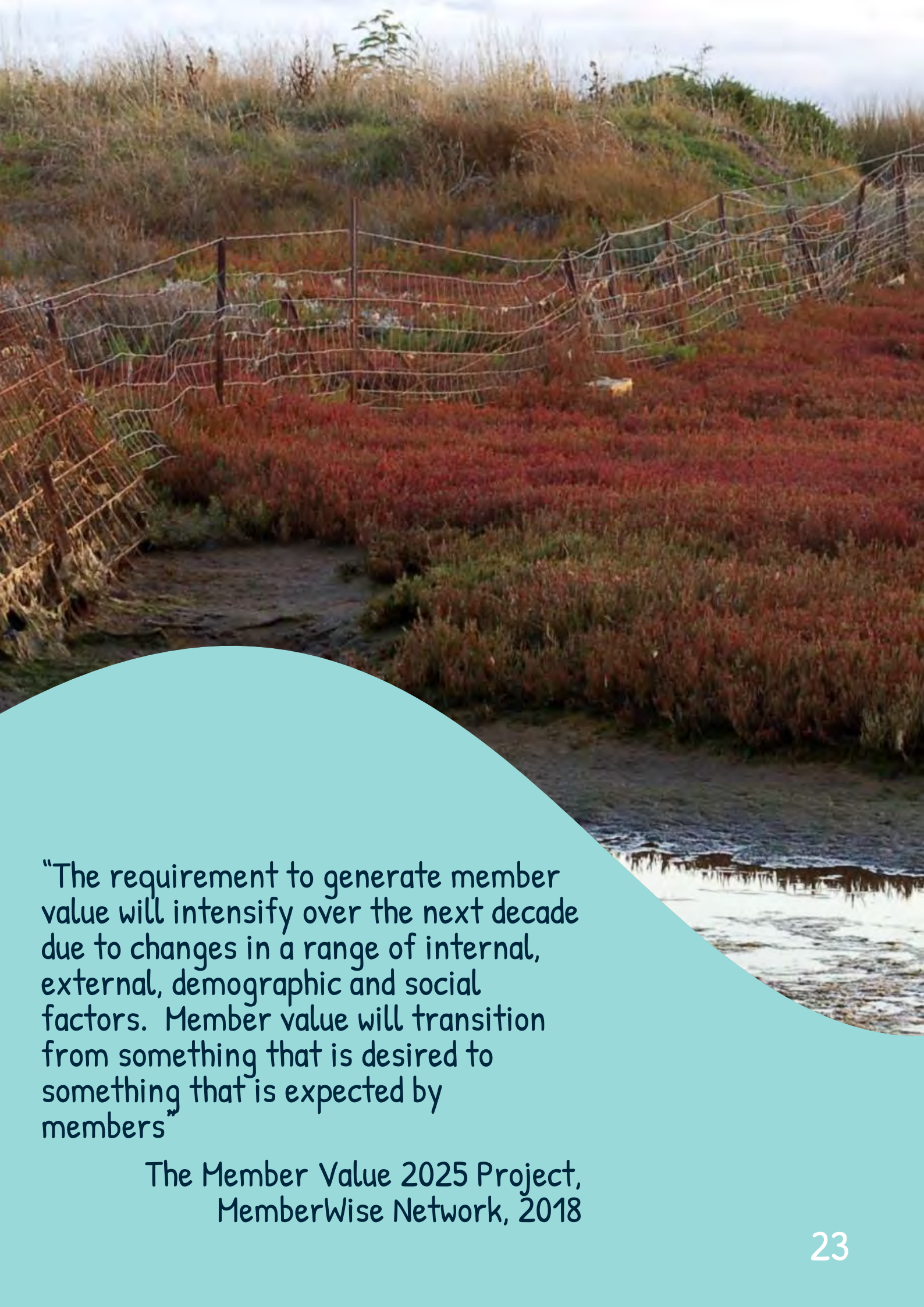
We noted earlier that the value proposition was a key barrier for growing membership. The community survey also showed that the **benefits of membership are not clear**.

For **business memberships** there is some detail on the website about the member benefits offered, but there are opportunities to improve the clarity and overall presentation.

For **non-business memberships** (individual/family/student) there are no details on the GS website about the benefits of membership.

Based on discussions with GS, our literature research, and interviews with similar organisations, the project team included a question in the community survey with a list of potential member benefits. This allowed us to capture the value placed on current member benefits and also identify opportunities to develop the member benefits in the future.





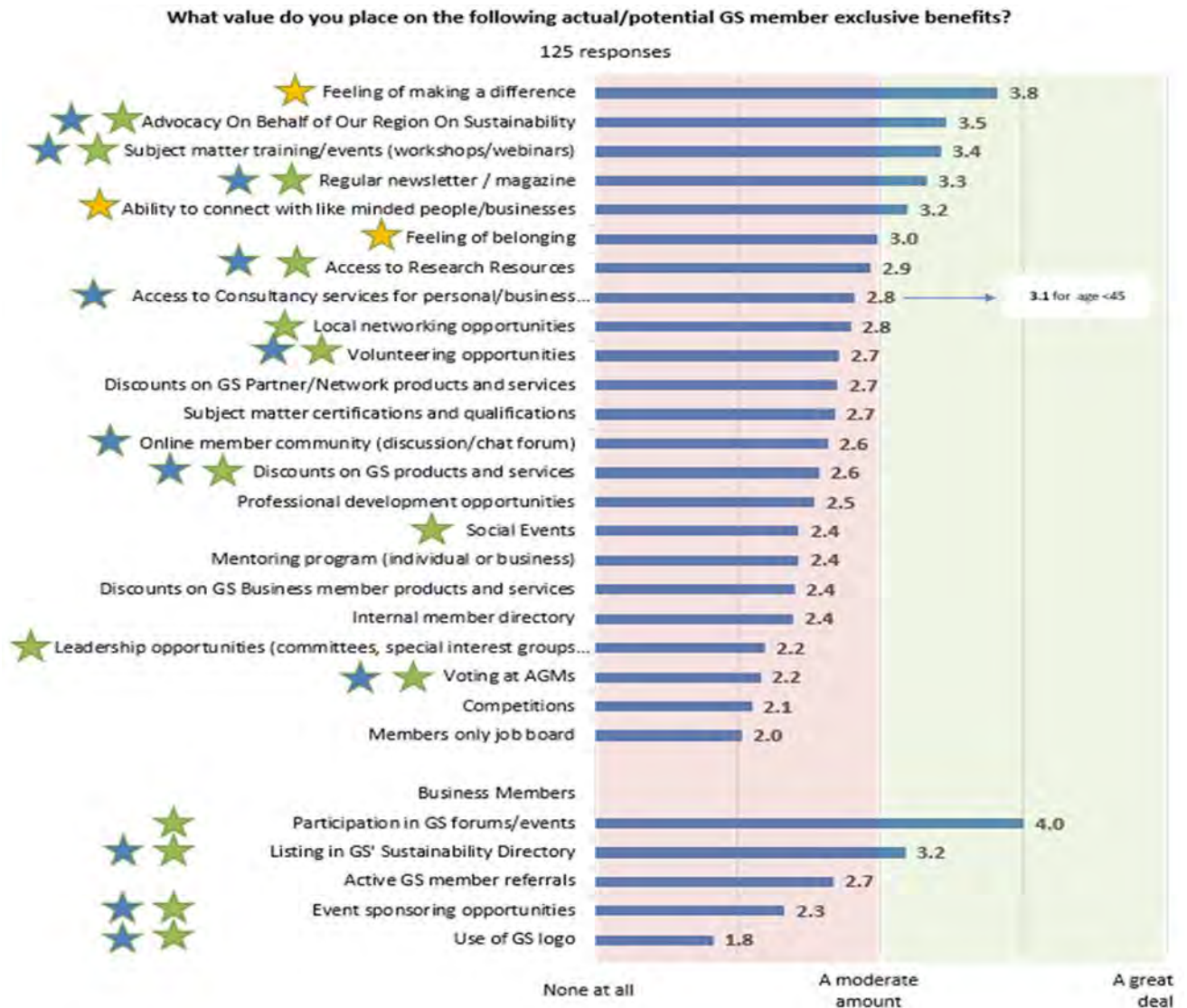
“The requirement to generate member value will intensify over the next decade due to changes in a range of internal, external, demographic and social factors. Member value will transition from something that is desired to something that is expected by members”

The Member Value 2025 Project,
MemberWise Network, 2018



Evolving the Geelong Sustainability MVP

The chart that follows orders most to least valued benefits, highlights GS' current offering, the offering of similar organisations and intangible benefits.



Key:

| | |
|---|---|
| ★ | Tangible benefits offered by GS |
| ★ | Tangible benefits offered by similar organisations (based on our research interviews) |
| ★ | Intangible benefits |

Some key points to note from this data:

- There is evidence to suggest that the **most valued benefits were largely the same whether you were a member or not, male or female, older or younger**. We have called out one notable point of difference from the analysis in relation to the provision of consultancy services which was rated of higher value by the younger demographic.
- There is evidence to suggest that **intangible benefits accounted for 3 of the top 6 most valued benefits**. These should not be overlooked when GS establishes and clarifies its current member benefits.



Evolving the Geelong Sustainability MVP

A summary of the member benefits being offered by similar organisations but not by GS are in the table. It is important to note that any additional benefits offered by other organisations are relative to the membership fees charged.

Some key points to note from this information:

When compared to similar organisations **current GS member benefits are largely aligned for individuals**. The two individual member benefits offered by similar organisations that are worth GS considering are online member community/chat forums and consultant services.

Similar organisations are offering some **additional membership benefits for their business/ organisation memberships**. It is not possible from our community survey to evaluate the value placed on all these additional benefits.

| Summary of member benefits offered by similar organisations, not offered by GS | |
|--|---|
| Individuals | Business/Organisation Members |
| Online member community/chat rooms | |
| Consultant/expert advice – discounted or free for members | Members can promote activities/services in newsletter/magazines/at events |
| Commercial arm (consultant services - discounted for members) | Partnership with schools/students |
| | Member round table - share ideas, challenges, solutions |
| | Access to sustainability self-assessment framework |
| | Sponsorship of monthly newsletter |
| | Support grants for community projects |
| | Offer member to member discounts |



Some of these member benefits should be considered as they are relatively time efficient and may generate income, such as allowing business members to sponsor the monthly newsletter



Evolving the Geelong Sustainability MVP

The research has established that GS do offer exclusive member benefits for business memberships, so the current value proposition for this group is well-defined

However, a key point to highlight is **that non-business memberships** (individual, family and student) currently **lack exclusive member benefits**. Most of GS' resources and events are offered for free or for a nominal fee / gold coin donation.

For example, a GS strategic decision some years ago was to distribute the monthly newsletter to a wider audience for free. This was a conscious decision to increase community reach and raise awareness. With over 6,000 email subscribers, the strategy was clearly successful, and the newsletter reaches a wide audience. However, in doing this GS removed the opportunity for the newsletter to be an exclusive member benefit.

We acknowledge that there is a balance to strike here. Placing access restrictions on information, content or events in order to provide member exclusivity may feel

like it works against GS' underpinning principles to *Inspire, Inform* and *Connect*.

However, increasing the membership base is critical for longer term organisational viability so a trade-off needs to be made. It is reasonable to ask why an individual would subscribe as a member when they can get a good offering of GS resources and information for free.



Evolving the Geelong Sustainability MVP

In evolving the MVP, consideration will need to be given to cost (financial, time and opportunity) versus the value placed on the particular benefit.

Consideration should be given to what existing GS events/content could be transitioned (fully or partially) to member only access. Potential lower cost/effort examples include:

- **Monthly email newsletter** – GS could continue to send the newsletter to its email subscriber base for free however could also limit certain articles and/or features to member access only. This may convert some email subscribers to members who want to access the content.
- **Record existing events for online member access** – Green Drinks for example is generally free with a gold coin donation. Restricting event attendance to members only would be counterproductive – based on internal GS member data non-members attending these events account for 30-60% of attendees, depending on the event, and is therefore an important recruitment avenue. However, as occurred during the COVID lockdown it would be relatively straightforward and cost free to record all Green Drinks sessions and provide them online with member only access ([Green Drinks - Geelong Sustainability](#)).
- **Consultant services for individuals** – a point of difference with similar organisations was that some offered consultant/expert advice which is either discounted or free for their members. Clearly, this is unlikely to be a low cost/effort option, however GS may wish to explore this given our community survey found that '**access to consultancy services for individuals**' was valued highly in the younger demographic.
- **Online member community/chat room** – our community survey respondents placed less value on this option. However, there are several reasons why GS should still consider it:
 - It would provide a point of difference compared to some similar organisations
 - It may help promote connection and collaboration directly with members and a more personalised experience as the membership grows
 - It is an option to provide a cost-effective way to offer expert advice and information to members in lieu of a consultancy service.
 - In the current COVID climate being online/digitally savvy was previously highlighted to increase participation

Consideration of what new events/content/ features could be introduced as member exclusive benefits. GS may wish to consider some, or all the potential member benefits listed in the earlier chart, including any points of difference with similar organisations. However, we would highlight the following:



Evolving the Geelong Sustainability MVP



Recommendation: The website content and presentation should be updated to clearly articulate the current MVP particularly for individuals, families and student membership.



Recommendation: In evolving the MVP for business members consider the additional low-cost offerings that other organisations offer their business members.



Recommendation: To attract new members with exclusive benefits, consideration should be given to transitioning some existing events/content in full/part to member only access. See report for examples.



Recommendation: In evolving the MVP for individual/family/student members, consider what new events/content/features could be introduced as member exclusive benefits e.g. consultant services and online member forum.



Recommendation: Document your current MVP and member benefits statement. The member value proposition should include both tangible and intangible benefits.



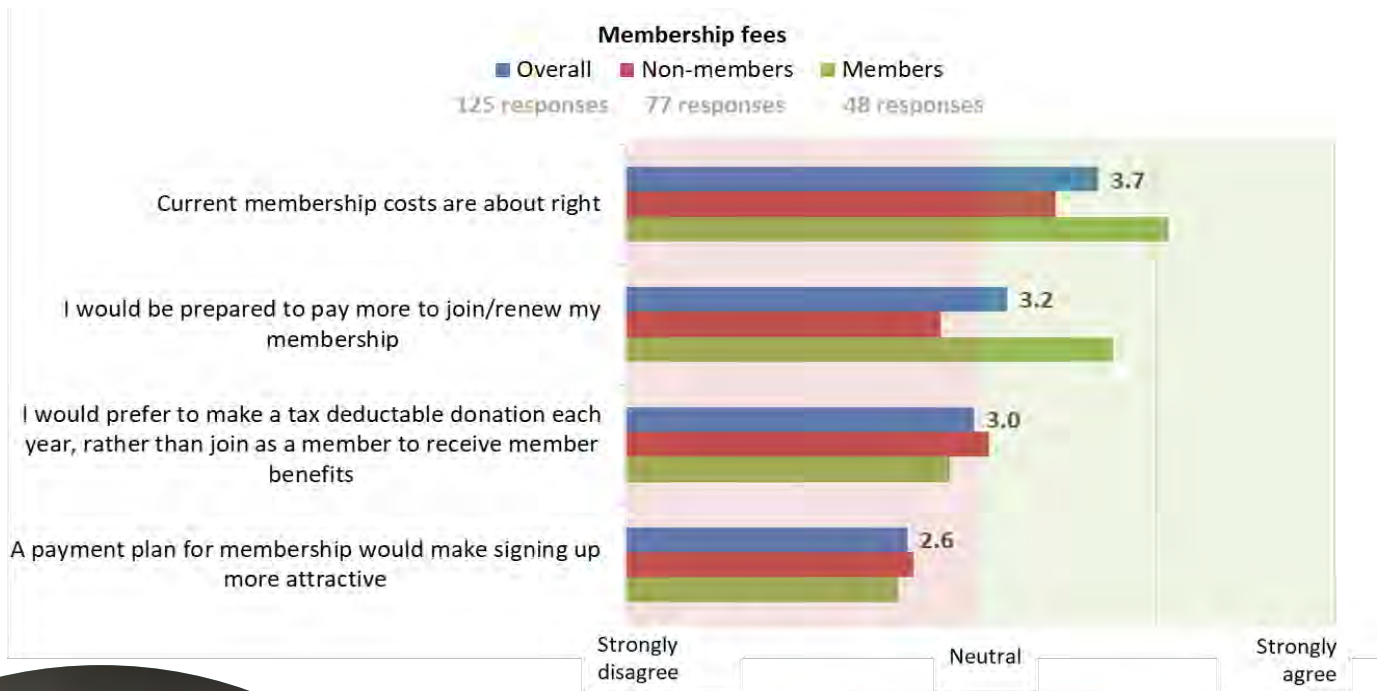
Membership Fees

The value of membership cannot be considered in isolation of the membership fee being charged.

The graph below shows that current member respondents to our community survey felt *that fees are about right* and *that they would be prepared to pay more for their membership*.

As shown in the chart below our survey also explored some potential membership options around fee structure.

Interestingly, respondents who were not current members were less sure and tended to disagree they would be prepared to pay more. This is perhaps not surprising - if the MVP is not well defined and not clearly articulated on the website for the community, it is hard to assess the costs versus benefit.



Results indicated that there was little value placed on a regular tax-deductible donation as an alternative to a membership subscription and little value placed on a payment plan option



Membership fees

Geelong Sustainability should consider the introduction of discounts / concessions associated with membership fees

Some options that could be explored are:

- **Payment plan / direct debit option** - similar organisations we researched offered this option however as discussed survey respondents were generally neutral on a payment plan. However, this format would likely benefit GS so this should be considered. Auto-renewal may avoid losing members at renewal time simply because they forgot. One similar organisation researched noted they employed an 'outbound caller' to contact members who forgot to renew, auto renewal would eliminate this need.
- **Membership concessions** - cost/cost structure was an identified barrier to membership and of note was the lack of concession rates for pensioners. Currently GS offer discounts on individual memberships for families (2 adults) and students. The introduction of a pensioner/health care card holder concession may potentially attract new members.
- **Membership discounts on the Sustainable House Day (SHD) product** - currently the annual SHD product fee is \$20 for full online access to featured houses. Individual memberships are \$30. GS could instead promote SHD \$20 plus a discounted 66% discount on an annual GS membership (i.e. \$10).

It may not necessarily lead to a net increase in membership income given the current member demographics, many of whom may be entitled to receive the concession. However, it would still result in an increased membership base, increasing the credibility of GS for advocacy and with greater access to potential volunteers in the future.



Recommendation: Review discounts/concessions associated with membership fees i.e. a pensioner concession rate and membership fee discounts on the SHD product.



Recommendation: Consider introducing a direct debit / auto renewal option for membership fees to avoid losing members at renewal time.



Target Market

A value proposition must appeal to an organisation's target market and as such they are inter-related.

Whilst GS' current MVP could be better defined and marketed and will evolve over time it is also important that GS identify its target market.

Although it is beyond the scope of this report, the project team acknowledge the concept of 'movement marketing'. Movement marketing is where brands tap into existing cultural movements that align with their own values, passions and goals, whereas traditional advertising starts with the product and pushes it upon the culture. Movement marketing does the exact opposite - this is most definitely the approach for GS.

The 'target market' for GS refers to a group who are aligned to the 'cause' (GS' mission and purpose). GS activities must interest them and they see value in the organisation because it helps them achieve their individual goals and act as a voice for them to influence change on a larger scale.

The group may be further segmented with common needs and perceptions of value and who may also respond similarly to different marketing actions.

Segments may be determined by a range of factors including geography, age, life stage and income to name a few. Once GS have defined this target market, it becomes easier to determine where and how to market itself to attract new members.

GS does not currently consider marketing segmentation but rather uses mass marketing e.g. emails to all its subscriber base and members.



Identifying GS' target market

The community survey demonstrated consistent results for questions we asked about general attitudes and beliefs about the environment.

Environment was a high priority for respondents, and they felt individual actions were worthwhile.

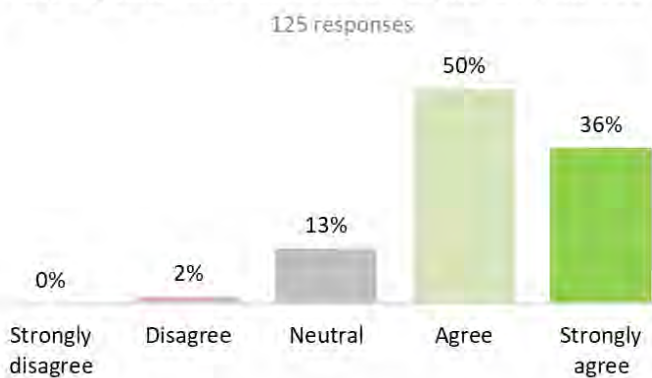
They strongly supported GS efforts to combat climate change and 86% said GS activities were aligned to their interests. This was consistent across demographics.

There is clearly some inherent bias in these results. The main channel for distributing the community survey was the GS email subscriber list, although it was also promoted through social media. 74% of respondents indicated email was how they found out about the survey. However, at least 25% of responses were through other means and 2 out of every 3 respondents were not GS members. So, the conclusion could be drawn that selling the cause and interest in GS activities are less a barrier to attracting new members than finding the people.

We found during our research that minimal demographic information is collected by GS in relation to members, email subscribers and customers who purchase event products. We note the general sign-up process:

- For an **individual membership** requests the bare minimum (name and address details).
- For **family memberships** nominated family members are added to notes on the application. No direct contact /relationship is established with the non-primary contact i.e. no individual member numbers, no personal member experience.
- For **email subscribers** it is simply an email address collected
- For **customers who purchase products** e.g. Sustainable House Day tickets, details are also limited.

Geelong Sustainabilities activities are aligned to my interests



It is important to collect such information as it not only helps inform and understand your target market, but it is also important for ongoing member engagement and opportunities for personalisation of marketing and communications in the future.



Recommendation: Review and develop the sign-up forms (for memberships, email subscriptions and customers) to collect more demographic information about these groups.



Geography

GS' philosophy is *'think global, act local'* so clearly geography is the starting point. However, this presents challenges.

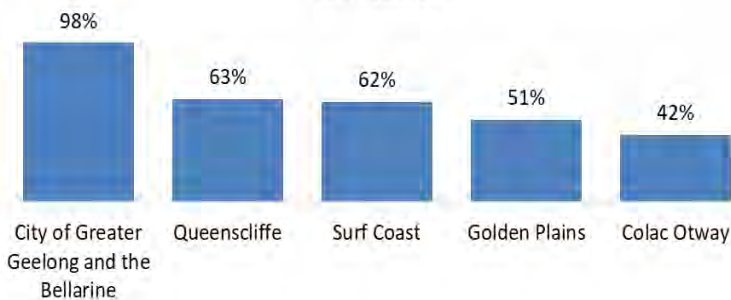
The community survey indicated that 1 in 3 respondents did not think GS' reach extended to Queenscliffe or the Surf Coast and 1 in 2 to Golden Plains.

Whilst GS seeks to appeal to the broader G21 region (five LGAs) in terms of branding, "Geelong" Sustainability may limit the appeal to some individuals. The sphere of influence may diminish further afield

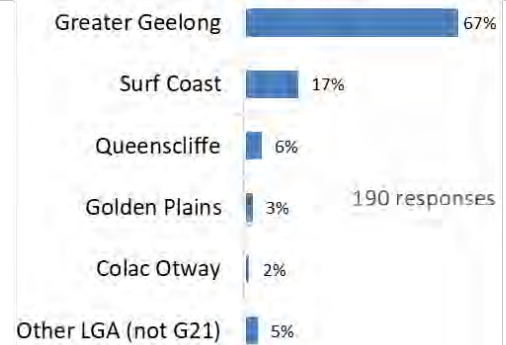
Additionally, the results also showed that of the 65 current members who responded to the survey 50% lived in just 4 post codes.

What do you think is the geographical reach of Geelong Sustainability?

183 responses



Which LGA do you live in?



GS seeks to be an umbrella organisation with a larger voice for advocacy and change. Its interests and activities cover a broad range of the 'sustainability spectrum'.

70-80% of survey respondents lived in the Greater Geelong and Queenscliffe LGAs and this is GS' current unique selling point.



A further consideration in terms of geography, are other likeminded sustainability focused organisations



Geography

As noted in the City of Greater Geelong's 'Climate Change Response Plan 2021-30' there are numerous community groups and non-government organisations that operate in the Geelong region alone.

The focus of these groups varies along the spectrum and as such individuals with specific interests may be drawn to groups with a narrower focus.

The Bellarine Catchment network recently launched a new volunteering website aiming to boost environmental volunteering across Geelong and the Bellarine Peninsula. The 'Bellarine and Geelong Environmental Volunteering Calendar' (BGEVC) showcases the 35 environmental groups and organisations that operate in the Geelong and Bellarine region and any activities or opportunities that are available for local people to contribute their time.

17% of survey respondents lived in the Surf Coast Shire, however the Surf Coast has their own sustainability group, very similar to GS and with a similar value proposition. All other LGA's in the G21 region accounted for approximately 5% of survey respondents.

If GS seeks to expand its membership appeal to a broader geographical base it will need to distinguish its MVP. However, given all these organisations are part of the same movement and largely have the same goals then strategic partnering and collaboration should be explored further in pursuit of common goals. Partnerships could involve representation at meetings, new member referrals, collaboration on projects and leveraging materials.



Recommendation: Focus on member growth from within the COGG, Bellarine and Queenscliffe LGAs.



Recommendation: Consider developing a strategy for strategic partnering and collaboration with similar organisations particularly those operating in other LGAs in the G21 region.



Demographics

If the demographics of survey respondents could be extrapolated out to a potential target market, we note the following:

| Current members (65 responses) | Non-members (125 responses) |
|--|---|
| <p>A broadly 50/50 male/female split</p> <p>33% are 65+ and retired</p> <p>3% age <45</p> <p>35% working full or part time</p> <p>37% work in the HealthCare/Social Assistance industry</p> | <p>A broadly 40/60 male/female split</p> <p>25% are 65+ and retired</p> <p>26% age <45</p> <p>61% working full or part time</p> <p>29% work in the HealthCare/Social Assistance industry</p> |

The age profile of the current membership is consistent with similar organisations we researched. In general, their member demographic was generally an older, wealthy population that had the means and time to look for collective solutions.

Some organisations had considered the time investment versus benefit to connect with a different demographic and determined it was not worthwhile at this time.

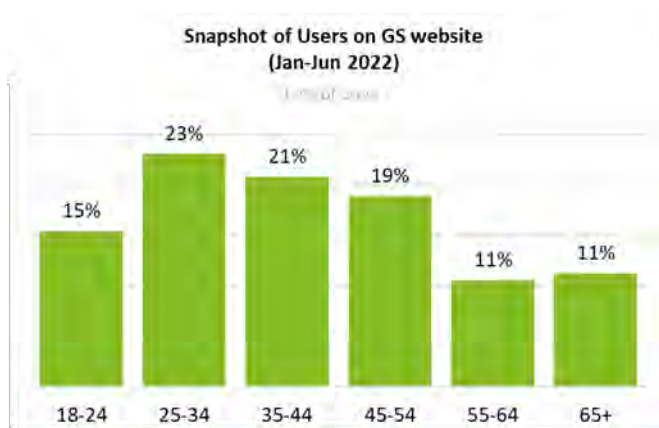
A consistent theme across all organisations we researched was that although there is a desire to increase the proportion of younger members and volunteers (18- 40yrs) there is simply little to no interest from this demographic, even after attempts to further engage this group.

We would however exercise caution not pursuing a younger demographic. Nearly 26% of non-member respondents were age <45 compared to 3% for current members.



Demographics

Analysis of GS google analytics data found that in the first half of 2022 nearly 40% of a sample of users of the GS website were aged 18-34. Note the sample was 428 people representing 4.4% of all users in that period.



Source: Google Analytics

The Member Value 2025 Project report stated that the Millennial generation (Generation Y) is expected to account for 75% of the UK workforce in 2025, this can be reasonably extrapolated to Australia

A key message from [Abila's 2016 Member Engagement Study](#) was "get them early". Whilst the study was focused on professional membership organisations the principle is the same. The study found the best time to attract new members is early in their career stage (as a student or between one and five years into their career). Members become increasingly difficult to acquire as they progress in their careers.

So clearly there is a cost / benefit trade off in pursuing a younger demographic, but GS do have some unique opportunities close to home.





Deakin University and TAFE

GS receive regular enquiries and requests from TAFE and University students (incl PhD) who are seeking specific information about projects GS are working on, work experience, placements, internships and ways to fulfill volunteer hour commitments

Deakin runs various undergraduate courses dedicated to environmental and marine science, postgraduate courses in sustainability and PHDs with environmental science.

Courses have a core professional placement unit, with students completing placements in local, state and federal government, as well as a range of high-profile organisations such as; Zoos Victoria, Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, Parks Victoria and Biosis-Environmental Consulting.

Currently GS have no formal engagement strategy with the local student sector. These are unique opportunities to explore. Formal arrangements may include students leading, participating or

contributing to GS work through placements and volunteer time or informal arrangements such as opportunities to present to students to generally raise awareness about the work of GS.

We would recommend GS developing a student engagement plan. The project team acknowledge that developing partner engagement strategies and working up plans and programs takes time and effort. However, given the interest from and importance of this sector this is a worthwhile investment of time (and potentially income).



Recommendation: Develop a student engagement strategy to tap into the student base, considering both formal arrangements (placements and programs) and informal arrangements (presentations).



COGG Youth Council

The Geelong Youth Council is made up of 12 young people aged between 12 and 17 years old, with three representatives from each of the four council wards. The Youth Council is the official 'youth voice' for the region. They hold monthly meetings at City Hall and their discussions, activities and advice are shared with Council in four reports presented across the year.

The City of Greater Geelong also has the '**Youth on Board' program**. This is a leadership program that trains and supports young people between 18 and 25 to join the boards of management of local organisations. It provides a youth voice in the shaping of Geelong by young people being part of the planning and decision-making process of local organisations. The program trains motivated young people in governance and matches them with local organisations who are committed to having a youth voice on their boards ([Youth on Board - City of Greater Geelong](#)).

In March 2022 the [Youth Council's First Report To Council](#) for the year set out their 4 priority areas for the 12 month term. These were:

- Mental Health and Wellbeing
- ***Environment and Sustainability***
- Diversity and Inclusion
- Healthy and Respectful Relationships

This is a unique opportunity to explore with COGG, and the Youth Council in particular. Connecting might include an initial presentation to the Youth Council to raise general awareness of GS' work and how GS could support and be a voice for local youth on sustainability issues. From this GS could identify issues that matter to the younger demographic and

develop events and activities that may engage the younger population of our region (and potentially their parents) to get involved and/or become a member.

Local schools

GS receive regular enquiries and requests from both primary and secondary schools. This may be teachers looking for curriculum materials and teaching resources, events to be run or facilitated, volunteer opportunities for students or general information.

As much as they would love to, GS do not have the resources to fulfill all these individual requests. Imagine though ...

... a '**Schools' membership** where for an annual subscription a school in the G21 can access support materials and training resources, access to activities and lesson plans and connect with GS for student volunteer opportunities. Teachers could collaborate in the GS online school's community, sharing ideas and materials they have developed. Schools could submit their sustainability events and activities which could be featured on the GS website. At the annual sustainability day facilitated by GS (who have coordinated guest speakers and activities) the winner of the most sustainable school is announced...


Clearly this would be a considerable amount of work! However, given the regular enquiries and requests from schools there is potentially an opportunity to explore the concept / feasibility for the longer term and connect with a target market that is already coming to GS.



Recommendation: Engage with the COGG Youth Council initially to present the activities and programs of GS and to explore future opportunities to connect and engage with Geelong's youth



Recommendation: Consider how GS might engage and support schools on their sustainability journey. Consider the introduction of a 'Schools' membership with its own MVP



Generational changes can't be ignored, they will bring changing needs and expectations. These changes will impact member-based organisations and necessitate member value propositions and member engagement strategies to evolve.

MemberWise Network, 2018



Member Engagement

“Member engagement is largely about encouraging members to interact and share in the experiences you create as an organisation.”

Member Evolution, Aspedia Australia

Successfully managing (and growing) any membership organisation boils down to two key objectives: **member acquisition** and **member retention**. Therefore, engagement should be seen through both lenses.

The importance of current member engagement cannot be undersold. In a recent study, member engagement was seen as a higher priority than new member acquisition. However, it was also seen as one of the major problem areas to execute successfully. (MemberWise, 2018)

High member engagement keeps retention rates high. **The aim is for current members to become organisation advocates** who can generate their own form of engagement and member value, in an outwards ripple effect.

These advocates help endorse membership to your organisation, through an organic and independent means. As will be shown later, the #1 membership recruitment tactic is member advocacy.

Key to member engagement is for organisations to recognise that engagement is an ongoing proactive process that must:

- Be personalised, including recognising loyalty

- Clearly communicate the value of the organisation
- Provide content and activities that are varied, relevant and timely
- Occur all year
- Be flexible and evolve with the member's needs, perspectives and interests
- Be automated

The well-known 'engagement ladder' (see [Appendix 4- The Engagement Ladder](#)) is an effective framework to demonstrate the value in engaging members. This illustration demonstrates the ideal member journey.

Members start out interested but not very involved, but as they renew year after year, they have the potential to grow into highly involved leaders and contributors.

Not every member will follow this path, and not every member will renew. However, if a clear strategy for engaging members from initial registration and then ongoing is developed, they will be more involved and invested and remain members for the long term.

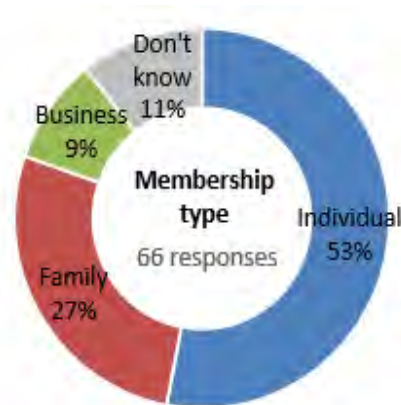
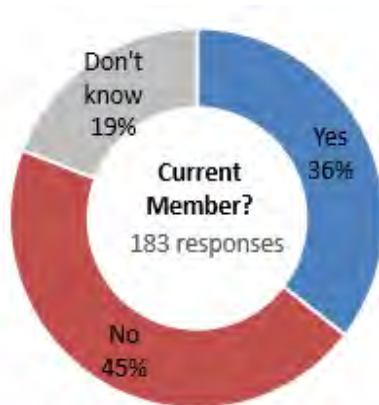
There are specific strategies that will recruit new members, strategies that focus on existing members and strategies that apply equally to both



Are you a current GS member?

“Customers tend to think of you as a transaction. They want what they want, when they want it, and how they want to consume it. You can still be a go-to organisation for them, but it is just a transaction. They don’t have that hook or that reason for belonging that members do. Members have multiple reasons for engaging with you. They view you as a community or a professional home”

“The Great Debate: Members vs. Customers”



20% of 183 community survey respondents did not know if they were a GS member or not. For those that knew they were members 11% did not know what type of membership they had.

Email communications do not include a membership number or any details about the membership plan type. Currently personalised communication from GS to members, email subscribers, volunteers and customers is limited to including their first name in the email.

An additional example of where confusion for the community can arise is when purchasing products such as tickets to the Sustainable House Day (SHD) event. In order to access the materials online, users go to the 'Members' section on the website. However, purchasing an event product does not mean you become a member. This demonstrates the need to make a distinction between members and customers.



Recommendation: Review the terminology and presentation on the website to clearly distinguish the 'member' area from the 'customer' area.



Recommendation: Consider ways to personalise email communications to acknowledge when someone is a member as opposed to a customer or an email subscriber e.g. include membership number, valid to date, plan type (if applicable)



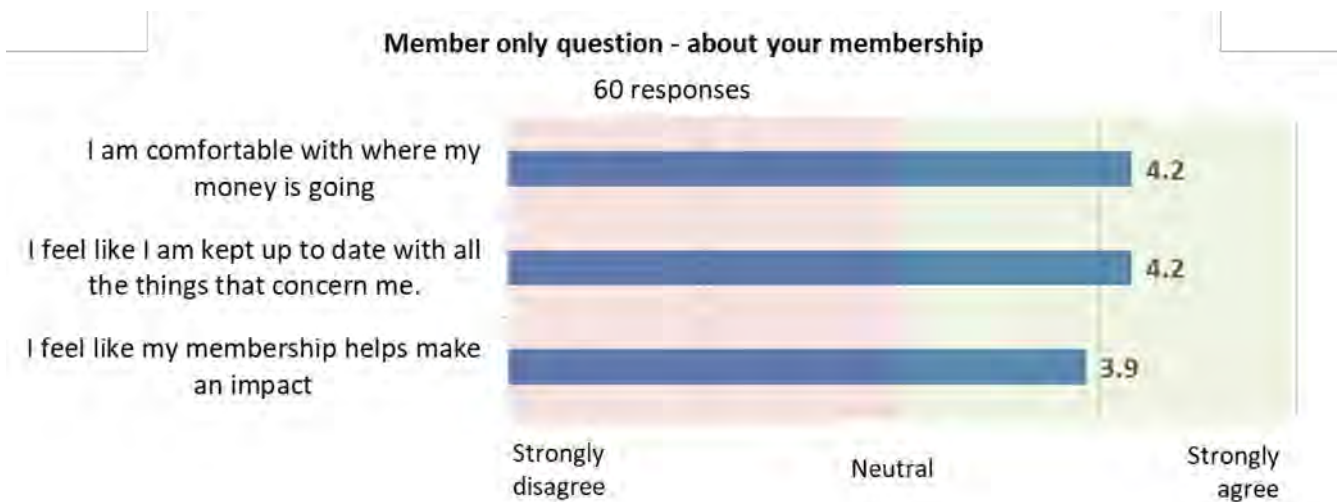
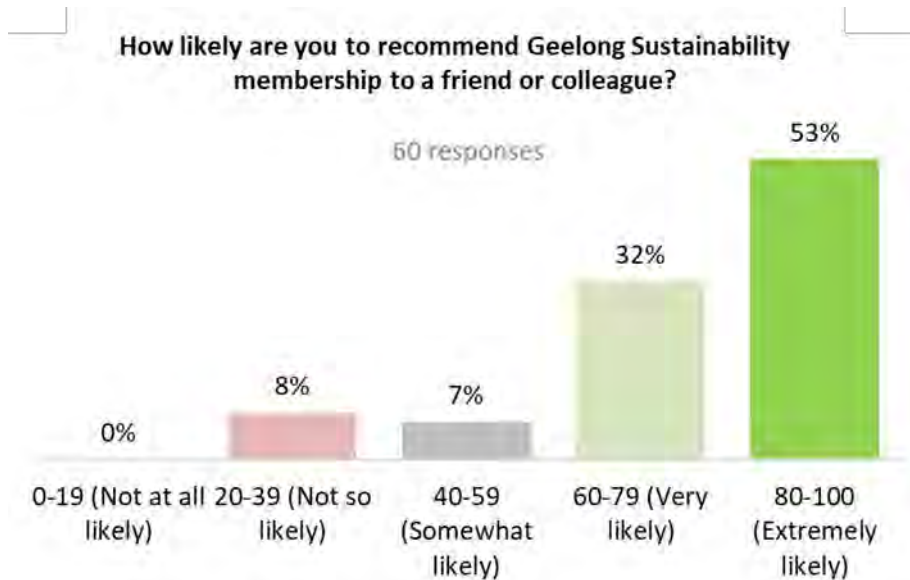
Current GS member engagement

For those that did know they were GS members, current member engagement levels are very good.

On the key question of advocacy, **85% of current members would recommend GS to a friend or colleague.**

In addition, as we showed earlier in the Growth Influences section of the report GS has a **strong retention rate averaging around 85%.**

Current members agreed or strongly agreed about where their money is going, that they were being kept up-to-date and that their membership was having an impact.





Current GS member engagement

This is a strong platform from which to grow. Whilst in the short-term attention for membership growth may be focused on the value proposition (particularly for non-members) to attract new members, it will be important to keep the current member base engaged and front of mind.

GS may wish to consider a dedicated role within the organisation that focuses on and monitors member engagement, this could be a role on the GS Committee. Template position descriptions are readily available online. Clearly creation of such a role would have to be filled by volunteer effort and therefore the scope of the role may be kept quite narrow initially.

There are several reasons for the creation of such a role within the organisation:

- It signals the importance of and intent of GS to continually focus on its current member base.
- As GS grows its membership the current levels of member engagement as highlighted earlier cannot be taken for granted, especially if GS are successful in acquiring new members from a different demographic.
- Some of the responsibilities and activities of the member engagement role are no doubt currently being performed by one or more existing dedicated members/volunteers who are also likely performing this among a variety of other responsibilities.

You can't monitor what you don't measure

Regardless of whether a dedicated Member Engagement Manager role is created, GS should look to develop and regularly monitor member engagement metrics. Close attention should be paid to membership retention and sign-up rates. Other measures may include tracking and measuring website and newsletter readership rates and attendance at events.

GS could also seek ways to capture more data by introducing short (1-3 questions) feedback forms following events as well as introducing regular member 'pulse checks' for continuous improvement.

Additionally, the findings within this report and from our community survey provide a basis for establishing some baseline metrics.



Recommendation: Consider establishing a dedicated 'Member Engagement Manager' role to provide a continual focus on and monitor of current member engagement.



Recommendation: Develop and regularly monitor member engagement metrics and where appropriate seek ways to capture more feedback data for continuous improvement.



Increasing volunteer participation

A bigger pool of members provides a bigger pool that may volunteer, one of the fundamental underlying reasons to grow membership

At this stage the project team can hear the sighs, moans and groans from those committed members and the relatively small proportion of those members who volunteer. As is typical for volunteer organisations. It is one thing to create such volunteer roles, but it is another to fill them.

Our community survey included 20 respondents who were volunteers.

If the survey is representative of the broader member base it suggests that approximately 30% of GS members also volunteer.

However, many volunteers (65%) give, or can give, less than 5 hours per month. A small proportion of volunteers (20%) give a significant amount of time.





Increasing volunteer participation

Once a list of volunteer opportunities is captured and centrally maintained, the list can be used to communicate on the GS website and in the GS newsletter.

So, how do you increase volunteer participation?

Simply ask - it shouldn't be assumed that members (or non-members) know the range of tasks and activities that need support. The GS website invites volunteers to express their interest to participate in one of the various volunteer teams, from strategic pillars to events, media and communications and on the Committee of Management. However, the timing and level of commitment required is unclear.

GS could consider breaking items down into more defined, specific requests capturing the activity detail, the timing, the tasks and the nature of the event (one-off/recurring). The example shown was taken from govolunteer.com.au.

Be flexible - Individual circumstances mean that some people would like to give time, some money and some both. Currently, GS has an expectation that volunteers are also members.

Whilst we do not see this as a significant barrier the key point we would make, is that volunteering and membership should be decoupled.

An individual may be able to provide one-off volunteer support for a discrete amount of time but their circumstances at that time may prevent them from making a further commitment (of time or money through membership).

However, a connection has been made and if engagement is maintained they may return in the future.

Advertise through 3rd parties - there are several internet sites that allow organisations to advertise for volunteer support. These include but are not limited to:

Volunteeringgeelong.org.au

Volunteeringvictoria.org.au

Govolunteer.com.au (an initiative of Volunteering Australia)

Christmas Event Assistant - Wynnum/Redlands for Mangrove Housing Ltd - Community Services

At Mangrove Housing, we understand that the festive season can be a stressful period for many and hope to reduce the burden for our clients by hosting a free Christmas event including a BBQ lunch, free fun activities and the giving of hampers and toys. We need proactive volunteers to help make this day a success!

- Homeless
- One off - an event
- Wynnum QLD





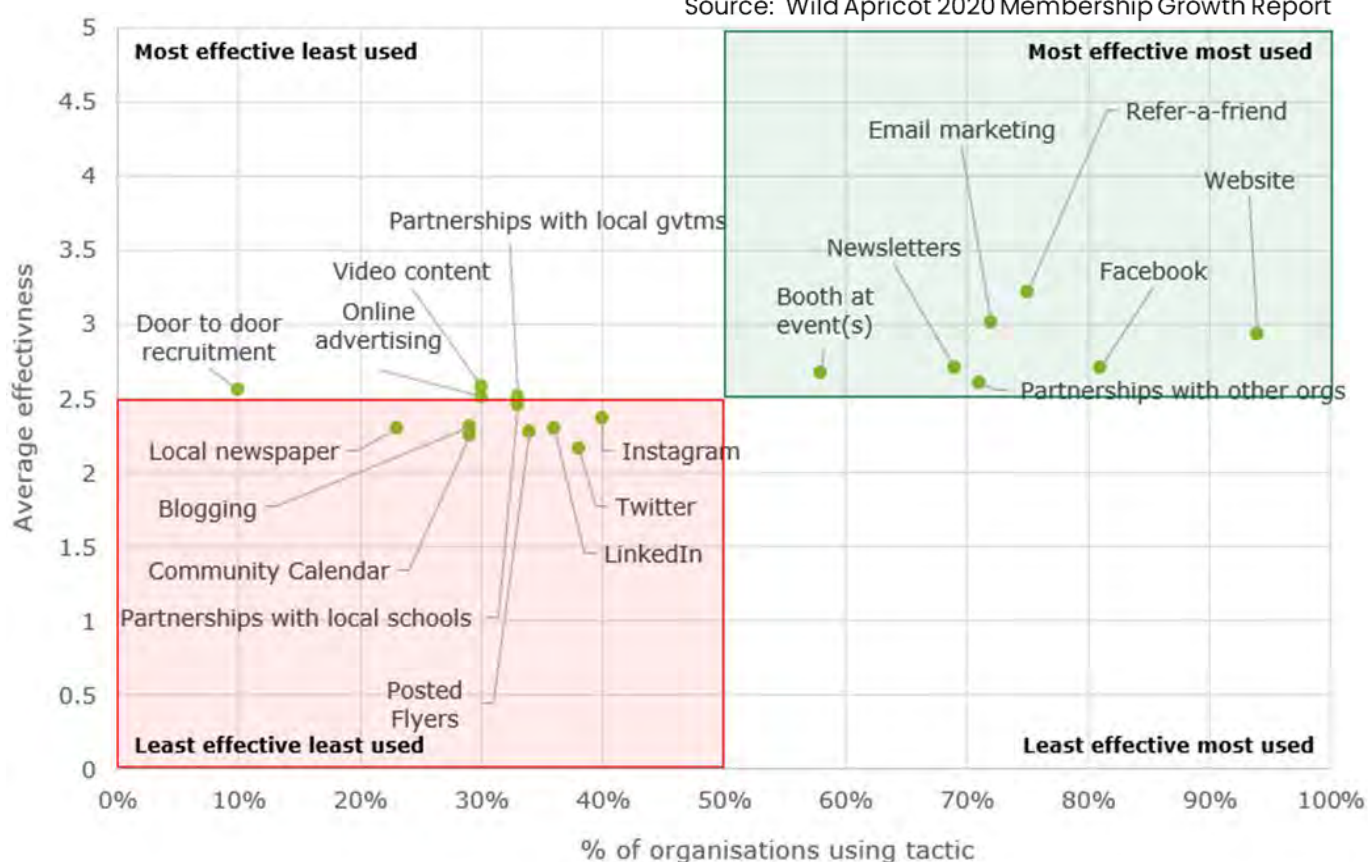
Top engagement / growth strategies

There are tactics specific to recruiting new members and tactics that apply to both.

In this section we turn to looking at the various engagement strategies that GS employ or could employ. [Wild Apricot's 2020 Membership Growth Report](#) asked membership organisations which tactics they were using to grow and how effective each one was.

They found that growth 'leaders' tended to employ more tactics than growth 'laggards' and they were more successful when using the same tactic. We have summarised their findings below:

Source: Wild Apricot 2020 Membership Growth Report



The good news is that GS are using many of the top growth tactics (the green section). They have a website, Facebook page, monthly newsletter, regularly send email marketing on initiatives and projects. Having a Booth at event(s) is akin to running events (such as Green Drinks).

We are not aware the extent to which GS attend events with the focus of member recruitment e.g. attending a Rotary Market and have earlier in the report outlined rationale for increasing the partnering with other organisations and schools.

Interestingly 3 of the 4 social media platforms were found to be a less effective tactic with Twitter the least effective of all listed tactics.

The key take-away from the chart above is that the number 1 effective growth tactic was refer-a-friend, which GS do not currently have in place.

As noted by the [Point of Loyalty](#), refer-a-friend initiatives with an offer can certainly create a transactional outcome (and a new customer), however friends that are referred to a brand or business, without a financial gain have a greater opportunity for a deeper connection and longer-term loyalty.



Top engagement / growth strategies

The number 1 effective growth tactic was refer-a-friend

Other membership-based organisations we researched and interviewed outlined these strategies as their main facilitators of member engagement:

| New member acquisition | Member engagement |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Membership drives •Employed outbound caller - to sign up former members & those overdue •Refer a friend incentive (discounted membership) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Clearly defined & articulated value proposition •Website, newsletters, magazines, bulletins, social media posts, text messages •Strong connection early is key – thanking them for joining •Membership choice - which initiative/project do they want to support •Local branches - focus on local interests •Fundraisers & engagement with businesses to sponsor events •Membership due reminders sent via email at 30days/7days/day of/7 days post •SMS reminder when membership due •Membership IT platform that is 'set & forget' i.e. send the reminders |



Recommendation: Consider introducing a refer-a-friend as part of GS' recruitment tactics.



Effectiveness of GS engagement strategies

Given we have established GS are using most of the right tactics we now look at how effective these tactics are.

Many respondents find out about GS work/activities/events by email and/or the monthly newsletter. We suspect there is overlap in these responses.

Consistent with the WildApricot survey findings, social media does not fare too well. The most referenced was Facebook and Twitter the lowest, with no mention of LinkedIn.

What was surprising was how the website fared. Hardly any respondents cited the website as their source of information.

Website

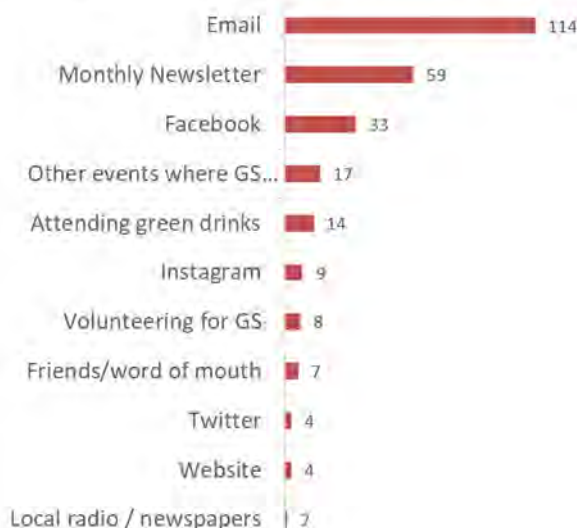
Wild Apricot's survey suggested that a website was the 3rd most effective engagement tactic.

Despite not accessing the website for information, the community survey feedback about the website was positive but indicated opportunities for further improvement.

The website is considered a trusted source of information and respondents would recommend it to a friend or colleague.

Where do you mostly access information about GS work/activities/events?

148 responses (* multiple responses allowed)



Website

104 responses



Strongly disagree

Neutral

Strongly agree

We asked survey respondents about how GS could improve the website. The themes that emerged were:

- More regular content updates
- evolving the content e.g. videos, interviews
- exploring ways to draw more people into the website



Website

In support of the community survey recommendations, our review found that there are opportunities to rearrange content and bring newer content to the fore e.g. the news section on the homepage is halfway down. Some pages require updating as they appear to have out-of-date content or broken links. Calls to action could be clearer and more prominent.

Given the significance of a website on member engagement, we used Google analytics to investigate in more detail the community's interactions with the GS website. The data to the right is focused on the first half of this year (1 Jan - 30 Jun 2022). Some key points to note are:

34% of traffic to the website are from organic searches. This refers to members of the public finding the GS website through simply surfing the web.

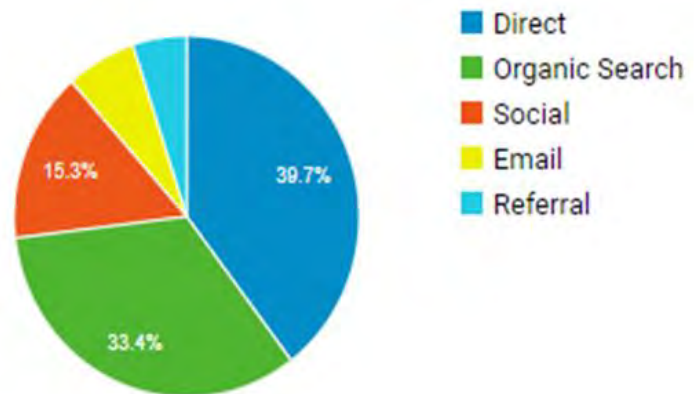
15% of traffic came via social media channels. Within this traffic 85% came from Facebook, 8% from LinkedIn and 5% from Instagram.

7% of traffic came from email. This involves clicking on links in the monthly newsletter

5% of traffic were from clicking on external links. This involves clicking on a link on another organisation's website. Within this group the top referrers (most to least are):

| | | |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------|
| geelongaustralia.com.au | goodcar.co | geelongcityofdesign.com.au |
| victorianenergysaver.vic.gov.au | greenlight.org.au | energytips.org.au |
| environmentvictoria.org.au | communitysolar.org.au | geelongrenewablesnotgas.org |

Top Channels



A high proportion of traffic are people surfing the web and finding GS. A high proportion of these are likely to be individuals with no connection to GS and therefore are potential new members or volunteers.



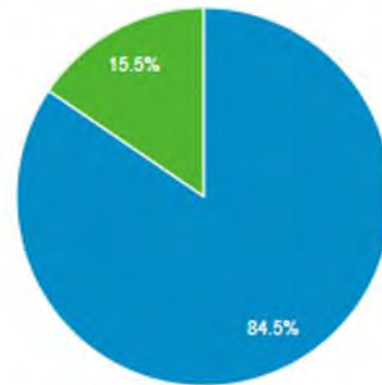
Website

Most people that visit the GS website don't return

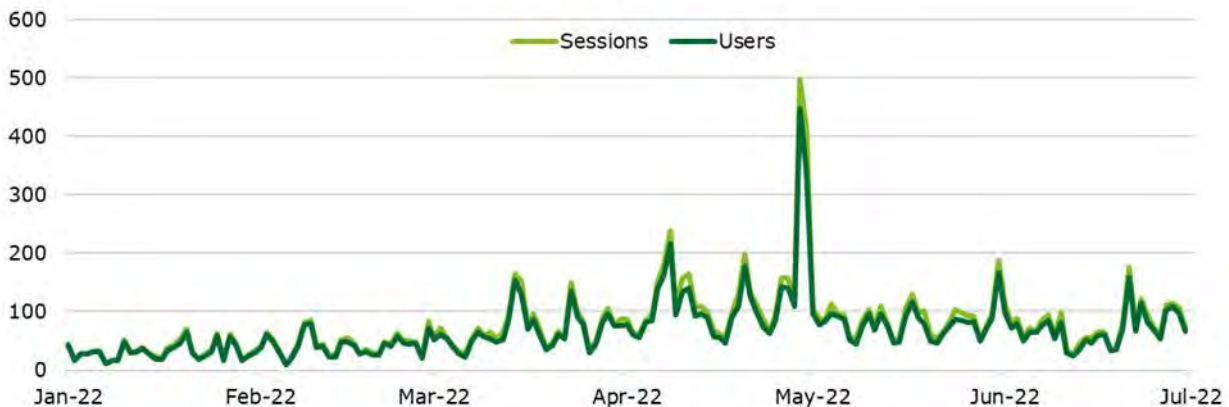
Returning visitors accounted for only 16% of traffic to the website.

The website traffic is relatively steady but as can be seen from the chart below a spike in visitors at the end of April coincided with the launch of the Circular living show on 30th April.

■ New Visitor ■ Returning Visitor



Website Traffic



It is beyond the scope of this project to delve deeper into the website. However, GS are already using google analytics data in a limited capacity and are ideally placed to leverage and evolve use of the google analytics platform to help with targeted development of the website.

We have only scratched the surface in this report. It is possible to further analyse pages that people visit, how long they stay on the page, set up campaigns to track specific activities and so on.

The insights above suggest that GS should take the opportunity to further develop the website given it is the 'shop front' of the organisation.



Recommendation: Further development of the website as the 'shop front' of the organisation will improve usage and visitation.



Recommendation: Leverage and evolve the use of google analytics data for targeted website development.

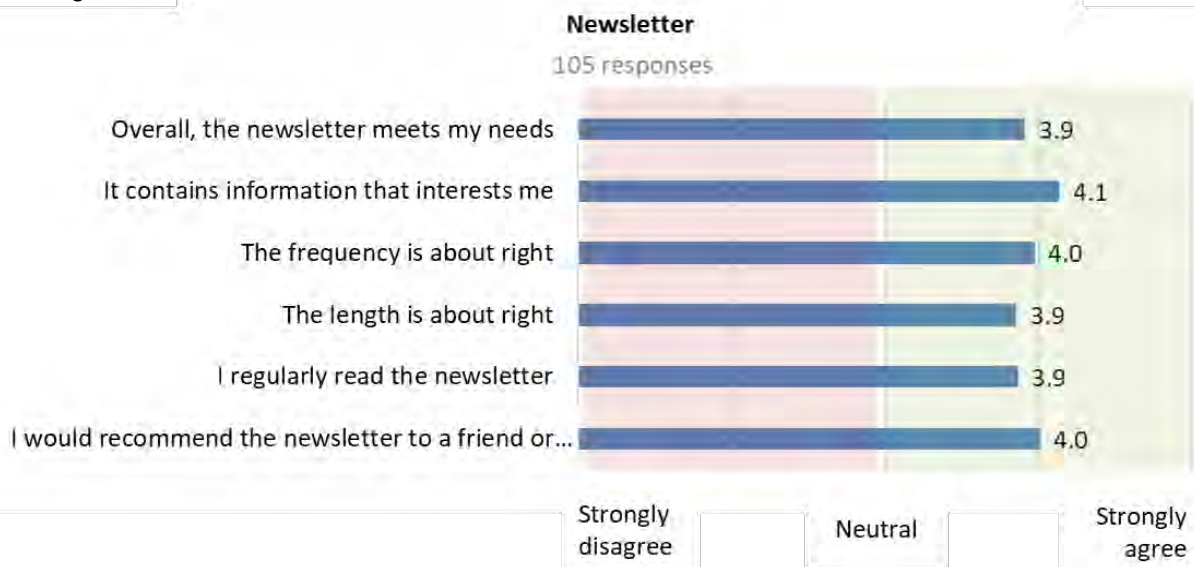


Newsletter

Newsletters are an effective tactic used by many organisations

GS have a strong engaging newsletter as noted in our community survey responses. All respondents agreed or strongly agreed the content, frequency and length met their needs and they would recommend it to a friend or colleague.

GS capture data on the readership of their emails sent. The chart below will principally capture newsletter readership but will also include other emails sent. On average readership has been relatively consistent over time between 40-50%.



Emails sent vs opened





Newsletter

GS could consider sending an abridged version of the newsletter by email with the detail captured on the website.

There were not many comments or suggestions to improve the newsletter. Most feedback about the newsletter was of the theme - "well done/keep it up".

It is important to note however that several respondents felt the newsletter was too long. We have referred to the interaction between the newsletter and website at various points in this report.

GS could consider sending an abridged version of the newsletter by email with the detail captured on the website. This may drive greater use of and interaction with the website by email subscribers. The impacts of any changes could be monitored through the readership %.



Recommendation: Explore modifications to the monthly newsletter to improve readership and drive interaction with GS website.



Conclusions and Recommendations

This section consolidates and provides a summary of the recommendations raised throughout the report. Each individual recommendation has hyperlinks into the report for the context and rationale underlying the recommendation.

Short term (1-2yrs)

| Area | Recommendation | Bookmark |
|-------------------|--|--------------------------------|
| Membership | The website needs to clearly set out a membership is a financial commitment only. Perfect for those that are time poor. Individuals may also contribute their time (volunteer) if they wish. | View in report |
| Membership | Review the terminology and presentation on the website to clearly distinguish the 'member' area from the 'customer' area | View in report |
| Value Proposition | Document your current MVP and member benefits statement. Benefits should include both tangible and intangible. | View in report |
| Value Proposition | The website content and presentation should be updated to clearly articulate the current MVP particularly for individual, family and student membership. | View in report |
| Target Market | Review and develop the sign-up forms (for memberships, email subscriptions and customers) to collect more demographic information about these groups | View in report |
| Target Market | Focus on member growth from within the COGG, Bellarine and Queenscliffe LGAs. | View in report |
| Target Market | Develop a student engagement strategy to tap into the student base, considering both formal arrangements (placements and programs) and informal arrangements (presentations). | View in report |



Conclusions and Recommendations continued

Short term (1-2yrs)

| Area | Recommendation | Bookmark |
|---------------|--|--------------------------------|
| Target Market | Engage with the COGG Youth Council initially to present the activities and programs of GS and to explore future opportunities to connect and engage with Geelong's youth. | View in report |
| Engagement | Consider introducing a direct debit / auto renewal option for membership fees to avoid losing members at renewal time. | View in report |
| Engagement | Consider ways to personalise email communications to acknowledge when someone is a member as opposed to a customer or an email subscriber e.g. include membership number, valid to date, plan type (if applicable) | View in report |
| Engagement | Consider establishing a dedicated 'Member Engagement Manager' role to provide a continual focus on and monitor of current member engagement. | View in report |
| Engagement | Consider introducing a refer-a-friend as part of GS' recruitment tactics. | View in report |
| Engagement | Further development of the website as the 'shop front' of the organisation will improve usage and visitation. | View in report |
| Engagement | Leverage and evolve the use of google analytics data for targeted website development | View in report |
| Engagement | Explore modifications to the monthly newsletter to improve readership and drive interaction with GS website. | View in report |



Conclusions and Recommendations continued

Medium term (3-5yrs)

| Area | Recommendation | Bookmark |
|-------------------|---|--------------------------------|
| Value Proposition | To attract new members with exclusive benefits, consideration should be given to transitioning some existing events/content in full/part to member only access. See report for examples. | View in report |
| Value Proposition | Review discounts/concessions associated with membership fees i.e. a pensioner concession rate and membership fee discounts on the SHD product. | View in report |
| Value Proposition | In evolving the MVP for individual/family/student members, consider what new events/content/features could be introduced as member exclusive benefits e.g. consultant services and online member forum. | View in report |
| Value Proposition | In evolving the MVP for business members consider the additional low-cost offerings that other organisations offer their business members. | View in report |
| Target Market | Consider developing a strategy for strategic partnering and collaboration with similar organisations particularly those operating in other LGAs in the G21 region. | View in report |
| Target Market | Consider how GS might engage and support schools on their sustainability journey. Consider the introduction of a 'Schools' membership with its own MVP . | View in report |
| Engagement | Develop and regularly monitor member engagement metrics and where appropriate seek ways to capture more feedback data for continuous improvement. | View in report |



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Appendices

Research Questions for Organisations

| | |
|------------------------------------|--|
| Purpose & Target Market | Could you tell us the main purpose of your organisation & the types of work you do? i.e run events, education, advocacy for the region |
| | Who is your 'Target Market'? i.e. who are you trying to appeal to |
| | What products/services do you offer your target market? |
| Membership | How do you define a member/membership? e.g. financial contributor, time volunteer, other? |
| | How many members do you have? How is this broken down e.g. individual/family/business/student? |
| | Is your membership base growing, decreasing, stable? What are the key drivers for this? |
| | Is the membership for 12months? Does it vary between businesses/individuals? |
| | Do you have information about your current member demographics? If so where do you understand the majority of members to come from? ie retirees, students, cultural groups |
| Value (to members) | What is/are your Unique Selling Points (s) i.e. why would a member join or contribute financially? |
| | What products/services do you offer your members? i.e gifts, discounts, opportunities, access to membership only information/platform |
| | Have you considered or offered other value for your members in the past? If so, could you tell us more about this? |
| Engagement & Retention | How do you keep current members engaged in the organisation? ie green drinks, education sessions Do you think these are effective at supporting the community to renew their membership? Have you thought or tried other activities with this focus? |
| | Do you have an understanding of retention/attrition rates? , What are your thoughts on why members may not renew (if relevant)? Have you addressed these challenges if so in what way? |
| | How has COVID impacted your organisation? |
| Financial | What are your membership subscription fees? Have you considered changing these? Do you have an regular increase? Do you have options like monthly payment plans or staggered membership levels? |
| | Do you conduct specific membership drives/fundraising activities? i.e. annual advertising campaign |
| | Do you accept donations also? Are these from individuals or businesses? Are they regular donations or ad hoc? |
| | Do you find donations or membership more effective in terms of revenue raising? |
| | How do the community/businesses sign up/make a donation? i.e. Website based |
| Management | How are they notified that membership is due? Do you have admin support or other resources to support this process? Are all members on the same cycle or does it vary based on when they signed up? |
| | Do you rely on your membership base to also be the volunteers for the organisation? |
| Marketing | How do you advertise the opportunity to become a member? i.e. Social media platforms, events, newsletters, collaboration with other organisations Do you have an understanding of which is the most effective? |
| | Do you have a formalised marketing plan or strategic document that focused on building membership? Have you implemented this? Were there any challenges? |
| | Main advertising platforms of the organisation? Newsletter, supporting or running events, social media Do you feel any of these support building a membership base more than others? |
| | Do you collaborate with other organisations in your region? i.e. environmental based, local council Do you feel this impacts the membership base for your organisation in anyway? |
| | Does your logo indicate your organisations purpose? Do you feel that this impacts community awareness about what you do? |
| | Have you considered how to market to other demographics? |
| | How do you engage with businesses to encourage them to become members? |
| | If you were to start again with little to no members, what advice would you give to get the ball rolling? |



Community Survey Questionnaire

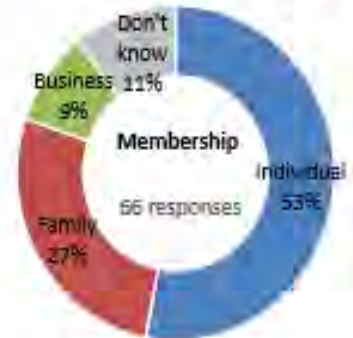
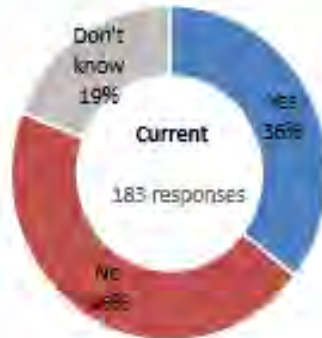
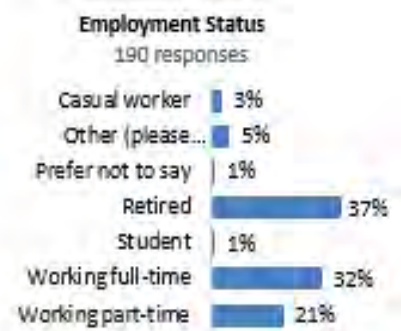
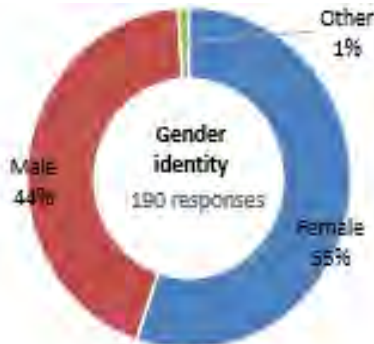
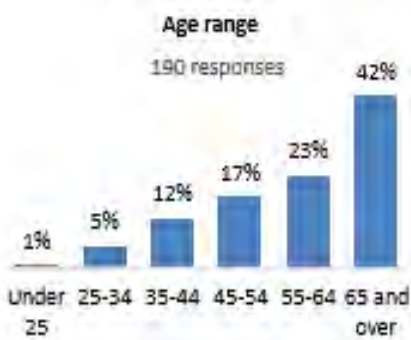
The survey comprised 36 questions, some with several sub-questions:

| |
|--|
| What is your postcode? |
| What is your age range? |
| What is your gender identity? |
| What is your employment status? |
| What is your industry? |
| What is your job role? |
| How familiar are you with Geelong Sustainability and the work that we do? |
| As a local community group what do you think is the geographical reach of Geelong Sustainability? [Please tick all that apply] |
| Are you a current member of Geelong Sustainability? |
| Please select your membership type |
| How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? |
| I feel like my membership helps make an impact |
| I feel like I am kept up to date with all the things that concern me. |
| I am comfortable with where my money is going |
| What do you like most about your membership? |
| What do you like least about your membership? |
| What should others know if they're thinking about becoming a member? |
| How likely are you to recommend Geelong Sustainability membership to a friend or colleague? |
| Are you a current Geelong Sustainability volunteer? |
| On average, how many hours per month do you volunteer for Geelong Sustainability? |
| How did you hear about this survey? |
| How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? |
| The environment is a high priority for me compared with a lot of other things |
| I believe my behaviour and everyday lifestyle contribute to climate change and/or climate change mitigation |
| It's worth doing environmentally-friendly things regardless of whether or not they save you money |
| It's worth me doing things to help the environment even if others don't do the same |
| It doesn't take much effort to do things that are environmentally friendly |
| I have all the information I need on what I could do to be more environmentally friendly |
| Any changes I make to help the environment need to fit with my lifestyle |
| I find it easy to change my habits to be more environmentally-friendly |
| It would make me feel proud if my friends thought my lifestyle was purposefully environmentally friendly |
| Being green is an alternative lifestyle; it's not for the majority |
| It's not worth Geelong Sustainability trying to combat climate change, these are global issues |
| Please indicate your level of interest in Geelong Sustainability's four strategic pillars |
| Please indicate your level of interest in Geelong Sustainability's key projects |
| Please indicate your level of interest in Geelong Sustainability's key campaigns |
| Please indicate your level of interest in Geelong Sustainability's key events |
| For you personally what are the top 3 local environmental/sustainability issues? |
| What would you like to see Geelong Sustainability do or do more of in our region? [please list up to 3 things] |
| Where do you mostly access information about GS work/activities/events? |
| Have you been to our website? |
| Regarding our website, how much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? |
| Overall, the website meets my needs |
| It is easy to find what I am looking for |
| It is easy to understand the information on the website |
| I trust the information on the website |
| I would recommend the website to a friend or colleague |
| Please add any further comments or suggestions about how we can improve our website. |
| Do you subscribe to our regular newsletter? |
| Regarding our newsletter, how much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? |
| Overall, the newsletter meets my needs |
| It contains information that interests me |
| The frequency is about right |
| The length is about right |
| I regularly read the newsletter |
| I would recommend the newsletter to a friend or colleague |
| Please add any further comments or suggestions about how we can improve our newsletter. |
| How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? |
| The activities of Geelong Sustainability are aligned to my interests |
| The current benefits of a Geelong Sustainability membership are clear to me |
| Current membership costs are about right (Individual \$30, Family \$40, Student \$10, Businesses \$100) |
| I would be prepared to pay more to join/renew my membership |
| I would prefer to make a tax deductible donation each year, rather than join as a member to receive member benefits |
| A payment plan for membership would make signing up more attractive |
| What do you see as the top barrier(s) to becoming a Geelong Sustainability member? [List up to 3] |
| What value do you place on the following actual/potential GS member exclusive benefits? |



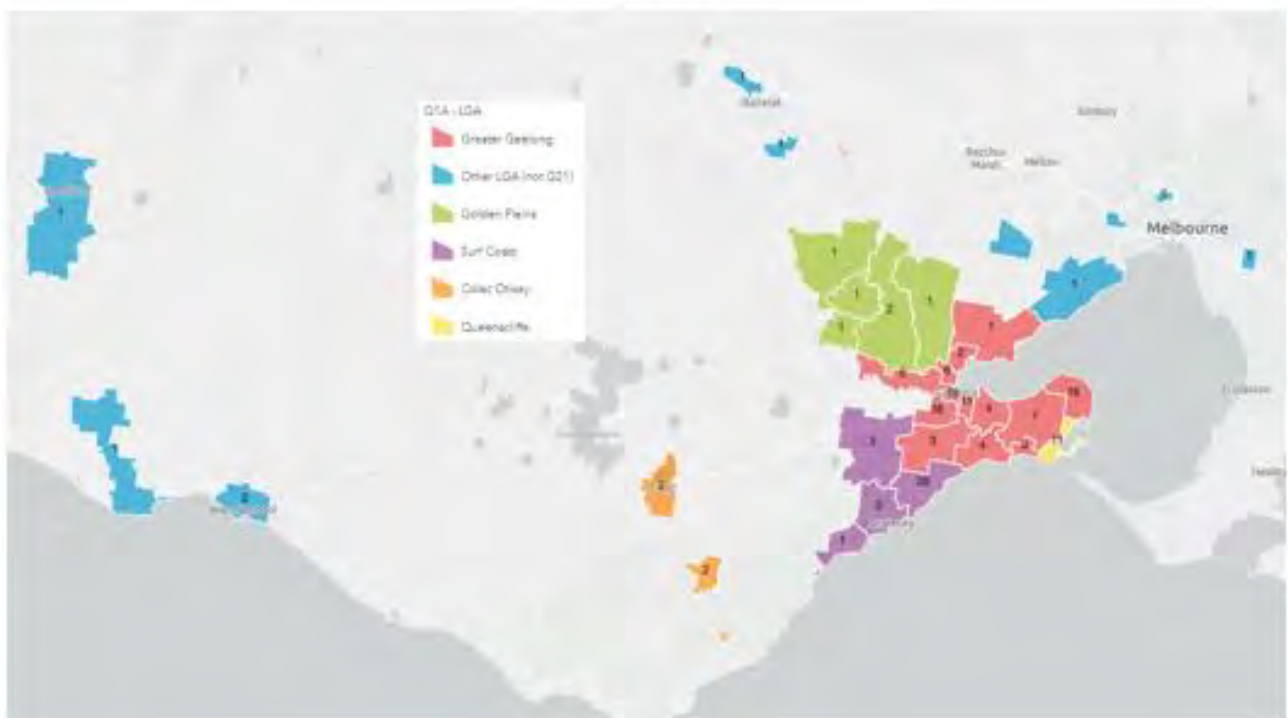
Survey Demographics

In total there were 190 responses to the survey. Key demographic information is shown below:



Postcode / LGA

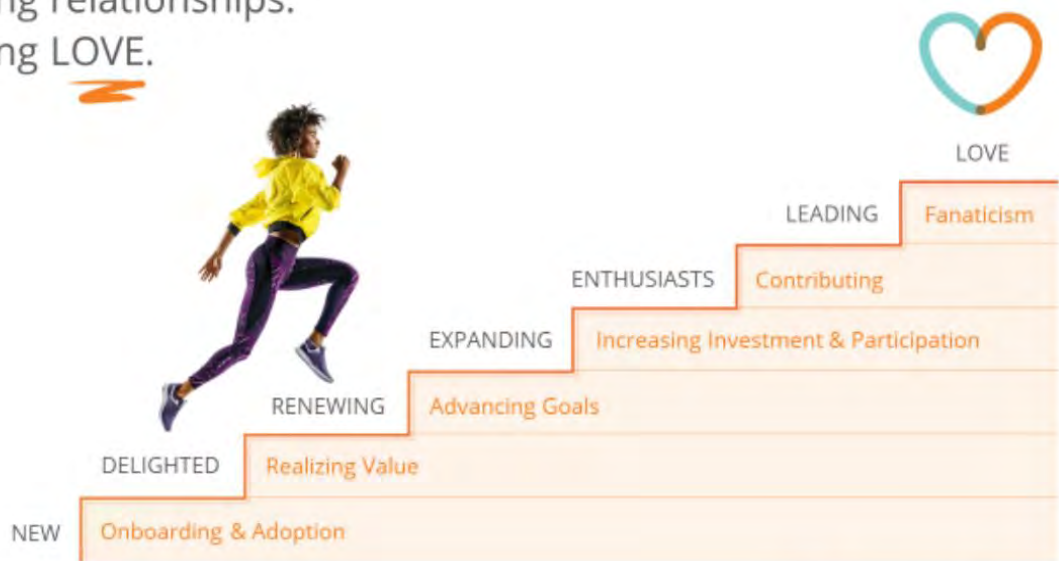
190 responses





The Engagement Ladder

Building relationships.
Building LOVE.



 higher logic