



# Retail Toolkit

How your local council  
helps retail businesses  
survive and thrive

Published 2019





# About this toolkit

The publication of this toolkit is an initiative of Rural Councils Victoria, an organisation representing and working alongside Victoria's rural councils to support and promote sustainable, liveable and prosperous rural communities.

Rural councils continue to face tough challenges, including drought, floods, fires, a limited or dwindling rate base, an increased demand on services, ageing infrastructure and a limited ability to provide new amenities to attract and retain people in communities.

Local councils are often the first point of contact for community-members who are seeking more information on relocating to a rural area, establishing or growing a business and retaining and attracting quality staff.

They are also a vital cog for community groups and organisations wishing to seek government funding through grants.

The toolkits feature case studies to inspire others and to show real-life examples of the ways in which rural councils and communities can apply innovation to what they do.

Rural Councils Victoria works closely with member councils to support economic development and increase the sustainability of rural communities, develop strategies and initiatives to improve the attraction and retention of residents and businesses to rural areas.

We thank all those who helped in developing the content, particularly the councils and organisations who were so

willing to share their experiences and stories to assist others.

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## Acknowledgements:

Information for this document was sourced from a number of organisations, which have a host of helpful information.

- **Business Victoria** is a State Government online resource designed to help you start, run and grow your business. It provides information about key business issues, share data and research about specific industry sectors. It can help you identify the details of government licences and regulations that apply to your business, step through interactive guides customised to your business situation and put you in touch with relevant financial support, advice and training.
- **Consumer Affairs Victoria** is a State Government agency. It can advise and assist on topics include renting accommodation, estate agents, building, shopping and training. It also registers and licences business and occupations and enforces and ensures compliance with consumer loans.
- **The Australian Taxation Office** has a range of tools and services to help make it easier for you to get your tax and super right.

Thanks to those councils and organisations who provided information or these documents – your advice and knowledge will be extremely beneficial to others.



# Case study

## Growing an Enterprising East Gippsland

### About the project:

The Growing an Enterprising East Gippsland project involves the mapping of the 'Entrepreneurship Ecosystem' of the shire. Part of this mapping process involves investigating the best and most conducive ways to support entrepreneurs and help them to develop. It aims to build the capacity and capability of young people to excel and flourish in their entrepreneurial pursuits. The project includes the development of a strategy to improve the culture of entrepreneurship within East Gippsland. A funding grant of \$97,500 from the Australian Government's Building Better Regions Fund has assisted the research project. The council worked with Australian Centre for Rural Entrepreneurship (ACRE) on the project.

### How will it benefit the community?

*"We wanted to present the region as one that encourages and develops entrepreneurs in an environment that is supportive. This is especially critical in regional Victoria where many young people are leaving country areas for metropolitan centres."*

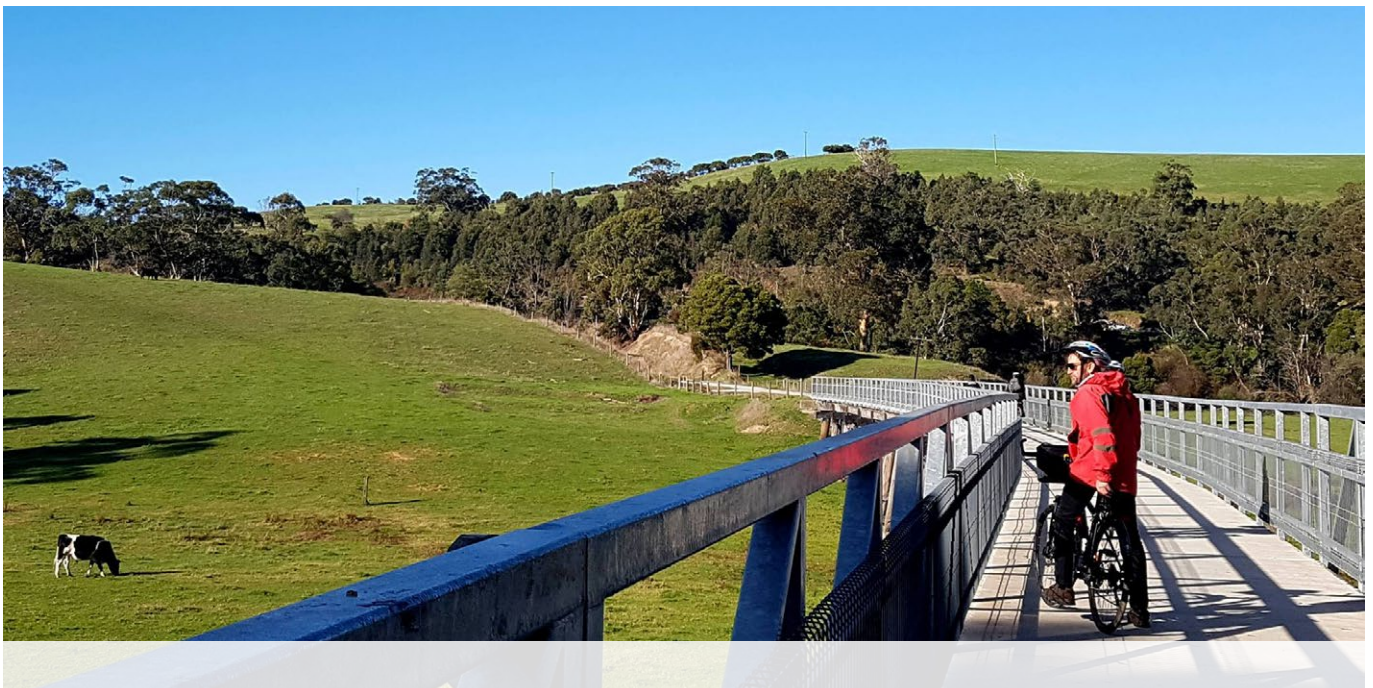
*If rural councils can show young people they are being pro-active in supporting small business start-ups more young people are likely to choose to remain in rural centres."*

### Why did the council take this step?

*"Supporting the community and young people, in particular, to start and develop businesses will have major social and economic benefits for the shire. In the grant application process, we made it very clear about the long-term strategic benefits that backing entrepreneurs would bring to the region and used research data that was measurable to back up the fact young people were leaving rural areas at alarming rates and drastic action was needed to make them realise they were supported in their future endeavours."*

### Any advice to others?

*"The partnership between East Gippsland Shire Council and ACRE was critical throughout the grant application process. ACRE has supported the shire and its entrepreneurs and continues to throughout the mapping project. ACRE holds two-day workshops that can be attended by entrepreneurs to provide further assistance in their business models and planning."*





# Why retail businesses are important to rural Victoria

Retail business are the lifeblood of rural Victoria.

Victoria's retail sector continues to go from strength to strength with retail trade growing by 4.5 per cent from 2017-2018 – the highest of all states – turning over \$79.2 billion and accounting for a quarter of the national retail turnover.

The retail industry remains one of Victoria's biggest employers, with more than 361,000 people employed across Melbourne and regional Victoria, accounting for over 11 per cent of the state's total employment.

Ecommerce has grown rapidly in the past few years as well. In 2018, online shopping increased by 11 per cent while in-store foot traffic increased by just 3 per cent (NAB Online Retail Index Report 2017).

This toolkit is designed to support those looking at establishing their own retail business in rural and regional Victoria work with their local council so that our communities can continue to grow and prosper.

## Fact box



- Retail sales in Australia increased 2.90 per cent in February of 2019 over the same month in the previous year.



- The Victorian small business sector is growing at a rate of 3.6 per cent compared to the national average of 3.1 per cent.



- Victorian small businesses account for almost half of all private jobs across the state while driving economic growth and supporting hundreds of local communities in rural and regional areas.



# Case study

## Towong Shire Business After Hours

Towong Shire Council answered the needs of the business community with a unique initiative known as the Business After Hours Program.

The informal meeting program focuses on what businesses in the shire might need assistance with and were held through the year.

*"We see what the business community need, by talking to businesses, attending chamber meetings and align topics to what the need might be," said a council spokeswoman.*

*"For example, we might talk with business owners who are not opening on certain days about the benefits of doing that, it might be getting a professional in to speak about the importance of merchandising in businesses.*

*"It might be educating businesses about ensuring they have enough coffee beans available for big events in the shire, so they don't run out early."*

She said the Business After Hours Program had been successful in educating business owners about social media and the best ways to use it for business success.

*"Whether it be how to host an event on Facebook to organising a slideshow and up-skilling their social media to keep up with the changing times," she said.*

*"Our economic development officer works with the community and these programs are really well received."*

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## Colac Otway Economic Development Strategy

### About the project:

The Colac Otway Economic Development Strategy articulates the council's vision, objectives and actions for economic development to plan and facilitate economic growth and prosperity for the shire. A \$25,000 grant from the Australian Government's Building Better Regions Fund, combined with a similar injection from the council, funded the document and strategy.

### How will it benefit the community?

*"The draft of the Colac Otway Economic Development Strategy was developed with significant business and industry stakeholder engagement through sector workshops, one-on-one discussions and an online survey. The strategy outlines how council will support economic development with the promotion of investment and job creation*

*in the shire. It identifies local sectors that are significant contributors to the local economy as well as specific activities the shire can pursue to support this economic growth in the region. The strategy will guide council's activities in supporting business and industry."*

*"We operated without an Economic Development Strategy for many years. As part of the grant application process, the council proved the importance of the strategy in providing a framework and direction for the shire. The council showed how essential the strategy was to the future of the shire as a whole."*

### Any advice to others?

*"Show how important the grant funding will be for your particular project. Show how it will create jobs and attract investment to the shire."*



# Role of your local council

Councils have an important role in helping bring new business and support existing business within their local government area.

Councils can help improve and maximise the benefits of local retailing through helping with land use planning, economic development, urban design, infrastructure and asset planning, rates and charges and transport planning, as well as:

- Collaboration/networking
- Lobbying/promotion
- Strategies and plans
- Business case development, evidence and information collection.

The main areas of a council which a business will deal with include economic development, planning and building and environmental health.

## What the economic development team does

Many councils have an economic development strategy highlighting the ways they will assist small business.

This includes:

- Providing the means and assistance for current businesses to expand both their premises and customer base.
- Providing information and research to help both existing and new businesses with targeted training methods to help fill skill gaps.
- The implementation of an incubator and business support centre model that removes some of the financial impediments for emerging small businesses.
- Additional support for small and homebased businesses to reach their target market
- Assistance with the applications for grant funding



Research undertaken by the University of Technology Sydney in 2017 (*The Role of Local Government in Local and Regional Economic Development*) showed that councils differ in the wide range of services they provide in terms of economic development, and many work in different areas of council. The report further highlighted the economic development has a key role to play in prosperity of local government areas.

Due to that role of helping business thrive, it is a good idea to collaborate with your local council about the best way for a business to succeed. If all the small businesses in your town work together for a common goal and strategic vision for the community, the more likelihood they will succeed.

Economic development staff are usually the first point of contact for business inquiries. They are responsible for promoting their town and attracting and retaining business, assist in business planning and advocate for policies encouraging economic development.

Through supporting business expansion and attracting investment, they look to build sustainable economic growth for their local and regional economy.

As the first point of contact for businesses looking to establish, grow or re-locate, economic development officers can help across several areas, including:

- General business and investment enquiries.
- Location selection support for both land and buildings.
- Economic impact modelling for business development and investment.
- Support with application processes.
- Provide advice on government regulation policies funding and business support services.
- Facilitate links to education facilities to help support training recruitment and access to research opportunities.
- Many towns in rural Victoria have active chambers of commerce or tourism groups – your council can provide information about how to link in with these.



# Case study

## Refurbishment of the Beechworth Goods Shed

### What is the project?

The refurbishment of the Beechworth Railway Goods Shed into a multi-purpose commercial space will complement the town's railway station precinct and the adjacent rail trail. The \$460,000 refurbishment works have been made possible through Indigo Shire Council funding and a \$230,000 injection from the Australian Government's Regional Jobs and Investment Package (RJIP) funding. Indigo Shire Council has designed the refurbishment to maintain the look of the Goods Shed and its heritage features using sensitive design and utilising mainly recycled materials.

The refurbishment works will include:

- New galvanised iron cladding of the walls and roof
- Refurbishment of internal and external platforms

- Improvement to access ramps
- Enhancing natural lighting and ventilation and provision of water, sewer and electricity upgrade

The current timber decking will be cleaned and recycled and used within the refurbished building to provide timber flooring. Every effort will be made to ensure all existing timber and iron in the existing structure can be used. Construction works have begun, and it is envisaged the project will be complete by September 2019.

### How will this benefit the community?

*"The revitalised Goods Shed will provide a vital link as the entry point to two legs of the Murray to Mountains Rail Trail and will provide a huge boost to the town's economy with the creation of jobs within the centre."*

*"The refurbishment will also drive private sector investment and create new commercial opportunities that will reinvigorate the railway precinct."*





# Case study

## Yarrawonga Tourism Trail Project

### About the project:

The Yarrawonga Tourism Trail Project along the iconic Yarrawonga foreshore overlooking Mulwala will fill two critical gaps in the 5km tourism trail from the central business district to the Silverwoods Golf Course. Works include a 900-metre section of river road that will benefit from bank stabilisation prior to the installation of construction of shared pathway, landscaping, bollards and furniture. There will also be works in and around “The Point” including shared pathways, a pedestrian and tourist bridge linking Silverwoods to The Point. Two additional boardwalks which allow pedestrians and cyclists to travel out over the waters of Lake Mulwala will also be constructed. Once complete, the tourism trail will provide a safe, off road passage offering picturesque and uninterrupted views across Lake Mulwala for the thousands of tourists who visit the region.

A \$2.7 million grant from the Australian Government’s Building Better Regions Fund to Moira Shire council will be injected into the project.

### How will it benefit the community?

*“The project will finalise the 5km tourism trail used by thousands of locals and visitors every year. The infrastructure works will link the central business district and the significant construction of the Sebel Hotel and Silverwoods Golf Course. The project will utilise both local and out of town trades, bringing further economic benefits to the town.”*

### Any advice to others?

*“Ensure there are strong partnerships with all the parties involved. Use strong planning and supporting documentation, accurate cost estimates and ensure there is an understanding of the purpose and outcome of the project at a grassroots level.”*







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