



Advocacy Strategy 2025/26

Big Ideas for a Better Region





Acknowledgement of Country

Swan Hill Rural City Council acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land, and pays its respects to their elders, past and present.



Introduction

Swan Hill Rural City Council is experiencing a period of significant growth and transformation. This presents opportunities for economic development, infrastructure investment, and enhanced liveability, but it also brings challenges that require timely and targeted action.

Local government plays a critical role as the closest level of government to the community. We are best placed to understand local needs and advocate on behalf of residents, businesses, and community organisations. However, many of the decisions and funding streams that shape our region are controlled by State and Federal Governments, as well as other external stakeholders.

This Advocacy Strategy sets out a coordinated, evidence-based approach to influence decision-makers and secure resources that will help realise our vision of a great place to live, work and grow - a region defined by its diverse culture and connected communities.

What is Advocacy?

In the local government context, advocacy is the deliberate and strategic process of influencing decisions, policies, and priorities made by other levels of government, industry, and stakeholders, to achieve positive outcomes for the municipality.

It goes beyond simply raising issues - effective advocacy is about:

- Presenting a clear, evidence-based case for investment or reform.
- Building coalitions and partnerships to amplify our message.
- Mobilising the community to demonstrate broad-based support.
- Engaging in consistent, targeted, and professional communication with decision-makers.

Our Role in Advocacy

Local government is the level of government closest to the people, uniquely positioned to understand and respond to the needs, priorities, and aspirations of its community. Recognised in the Victorian Constitution as a distinct and independent tier of government, local councils play a pivotal role in shaping the liveability, prosperity, and sustainability of their municipalities.

While Swan Hill Rural City Council delivers a broad range of essential services and infrastructure, our influence extends well beyond service delivery. We are a strong voice for our community, advocating for investment, policy reform, and strategic partnerships that bring lasting benefits to the region. By working alongside key partner organisations, industry, and other levels of government, we champion projects and initiatives that unlock economic opportunities, improve quality of life, and ensure our region remains vibrant and resilient into the future.



Why Advocacy is Important for Council

While Council delivers a wide range of services and infrastructure, our capacity is limited by the revenue we generate locally (e.g., rates, fees, and charges).

Many of the large-scale projects that shape our future rely on funding, approvals, or policy changes from State and Federal Governments.

Advocacy ensures:

- Funding equity: Regional communities receive their fair share of investment.
- Policy influence: Our local priorities are reflected in broader government strategies.
- Community voice: Residents' needs and aspirations are heard at the highest levels.
- Partnership leverage: Stronger relationships lead to better collaboration across sectors.

Without effective advocacy, the region risks missing out on critical opportunities and falling behind in competitiveness, service delivery, and liveability.

Principles of Effective Advocacy

Our advocacy efforts will be guided by the following principles:

Evidence-Based - Use accurate, up-to-date data, economic modelling, and community input to support all proposals.

Outcome-Focused - Clearly link advocacy asks to tangible community benefits.

Community-Led - Demonstrated through community engagement and feedback.

Strategic and Targeted – Focus resources on the right decision-makers, at the right time.

Collaborative - Partner with other councils, industry bodies, community groups, and peak organisations.

Consistent and Persistent – Maintain engagement over the long term, not just during election periods.

Non-Partisan - Advocate based on community need, irrespective of political alignment.

Framework for Advocacy

To maximise the effectiveness of our advocacy efforts, Swan Hill Rural City Council follows a structured framework that ensures all activities are carefully planned, coordinated, and focused on delivering measurable results. This framework provides a clear pathway from identifying community needs to achieving tangible outcomes through strategic influence and engagement.

Step 1: Identify Priorities

Advocacy begins with a clear understanding of what matters most to the community and Council. We draw upon Council's strategic documents, such as the Council Plan and Community Vision, Long-Term Financial Plan, and Strategic Asset Management Plan, to identify projects and issues that will deliver the greatest benefit and align with our long-term goals. This ensures our advocacy is purposeful, targeted, and reflective of community aspirations.

Step 2: Build the Case

A compelling advocacy effort relies on a strong evidence base. Council prepares detailed reports to show that proposed projects or changes are practical and worthwhile. We also include real stories and experiences from the community to show how these issues affect people's lives. Combining facts with personal stories makes our case both credible and compelling.

Step 3: Engage Stakeholders

Connecting with the right people is key to moving our advocacy forward. We must identify decision-makers - like Ministers, local MPs, senior officials, and policy advisors - who influence funding and regulations. By developing professional, trust-based relationships, we can share our case more effectively, understand government priorities, and work smoothly within the political process.

Step 4: Mobilise the Community

Community engagement amplifies our advocacy voice. Council coordinates grassroots campaigns such as petitions, open letters, and public forums to gain support and demonstrate widespread backing for priority initiatives. We actively involve local businesses, service organisations, advocacy groups, and media outlets to broaden our reach and reinforce the legitimacy of our requests. This united front increases pressure on decision-makers to act.

Step 5: Communicate the Message

Consistent, clear, and strategic communication is essential throughout the advocacy process. We leverage a diverse range of channels - including traditional media, social media platforms, community newsletters, and public events - to maintain visibility and momentum around our key issues. Messages are crafted to be professional, accessible, and aligned with Council's broader communications to ensure clarity and coherence.

Step 6: Monitor, Review, and Report

To be effective, advocacy should be reviewed regularly. Council systematically tracks progress by monitoring government commitments, funding announcements, policy developments, and stakeholder feedback. We report outcomes transparently to Council, staff, and the community through regular updates. This ongoing review allows us to celebrate successes, identify challenges, adapt strategies where necessary, and uphold accountability to our community.

Following this framework, Swan Hill Rural City Council enhances its ability to secure the resources, partnerships, and policy support needed to deliver better outcomes for our community.



Effective vs Ineffective Advocacy

What is Effective Advocacy

The aims of effective advocacy are to secure tangible commitments, strengthen strategic relationships, and enhance Council's reputation as a trusted and influential partner. This can be achieved through:

- Clearly articulated priorities backed by Council-endorsed strategies.
- Proposals supported by robust evidence, economic modelling, and clear community benefit.
- Engagement with all relevant decision-makers, not just political representatives.
- Strategic timing, aligned with government budget cycles, grant rounds, or election periods.
- Strong, ongoing relationships with media and stakeholders.

What is Ineffective Advocacy

Ineffective advocacy fails to achieve meaningful outcomes, resulting in the inefficient use of resources, missed strategic opportunities, and stakeholder frustration due to a lack of progress on the issue. Over time, it can erode organisational credibility and diminish the likelihood of future success. Examples of ineffective advocacy include:

- Vague or inconsistent priorities that change without evidence.
- Reliance on anecdote without data.
- Reactive engagement only initiated when an opportunity arises.
- Poor communication, unclear messages, or fragmented campaigns.
- Failure to follow up after initial contact with decision-makers.

Partnerships for Effective Advocacy

Strategic Relationships and Partnerships

Advocacy is most powerful when delivered through a unified voice and collaborative effort. Swan Hill Rural City Council is committed to fostering and sustaining strategic partnerships that amplify our influence and effectiveness. These relationships with key stakeholders are a continual priority - not limited to periods of urgent need or political opportunity - but maintained proactively to build trust and readiness for collective action.

Collaborations Across Government

All tiers of government - local, state, and federal - share the fundamental objective of enhancing community liveability and wellbeing. Council recognises that achieving meaningful outcomes depends on effective coordination and partnership across these levels. While Council actively seeks financial investment from other governments, it also values in-kind contributions, policy support, and cooperative engagement that enable shared progress. These strategic governmental relationships form the cornerstone of successful advocacy.

Community Partnerships

Strong advocacy relies on genuine engagement and alignment with the community's diverse voices and interests. Council is dedicated to partnering broadly across community groups, organisations, and networks where shared goals exist. By uniting with the community around common priorities, we strengthen our collective voice and enhance the impact of our advocacy efforts.

Corporate Funders and Philanthropic Organisations

Beyond government, partnerships with corporate funders and philanthropic bodies represent valuable opportunities to advance projects that leave lasting legacies for the municipality. By adopting a collaborative, goal-oriented approach consistent with our work with government and community partners, Council aims to build mutually beneficial relationships that align with both our strategic priorities and the philanthropic objectives of these organisations.



Key Advocacy Priorities



1

A new Swan Hill Bridge

The need for a new Swan Hill Bridge is urgent as the existing structure is ageing and increasingly unable to meet traffic demands.

Replacing this critical crossing will not only resolve pressing safety issues and reduce ongoing maintenance costs but also dramatically improve cross-border connectivity between Victoria and New South Wales. A state-of-the-art bridge will better support the rising volumes of freight and commuter traffic, bolster regional economic partnerships, and enhance travel reliability for communities on both sides of the Murray River - ensuring this vital link remains strong well into the future.

Request: We are calling on government to commit to replacing the ageing structure with a modern crossing that addresses safety concerns, reduces costly maintenance, supports growing freight and commuter demands, and strengthens cross-border connections between Victoria and New South Wales.

2

To be confirmed

3

To be confirmed





Monitoring and Evaluation

Effective advocacy requires ongoing monitoring and evaluation to ensure strategies remain relevant, impactful, and aligned with Council's goals. To measure success, Council will track a range of key indicators, including:

- **Commitments Secured:** Formal commitments and agreements obtained from State and Federal Government decision-makers that support priority projects and initiatives.
- **Funding Allocations:** Announcements and receipt of financial resources allocated to Swan Hill Rural City Council for the delivery of advocated projects, demonstrating tangible investment outcomes.
- **Policy and Regulatory Changes:** Adoption of policy reforms, legislative amendments, or approvals that facilitate or enable the advancement of Council's priorities.
- **Stakeholder Engagement:** Growth in active participation and support from community members, partner organisations, industry groups, and elected representatives, reflecting broad-based advocacy influence.
- **Media and Public Visibility:** Increased positive media coverage and public awareness of Council's advocacy priorities and achievements.

Council will establish a formal reporting framework to assess these indicators, providing transparent updates to Councillors, staff, and the community.

This process will:

- Celebrate advocacy successes to build momentum and morale.
- Identify challenges or gaps requiring strategic adjustment.
- Ensure continuous learning and improvement of advocacy approaches.
- Align advocacy efforts with changing political, social, and economic contexts.

Through monitoring and evaluation, Council will maintain accountability, demonstrate impact, and refine its advocacy strategy to maximise benefits for the municipality.

