



The GROW initiative is tackling barriers to employment by convening a regional approach, bringing together business, government and community.

By working collaboratively to change everyday business practices, the GROW initiative aims to drive inclusive growth and create sustainable and sustaining jobs for people from Norlane, Corio, Whittington and parts of Colac.

To reflect on the collective activities and achievements during the start-up phase, Clear Horizon Consulting undertook an inclusive review of the regional GROW initiative.

Together with Compact Signatories and key stakeholders, past successes were identified and insightful solutions proposed for the next phase.

The GROW Timeline



The initiative has already shown evidence of a number of notable successes:

Significant mobilisation



of region wide support for developing and committing to a collective response to address place based disadvantage.

Strong commitment and motivation to sign up



to the GROW initiative, driven by perceived benefits to business, and the desire to help the local community and break the cycle of disadvantage.

Ownership and buy-in



from Compact Signatories through co-design work.

Growing awareness



of the barriers to employment faced by people from target areas.

Changed conversations



around "how you do business" and a drive to change key practices around local procurement.

Expanded collaborations and connections



across business, government and job services.

Well received resources and information



developed with Compact Signatories, including organisational dashboards and Compact Action Plans.

Strong and sustained commitment to learn and co-design



solutions, despite complexities and challenges experienced during early attempts to employ people from target areas.

Policy influence



both at State and Federal level through the rollout of GROW across the state and convening key stakeholders to explore changes to the local Job Active model to ensure greater sustainability of local employment services.



CHANGING BEHAVIOURS

The review findings demonstrate that **mindset shifts and practice changes are occurring among a substantial number of businesses, organisations and partners in the G21 region as a result of the GROW initiative.**

Whilst some of these changes are not necessarily in line with projections within the original strategy, this indicates significant learning has occurred during the start-up phase of GROW, which has led to a revised understanding of what is achievable.

CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

- **Need for clear and simple communication** of GROW – what it is and how you do it.
- **Need to create a scalable model** to support embedding and expansion of GROW in organisations.
- Increased need for **GROW principles to be built into public tenders** and in the provision of public services in the G21 region.
- Need for **improved reporting** to eliminate some of the challenges in the reporting and collation of local and social procurement data.
- **Jobs are being created** for people from target areas, however **progress is slow.**
- Additional support is needed to create **supportive and inclusive workplaces** for people from target areas.
- **Short term funding cycles** for employment support services create challenges for the level and type of support needed for people from target areas.
- GROW needs to consider how to strategically position itself, and how to effectively use **collaborations and networks to support and strengthen the job ecosystem** and to build momentum for demand led employment brokerage.
- Significant opportunity remains with regards to **impact investing** within the region.

WAY FORWARD

Key priorities for the next phase of the GROW initiative include:

- ✓ **Scaling Up & Scaling Deep** – creating change across policy, practice and behavior and embedding GROW principles across organisations;
- ✓ Continuing to advocate for GROW principles to be built into **local strategic tenders and contracts**;
- ✓ Finding meaningful ways to more **clearly and simply communicate** GROW;
- ✓ Co-designing solutions with employers to create more **inclusive and supportive workplaces**;
- ✓ Support **mobilising more and new forms of funding** for aligned activities, notably the employment support services sector for GROW target areas;
- ✓ Re-thinking regional **collaboration and governance structures** to ensure the GROW initiative leverages the skills and time of participants and key stakeholders in the most effective way.