



AUSTRALIAN
smart communities
association

AUSTRALIAN SMART COMMUNITIES ASSOCIATION

The Smart Victoria Opportunity

A vision for connected, resilient and thriving communities



Acknowledgement of Country

The Australian Smart Communities Association (ASCA) acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands, waters and skies across Australia and pays our respects to Elders past, present and emerging. We recognise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have cared for, managed and learned from Country for tens of thousands of years, and that sovereignty was never ceded.

As an organisation focused on innovation, we recognise that Australia's First Peoples were this nation's first innovators.

For millennia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples developed sophisticated systems of knowledge, communication, governance, trade, environmental stewardship and resource management. These systems were deeply connected to place and grounded in a profound understanding of the relationships between people, community and Country.

Long before the emergence of modern cities and digital technologies, Australia's First Peoples demonstrated the power of observation, adaptation, collaboration and long-term thinking. These are qualities that remain essential to building smarter, more sustainable and resilient communities today.

ASCA believes that the future of smart communities should be informed not only by emerging technology, but also by enduring wisdom. As we explore new ways of using data, innovation and digital solutions to improve community outcomes, we acknowledge the value of Indigenous knowledge systems and the insights they offer in caring for place and strengthening community connection.

In building a smarter Victoria and a smarter Australia, we recognise that innovation did not begin with technology. It began with people understanding their environment, working together and continuously adapting for future generations. That spirit of innovation continues today.

Foreword

Victoria is changing.

Our communities are growing rapidly. Infrastructure demands are increasing. Climate pressures are becoming more visible. Residents expect services that are responsive, connected and easy to access, while governments face growing pressure to do more with limited resources.

These challenges are complex, but they share a common theme: they require governments at every level to work smarter.

A Smart Victoria is not defined by technology. It is defined by outcomes.

It is a Victoria where public investment is guided by evidence. Where government services are designed around the needs of people. Where innovation is used responsibly to improve daily life. Where collaboration replaces duplication. Where communities are empowered to participate in the decisions that shape their future.

Across Victoria, local governments are already demonstrating what this looks like in practice. From digital inclusion programs and environmental monitoring to data-sharing platforms and community innovation projects, councils are delivering tangible improvements for residents every day.

These successes are not isolated examples. They are signals of a broader opportunity.

Victoria already possesses the ingredients required to become Australia's leading Smart State:

- world-class universities
- innovative local governments
- a thriving technology sector
- strong research capability
- engaged communities
- global expertise in urban development

What is missing is a shared vision that brings these strengths together.

This publication presents a practical blueprint for how Victoria can build smarter communities across the state. It explores the role of local government, examines successful initiatives from across Australia, and outlines the foundations required to scale innovation in a responsible, inclusive and community-focused way.

Most importantly, it demonstrates that building smarter communities is not a future aspiration.

It is already happening.

The opportunity now is to connect, support and accelerate these efforts so that every Victorian community can benefit.

What does a Smart State look like?

People

Smart communities put people first.

- Easier access to government services
- Improved digital literacy
- Better accessibility for people with disabilities
- Community co-design
- Trusted use of data

Future headline: *Every Victorian can participate in an increasingly digital society.*

Places

Communities designed using evidence.

- Intelligent transport networks
- Climate resilience
- Smarter parks and recreation spaces
- Digital infrastructure in growth areas
- Better planning decisions

Future headline: *Places that adapt to community needs in real time.*

Government

Better decisions. Better outcomes.

- Data-informed planning
- Shared platforms
- Performance transparency
- Collaborative service delivery
- Modern governance
- Statewide collaboration networks for councils to share ideas, lessons and innovation

Future headline: *Government that learns, adapts and improves continuously.*

Economy

Innovation as an economic driver.

- Local technology ecosystems
- Start-up support
- Research partnerships
- Skilled jobs
- New markets

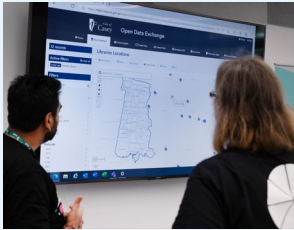
Future headline: *A stronger economy powered by collaboration and innovation.*

The Smart Victoria Maturity Journey

Stage	What this means	Key capabilities
Connected	Building the digital foundations that allow communities to participate in a modern society	<i>Connectivity, Public WiFi, IoT Infrastructure, Cyber Security, Smart Assets</i>
Informed	Using information to understand communities, measure outcomes and make evidence-based decisions	<i>Open Data, Analytics, Dashboards, Reporting, Data Governance</i>
Integrated	Moving beyond isolate projects and enabling collaboration across regions and sectors	<i>Data Sharing, Common Standards, Regional Partnerships, Shared Platforms, Interoperability</i>
Adaptive	Using advanced analytics, artificial intelligence, and automation to respond to changing conditions and predict future needs	<i>AI, Digital Twin, Predictive Analytics, Automation, Real Time Monitoring</i>
Community Led	Residents, businesses, researchers and government codesign solutions and shape the future together	<i>Living Labs, Co-design, Innovation Ecosystems, Citizen Science, Participatory Innovation</i>

Victoria already demonstrates capabilities at every stage of the maturity journey. The challenge is not proving innovation works. It's creating the conditions to scale it!

Where have we seen this already?

	Where have we seen this already?	Where do we need to be?
 City of Greater Geelong Smart Poles	Multipurpose infrastructure supporting connectivity, environmental sensing, public safety and future smart city services	Digital infrastructure becomes as essential as roads, water and electricity. Every Victorian is connected, secure and future ready.
 Open Data Programs	Several cities including Casey, Melbourne, Geelong, and Frankston run thriving Open Data Programs to improve transparency and access to data that enables better planning decisions	Data becomes a strategic public asset that informs policy, planning and service delivery across government. Better information leads to better outcomes for everyone.
 Southeast Smart City Regional Community of Practice	A partnership of councils reducing duplication, sharing costs, improving procurement and codesigning solutions for regional issues together	Organisations across Victoria operate within connected ecosystems sharing knowledge, standards and platforms that accelerate learning and innovation.
 City of Casey AI Adoption Program	A safe and repeatable adoption model being utilised by other local government areas to improve decision making and efficiency through AI adoption	Governments move from reactive to issues to predicting and preventing them. Services become more proactive, efficient and personalised.
 City of Melbourne Incubator	Creating environments where researchers, innovators, and communities trial solutions in real world settings	Communities become active participants in creating solutions rather than passive recipients of services. Innovation is continuous and owned by the community.

Victoria's digital capability skills are inconsistent from region to region — local government needs a connected vision to work towards.

What happens when Local Government is supported?

Across Australia, governments are demonstrating that innovation delivers the greatest value when it is supported by long-term vision, coordination and investment.

Rather than funding isolated technology projects, leading jurisdictions are creating the conditions that allow innovation to scale across communities.

New South Wales: Smart Places

The NSW Government's Smart Places program established a statewide framework for place-based innovation. By bringing together planners, councils, government agencies and industry, the program helped embed digital thinking into the planning, design and management of communities. The result was a common vision, stronger collaboration and a more coordinated approach to delivering connected and responsive places.

Queensland: A Thriving Digital Future

Queensland's digital transformation agenda focused on building capability across government, industry and communities. Through investment in connectivity, emerging technology and digital skills, Queensland has positioned itself as one of Australia's leading jurisdictions for digital innovation. Importantly, the approach recognised that technology alone is not enough—capability and collaboration are equally critical.

South Australia: Open and Connected Government

South Australia has invested heavily in open data, digital government and innovation ecosystems. By encouraging collaboration between government, universities, researchers and industry, the state has created an environment where new ideas can be tested, refined and scaled. This has strengthened transparency, accelerated innovation and helped attract investment into emerging industries.

These initiatives demonstrate a common lesson: successful innovation is rarely the result of a single project. It is the outcome of leadership, partnerships and sustained investment that allows organisations to learn from one another, share risk and build on proven success.

Victoria already possesses the ingredients required to achieve similar outcomes: innovative councils, world-class universities, engaged communities and a thriving technology sector.

The opportunity is not to start from scratch.

The opportunity is to bring these assets together through a coordinated approach that enables local innovation to scale into statewide impact.

When governments create the conditions for innovation to thrive, communities benefit. Innovation scales. Communities benefit.

The Building Blocks of a Smart Victoria

Building block	What it is	Why it matters
Digital Infrastructure	Reliable connectivity, smart assets, and modern digital infrastructure — the essential foundation for a smart community.	<i>It enables access, inclusion and innovation. Strong infrastructure supports economic growth, resilience and equitable access to digital services across metropolitan and regional Victoria.</i>
Data & Insights	High quality data shared securely and used responsibly turns information into insight and insight into action.	<i>Better data leads to better decisions, smarter planning and more efficient services. Open data and strong governance build transparency and community trust.</i>
Digital Inclusion	Ensuring all Victorians can access, use, and benefit from digital technologies and online services.	<i>Inclusion closes the digital divide, improves community participation and ensures no one is left behind in an increasingly digital society.</i>
Innovation & Testbeds	Safe environments to experiment, pilot, and evaluate new ideas and emerging technologies in the real world.	<i>Testbeds reduce risk, accelerate learning and help councils and partners identify what works before scaling solutions to ensure they deliver real community value.</i>
Skills & Capability	Building digital skill, leadership, and technical capability across the public sector, partners and communities. Establish dedicated smart city and innovation functions within LGAs to spearhead the urban innovations within the Councils.	<i>A skilled and confident workforce is essential to deliver and sustain innovation and adapt to future challenges.</i>
Governance, Trust & Ethics	Strong governance, privacy, security and ethics frameworks ensure responsible innovation.	<i>Trust is the foundation of adoption. Protecting privacy and data, ensuring cybersecurity and acting ethically safeguards communities and strengthens confidence in all levels of government.</i>
AI & Emerging Technology	Harnessing AI, automation, IoT and other emerging technologies responsibly to improve outcomes and productivity.	<i>Emerging technologies can help solve complex problems, improve service delivery and unlock new economic opportunities for Victoria's future.</i>

The Victorian Opportunity

Victoria does not need to start from scratch. Many local government areas are already requesting funding in the upcoming election to improve urban resilience, uplift digital infrastructure and improve their local economy through targeted strategic innovation.

The opportunity is not to create a new sector in Victoria; it is to link up the existing fragmented pockets of innovation to create better outcomes for all Victorians. The building blocks are already in place — now it's time to bring them together.

How local government wants to help:

Deliver high-speed connectivity, telehealth access and digital services to remote communities across the Wimmera Southern Mallee Alliance.	Help local businesses thrive through visitor insights, smart place management and safer, more vibrant commercial precincts in Stonnington.
Expand digital connectivity, public transport and enabling infrastructure to unlock housing and economic growth in the Greater Ballarat Alliance of Councils.	Link trains, buses, bike paths and pedestrian networks in Merri Bek through data-driven planning that reduces congestion and improves access to jobs.
Deploy smart monitoring of erosion, flooding and sea level rise in Port Phillip to protect Victoria's coastline before disasters occur.	Create Australia's most connected and data-enabled urban precincts in Fisherman's Bend, integrating transport, housing and public infrastructure from day one.
Eliminate mobile blackspots in Casey across growth areas to improve safety, digital inclusion and economic participation.	Use predictive growth modelling to deliver roads, services and community infrastructure in BawBaw before growth creates bottlenecks.
Establish Latrobe as Australia's regional hub for drones, advanced aviation and next-generation aerospace industries.	Deliver resilient telecommunications, emergency communications and digital services so East Gippsland stay connected during disasters.
Use visitation data and digital infrastructure to improve tourism experiences on Bass Coast while protecting local environments.	

CALL TO ACTION #1

Adopt a Victorian Smart Communities Statement

A shared vision for a smarter Victoria

Victoria has long been recognised as a leader in planning, liveability, infrastructure and community development. Yet despite significant activity occurring across government, local councils, industry and universities, there is currently no unifying statement that articulates a statewide vision for smart communities.

A Victorian Smart Communities Statement would provide that vision.

Importantly, this is not a strategy, funding program or new layer of bureaucracy. Rather, it is a simple and enduring declaration of intent that defines what success looks like for Victoria's digital future. It would provide a common language that helps governments, communities and industry align behind shared objectives.

The statement would articulate a future where innovation is used to improve quality of life, strengthen resilience, support economic prosperity and deliver better public outcomes. It would reinforce that smart communities are not about technology for technology's sake, but about creating communities that are more connected, inclusive, sustainable and responsive.

A clear statewide statement would also help connect existing government priorities. Digital transformation, climate resilience, housing growth, infrastructure planning, emergency management, economic development and community wellbeing all rely on the ability to make better decisions, collaborate effectively and adapt to change.

Rather than creating a new agenda, a Smart Communities Statement would provide a unifying framework that links these priorities together.

For local government, the statement would provide confidence that innovation is a recognised and supported part of modern service delivery. For industry, it would provide a clearer understanding of Victoria's ambitions. For communities, it would establish a commitment that public innovation will be delivered responsibly, transparently and with people at the centre.

Successful transformation starts with a shared vision.

A Victorian Smart Communities Statement would establish that vision and provide a foundation for the next decade of innovation, collaboration and community outcomes.

KEY OUTCOME

Victorian councils, government and industry are united by a shared vision for smarter communities and better outcomes.

CALL TO ACTION #2

Establish a Victorian Smart Communities Partnership

Connecting capability across the state

Across Victoria, innovation is already happening.

Councils are trialling new technologies, universities are producing world-class research, industry is investing in new solutions, and communities are helping shape the future of the places they live.

The challenge is not a lack of activity. The challenge is that much of this work occurs independently.

Projects are often delivered in isolation. Lessons learned in one region may never reach another. Similar challenges are solved multiple times by different organisations, while valuable knowledge can be lost when funding ends or staff move on.

A Victorian Smart Communities Partnership would help bring these efforts together.

The partnership would provide a formal mechanism for collaboration between State Government, Local Government, industry, universities and community organisations. Its purpose would be simple: identify common challenges, share practical knowledge and accelerate the adoption of successful solutions.

Rather than directing projects from above, it would act as a connector and enabler. It would support communities of practice, facilitate cross-sector collaboration and help councils access knowledge, expertise and opportunities that may otherwise be out of reach.

Importantly, the partnership would ensure Victoria benefits from the collective experience already held across the state.

Successful innovations could be scaled more rapidly. Risks could be shared. Duplication could be reduced. Public investment could deliver greater value.

ASCA is uniquely positioned to support this role.

As Australia's peak body for smart communities practitioners, ASCA brings together professionals from local government, academia, technology providers and community organisations. It provides a trusted forum for knowledge sharing, professional development and practical collaboration.

By supporting a Victorian Smart Communities Partnership, the next Victorian Government can strengthen connections across the innovation ecosystem and help successful ideas move beyond individual projects to deliver benefits at scale.

KEY OUTCOME

Victorian councils are connected through a strong innovation ecosystem that accelerates learning, collaboration and impact.

CALL TO ACTION #3

Create a Smart Victoria Fund

Investing in capability, not just technology

One of the most common barriers facing innovation in local government is not a lack of ideas.

It is a lack of capacity to test them.

Across Victoria, councils frequently identify opportunities to improve services, strengthen resilience or better understand community needs. However, the pathway from concept to implementation can be difficult without dedicated support.

A Smart Victoria Fund would address this challenge.

The fund would provide targeted investment for pilot projects, innovation testbeds, digital inclusion initiatives, open data programs, AI demonstrations and collaborative projects between councils and partners.

Crucially, the purpose of the fund would not be to purchase technology.

Its purpose would be to build capability.

Successful innovation requires organisations to explore new approaches, learn from failure, gather evidence and refine solutions before making larger investments. Small, carefully structured pilot projects allow government to test ideas in a controlled and responsible manner while reducing risk.

A dedicated funding program would also encourage collaboration between councils, helping ideas developed in one municipality be adapted and replicated elsewhere. This would increase return on investment while reducing duplication of effort.

The greatest value would be realised over time.

Each funded project would contribute to a growing body of evidence, helping councils, government agencies and communities better understand what works and where future investment should be directed.

Victoria has an opportunity to become Australia's leading Smart State. Achieving this vision will require more than ambition alone. It will require practical mechanisms that help communities move from ideas to evidence, and from evidence to implementation.

A Smart Victoria Fund would provide that mechanism.

KEY OUTCOME

Communities benefit from innovations developed by councils and scaled across Victoria.

A FINAL THOUGHT

Victoria stands at an important crossroads.

Across the state, councils, universities, industry partners and communities are already demonstrating what smarter communities can achieve. New approaches to service delivery, climate adaptation, digital inclusion and data-driven decision-making are emerging every day. The ideas exist. The capability exists. The willingness to innovate exists.

What is missing is not technology.

What is missing is the ability to connect, support and scale what is already working.

This document does not call for a new layer of bureaucracy or technology for technology's sake. Instead, it recognises that the foundations of a Smart Victoria are already being built in communities across the state.

A smarter Victoria is one where local innovation becomes state-wide learning. Where successful pilots become established practice. Where collaboration replaces duplication. Where data, technology and innovation are used responsibly to improve everyday outcomes for people.

The coming decade will bring significant challenges, from population growth and housing pressures to climate resilience and rising expectations of government. Meeting these challenges will require governments to work together, think differently and make better use of the tools available to them.

Victoria has an opportunity to lead the nation in building smarter, more connected and more resilient communities.

The foundations already exist.

Now is the time to bring them together.