

Simplifying the complex

Lessons learned from the 2016 LGPro Annual Conference

➤ **One of the many good things about LGPro's Annual Conference is that it happens in February. The summer is still with us, winter warmers are yet to come, and we're all possibly more receptive to new ideas and alternate perspectives thanks to this.**

As a freelancer (an increasingly rare entity in our current environment I'd suggest) it's a fantastic way to keep in touch with the sector's latest thinking, catch up with past colleagues and meet a few new ones. This applied to everyone there I'm sure.

Reading the conference brochure in the weeks ahead, I admit that I found the conference theme "Local Government is a verb" a little obtuse. But it made sense when thinking of the converse – that Local Government is not (necessarily) a noun. The subtext here is that Local Government is about action and doing, not just planning and strategising, which we do a lot of.

Some lessons I learned from this two day brain fest were along those lines. For example:

- The simplest of actions can make the biggest difference
- Bettering the simplest needs of life is easier than solving the "big questions"
- When you do act, "test and measure everything" (in the

words of keynote speaker, Tim Lovitt)

- And a parallel thought to this – of all spheres of government, the local is where you can experiment with the lowest risk. We can be laboratories for social and organisational innovation

As always, the Conference Dinner where the winners of the 2016 LGPro Awards for Excellence were announced was a quite a celebration, and I learned a few lessons from this too. Around 20 individual metro cities, rural cities and Shires were acknowledged for their good and innovative work during the previous year, but the geographical distribution of awardees was telling.

Of the nine outright category winners, only two were located in metropolitan Melbourne – rural cities and Shires took out the other six in equal proportion. They also made up 50% of finalists and the highly commended. Notably, the metro winners got the gong in financially big ticket infrastructure categories.

I took this as evidence that the less well-off smaller Councils are getting

smarter than their comparatively cashed up counterparts, doing more with less as we say.

I'd also like to acknowledge keynote speaker Stan Grant's presentation, which kicked off the conference. I doubt anyone walked away unaffected and not wiser.

His theme "the weight of history" did two things for me. It gave me a profoundly deeper appreciation of the indigenous perspective on Australian attitudes and society, and that there's much which non-indigenous Australians are not aware of or just don't get, to the detriment of our governmental interventions.

The second was a chunking up of this – you can't do anything or introduce change effectively without understanding constituents' historical experience of you and your predecessors' actions. You are not a temporal island.

If Local Government is a verb (not a noun), the same is surely true of communities.

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Tim Lovitt presents his interactive session titled: Local Government Services – moving from reactive to proactive in the digital age.