



# **Regional Sports Assembly Evaluation**

**Department for Victorian Communities**

# **1**

## **Final Report**

## Acknowledgements

This evaluation of the Regional Sports Assembly Program was initiated by the Department for Victorian Communities (Sport and Recreation Division).

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## About this document

This document is Volume 1: **Final Report**.

The document details key findings and recommendations from the evaluation of the RSA Program.

Volume 2 is **Background and Research Findings** including **Appendices**.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**@leisure**, in association with **Victoria University** undertook a formal evaluation of the Regional Sports Assembly (RSA) Program in Victoria on behalf of the Department for Victorian Communities (DVC) between May and October 2005.

The RSA Program is delivered by nine provider organizations throughout ten regional catchment areas with the aim of strengthening the capacity of rural and regional communities to respond to sport and active recreation issues at the grassroots level.

The program objectives are to:

- ◆ *strengthen the capacity of grassroots sport and recreation organisations to operate in a robust fashion and deliver quality opportunities for participation*
- ◆ *increase the quality and availability of information about local sport and recreation issues, infrastructure and opportunities;*
- ◆ *enhance networks between grassroots sport and recreation organisations and other key stakeholders in the community to ensure that sport and recreation services address local community needs and issues; and*
- ◆ *increase opportunities for the activities of statewide organisations to be delivered at a local level.*

The evaluation examined the Program within the three key areas of:

- ◆ program implementation and delivery
- ◆ direction setting and
- ◆ program administration.

The RSA Program provides a valuable service to the sport and recreation community, in particular at a grass roots level in relation to information, volunteer support and club development. The Programs ability to deliver services of a consistent high standard however is constrained by objectives that are too broad to provide adequate focus, lack of profile and limited funding and resources.

### ■ Methodology

The evaluation comprised predominantly qualitative procedures, such as telephone interviews and focus groups. These were conducted with a wide range of Program stakeholders including representatives of clubs, community groups, local government authorities, State Sporting Associations, DVC representatives and Program administrators including staff and board members of RSA Program providers.

Key tasks undertaken for the project included:

- ◆ a review of existing documents, annual plans, mid year and annual reports
- ◆ focus group workshop with DVC and SRV staff
- ◆ focus group workshops with representatives of the board and staff of RSA Program providers
- ◆ focus group with representatives of clubs, community groups and local government authorities within each RSA Program catchment area
- ◆ telephone interviews with 250 representatives of clubs, community groups and local government authorities throughout RSA Program catchment areas
- ◆ telephone interviews with representatives of 40 State Sporting Associations (SSAs) and other key industry bodies within Victoria.

## ■ Summary of findings

The three things that all RSA Program providers do well at provide to sport and recreation clubs:

- ◆ **information**
- ◆ **volunteer support and**
- ◆ **club development activities and support.**

RSA Program providers appear to be having a significant impact on the capacity of grassroots sport and recreation clubs to operate in a viable way. They do this, on a limited budget, by providing:

- ◆ general advice and support
- ◆ easy to understand information
- ◆ training programs
- ◆ information dissemination
- ◆ provision of networking opportunities
- ◆ organisation of events

It is clear that the RSA Program is providing a valuable service to the Victorian sport and recreation community. However, its ability to deliver services of a high standard throughout the state is constrained by four factors:

- ◆ a set of objectives that are too broad to provide adequate focus and enable monitoring
- ◆ a lack of profile
- ◆ limited funding and resources
- ◆ reporting and monitoring procedures out of proportion to the scale of the program

## ■ Key issues

The following five key issues were identified throughout the evaluation:

### ◆ **Role of the RSA Program and the need for a clear focus**

The current program objectives are very broad and there is a lack of consistency in perceptions of the role of the program and the functions it performs throughout both the local community and SSAs. RSA Program providers presence within the community makes them accessible which is seen as a key strength, however it also raises community expectations that all sport and recreation issues can be met through the RSA Program provider.

The core business of the RSA Program is to increase the capacity of grass roots clubs and commonalities that exist between all RSA Program providers are information dissemination, volunteer support and club development. Generally RSA Program providers focus on these areas, ie on increasing club development and increasing club capacity.

### ◆ **Need for a stronger Program profile at both a local and state level**

The current Program lacks a profile and community stakeholders identify with the provider organisation or individual staff member rather than the RSA Program. There is no evidence to suggest that responsibility for promoting the program has been clearly designated and a lack of consistency in approach has been seen as a barrier to state wide promotion. The program name does not reflect the current nature of services provided and is confused with the Responsible Serving of Alcohol (RSA) program by many members of the community.

### ◆ **Relationships between RSA Program providers and state level organisations**

Issues associated with contract management and reporting requirements currently have a negative impact on relationships between service providers and DVC. SSAs are generally unaware of the benefits of the program and are at times frustrated in implementing programs by the inconsistent approach of RSA Program providers throughout the state. Program providers have great difficulty in encouraging SSAs to deliver programs in regional Victoria.

#### ◆ Reporting and monitoring requirements

Current reporting and monitoring requirements are generally seen by Program providers as a time consuming restriction to effective service delivery while some DVC representatives have indicated they are too time consuming and onerous, particularly in relation to the level of funding received. Overall contract management responsibility at either a state or regional level needs to be determined.

#### ◆ Program funding levels.

The current funding levels are insufficient to satisfactorily meet the current objectives and community expectations of the Program. RSA Program providers see themselves and are seen by others as providing valuable services in comparison with the funds they receive. Funding received by provider organisations to deliver other services contributes to the effective delivery of the Program

#### ■ Recommendations

The following key recommendations are made in view of the significant value the RSA Program provides to the Victorian sport and recreation community and are designed to enhance the future direction of the Program:

- ◆ Retain the RSA Program but bring it up to date to reflect current DVC objectives.
- ◆ Refine the roles and objectives of the RSA Program - this will clarify the position of the Program within the sport and recreation sector, assist with raising the Program's profile, enable a better assessment of outcomes and better reflect the current objectives of DVC.
- ◆ Consider marketing the Program centrally to assist in raising the overall profile of the Program and provide clarity about Program functions.
- ◆ Develop materials to assist building the profile of the Program.
- ◆ Provide a level of funding to providers that is commensurate with the specified roles and objectives of the Program.
- ◆ Refine reporting arrangements and contract management responsibility.
- ◆ Address the RSA Program providers role in relation to SSA operations in regional Victoria.
- ◆ Promote the role and benefits of the Program to SSAs, local government and the broader community.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Project background

Sport and Recreation Victoria (SRV), through the Department for Victorian Communities (DVC), provides funding to a network of providers who deliver the Regional Sports Assembly (RSA) Program in ten regional catchment areas.

The Program's aim is to strengthen the capacity of rural and regional communities to respond to sport and active recreation issues which impact at the grassroots level.

*The objectives of the RSA Program are to:*

- ◆ *strengthen the capacity of grassroots sport and recreation organisations to operate in a robust fashion and deliver quality opportunities for participation*
- ◆ *increase the quality and availability of information about local sport and recreation issues, infrastructure and opportunities;*
- ◆ *enhance networks between grassroots sport and recreation organisations and other key stakeholders in the community to ensure that sport and recreation services address local community needs and issues; and*
- ◆ *increase opportunities for the activities of statewide organisations to be delivered at a local level.*

### 1.2 Project aim

The RSA Program had not been independently evaluated since 1987. The aim of this project was to provide a formal evaluation of the Program, taking into consideration:

- ◆ the stated future directions of DVC and SRV
- ◆ the 'Ministerial Statement on Community Sport and Recreation' and
- ◆ the contribution of the RSA Program to the local community.

### 1.3 Project Scope

The overall Program was examined within the context of three key program areas.

#### ■ Program implementation and delivery

This aspect included an overall examination of the delivery of the Program by the providers, including the levels of engagement with sport and recreation clubs, breadth and outcomes of networking and partnerships, delivery of education and training programs, information collection and dissemination, and the level of support provided by DVC/SRV to Program providers.

#### ■ Direction setting

An examination of aims and objectives was undertaken, including an identification of key factors that contribute to the success of the Program, and any opportunities to enhance and promote the Program.

#### ■ Program administration

A review of the current reporting and monitoring requirements between SRV and the Program providers was completed.

## 1.4 Project methodology

The following tasks were undertaken to achieve the outcomes required by the project brief:

- ◆ a review of existing documents including annual plans, mid year and annual reports
- ◆ meetings with DVC staff and the project Steering Committee
- ◆ meetings with RSA Program providers Executive Officers and Managers
- ◆ focus group workshops with representatives of board and staff of RSA Program providers
- ◆ focus group with representatives of clubs, community groups and local government authorities within each RSA catchment area
- ◆ telephone interviews with 250 representatives of clubs, community groups and local government authorities throughout RSA catchment areas
- ◆ telephone interviews with representatives of 40 State Sporting Associations and other key industry bodies within Victoria
- ◆ importance/performance analysis of key criteria associated with the program
- ◆ development of key themes and issues
- ◆ development and presentation of a Draft Issues and Opportunities Paper

### Qualitative analysis

The project used **qualitative** procedures to uncover the perceptions of a range of stakeholders regarding the Program. The main information gathering methods used in this evaluation were:

- ◆ focus groups meetings
- ◆ telephone interviews.

Information obtained via these methods was analysed to identify the underlying evaluative themes. Qualitative methods were then applied to assess respondents' perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of the Program, as well as any potential opportunities and threats.

Additionally, the project sought answers to particular issues associated with the Program that had been identified, such as reporting and monitoring procedures.

The project sought to examine the evaluative meanings that people gave to the Program. Generalisations that describe experiences were in terms of the respondents' perspectives about the Program, and the project therefore was less concerned with numbers, such as averages or frequency counts, that may be identified through quantitative processes.

The project methodology and analysis was designed to uncover evaluative themes that emerged from the responses to open ended questions addressed to an array of stakeholders (usually in focus groups) in order to inform DVC of the characteristics of the Program.

## 1.5 Summary of recommendations and findings

### ■ Major recommendations

The following key recommendations are made in view of the significant value the RSA Program provides to the Victorian sport and recreation community and are designed to enhance the future direction of the Program:

- ◆ Retain the RSA Program but bring it up to date to reflect current DVC objectives.
- ◆ Refine the roles and objectives of the RSA Program - this will clarify the position of the Program within the sport and recreation sector, assist with raising the Program's profile, enable a better assessment of outcomes and better reflect the current objectives of DVC.
- ◆ Consider marketing the Program centrally to assist in raising the overall profile of the Program and provide clarity about Program functions.
- ◆ Develop materials to assist building the profile of the Program.
- ◆ Provide a level of funding to providers that is commensurate with the specified roles and objectives of the Program.
- ◆ Refine reporting arrangements and contract management responsibility.
- ◆ Address the RSA Program providers role in relation to SSA operations in regional Victoria.
- ◆ Promote the role and benefits of the Program to SSAs, local government and the broader community.

### ■ Summary of findings

The three things that all RSA Program providers do well are provide to sport and recreation clubs:

- ◆ **information,**
- ◆ **volunteer support** and
- ◆ **club development activities and support.**

Research undertaken for this project identified the considerable value and extent of activity undertaken by grass roots sport and recreation organizations. Their motivation, their dedication to their sports, and their commitment to increasing participation in a range of activities at a range of levels is impressive: there is a remarkable amount of community involvement in sport in regional Victoria that is supported by the RSA Program.

RSA Program providers appear to be having a significant impact on the capacity of grassroots sport and recreation clubs to operate in a viable way. They do this, on a limited budget, by providing:

- ◆ general advice and support
- ◆ easy to understand information
- ◆ training programs
- ◆ information dissemination
- ◆ provision of networking opportunities
- ◆ organisation of events

It is clear that the RSA Program is providing a valuable service to the Victorian sport and recreation community. However, its ability to deliver services of a high standard throughout the state is constrained by four factors:

- ◆ a set of objectives that are too broad to provide adequate focus and enable monitoring
- ◆ a lack of profile
- ◆ limited funding and resources
- ◆ reporting and monitoring procedures out of proportion to the scale of the program

## ■ Program implementation and delivery

Each RSA Program provider, while offering some common services throughout the State, operates independently, but driven primarily by the differences in their catchments, histories and demographics. The skills, knowledge and motivations of the Executive Officer and Program staff also impact upon the type of, and manner in which programs are delivered.

A General Satisfaction survey conducted as part of the telephone interviews of 250 club and community representatives concluded that, on average, respondents strongly agreed with the statement “Generally, I am satisfied with what the RSA Program is delivering.” Respondents also strongly agreed, on average, with the statement “I would seek assistance from the RSA Program if required in the future” (detailed information regarding the survey is contained in the Background and Research Findings Report).

The ability of each provider to deliver the Program to a high satisfaction level throughout their catchment area however is limited by two things: the availability of funding and resources, and the need to meet a broad set of objectives. Although programs implemented within the community are well-received by sporting clubs, current levels of funding and resources combined with broad objectives and extensive catchment areas limit the extent to which a high satisfaction level of performance may be achieved.

The delivery of training and education programs, provision of general support for volunteer administrators, networking opportunities for clubs and the dissemination of information throughout the community are seen as the core Program objectives and are highly valued by the community.

By concentrating on the delivery of these core functions the Program is capable of performing a function well matched to Government priorities - and much needed by the sport and recreation sector.

## ■ Direction setting

The current objectives are in line with the revised *DVC Outcome Framework* (outlined below in 1.6 Policy Context). They also reflect the current needs of community sports clubs run by volunteers, and generally reflect the RSA Program Providers core business. The objectives however are not written so as they are easily measurable.

The providers see the objectives as being too broad and ambiguous to provide clear directions, and are the major cause of inconsistencies in approach to service delivery around the State. The breadth of the current charter may also be a contributing factor to the lack of recognition of the Program by community and state sporting groups, many of whom are unaware of the role RSA Program providers play and or the potential benefits they could deliver. SSAs in particular indicated that they are generally unaware of the functions of the Program. This lack of clarity, when coupled with the current low funding levels, means that RSA Program providers are often having difficulty meeting their own expectations, let alone community ones. Providers are not given a realistic opportunity to succeed in meeting expectations to a high level of satisfaction.

The lack of consistency in program and service provision across the RSA Program providers has been regularly identified, particularly by SSAs, as a major constraint of the Program. However, this apparent constraint can be seen as a positive since it also offers opportunities for flexibility in terms of service provision.

The Program needs a simpler distinction of roles and measures against which providers performance can be assessed. The RSA Program should continue to target sport and recreation clubs and focus on the key roles of:

- ◆ **information dissemination**
- ◆ **volunteer support and**
- ◆ **training and club development.**

Undertaking these core functions would assist in meeting the outcomes of the revised DVC Outcome Framework such as:

- *information about Government policy and grant programs being more readily accessible to a greater range of communities*
- *people from a range of backgrounds are involved in volunteering*
- *more people from a range of backgrounds are encouraged to participate in sporting or physical activity.*

While establishing clear direction, such a role would also set the program apart from, and allow it to sit comfortably alongside, the aims of other state-wide programs such as the Access for All Abilities (AAA) Program and Participation in Community Sport and Active Recreation (PICSAR) Scheme.

### ■ Program administration

Reporting and monitoring requirements of the Program have been identified as one of the five key issues to be addressed (see Chapter 3: Key Issues). While acknowledging the need for transparency and accountability when in receipt of Government funding, Program providers view current administrative procedures as a time consuming restriction to effective service delivery and some Managers see little value in preparing reports when they believe they get little feedback that assists in service delivery. Some DVC representatives also acknowledged that administrative requirements of the program are too detailed and onerous, particularly in view of the amount of funding received. The effort required to administer the program and scale of reporting should be in keeping with the scale of funding provided. Most stakeholder sectors considered that for the amount of funding received under the Program, administrative processes required to satisfy Government contracts are excessive. Opportunities to report positive program outcomes need to continue to be identified. It is imperative that feedback be provided to program staff in relation to their performance and that reporting requirements effectively measure RSA Program outcomes in relation to funding received.

While organisations delivering the RSA Program currently receive funding from a diverse range of agencies, each with their own reporting requirements, some collaborative efforts to share reporting information would allow greater resources to be spent delivering the Program and assist in creating positive relationships between providers and funding agencies.

### ■ Strengths

Club and community representatives value the skills, knowledge, enthusiasm and responsiveness of staff to their needs. A key strength of the program identified by both local and state organisations was that the Program providers are accessible to their local communities.

RSA Program providers provide an easy, non threatening and non-governmental point of access to information and assistance for sport and recreation clubs in regional communities. They are seen to be staffed by committed, neutral, sports minded people, rather than as an arm of Government providing advice on sport. Providers delivering the Program are seen to have a professional image within their communities

Generally positive aspects of the program relate to the provision of information, volunteer support and club development activities.

## ■ Weaknesses

Club and community group representatives noted several salient weaknesses of the RSA Program. All groups consulted, including representatives of DVC/SRV recognised that coverage of the catchment areas is a real challenge because of the distances involved, the impact of travel time on work arrangements, and the lack of resources. Suggestions to assist in the delivery of the Program included introducing smaller catchment areas, distributing staff better, and using electronic communications more extensively.

A major weakness of the Program is the perceived low level of funding in comparison with high expectations of providers. The low level of funding is seen to restrict the availability and retention of staff due to relatively low salaries, burnout and the use of the positions as 'stepping stones' to more secure positions. The vast majority of funds provided are directed towards staff resources that make it difficult to secure other resources, such as transport, to adequately cover the catchment areas. RSA Providers also perceive that the funding is short term, although it is provided over a three year term consistent with other Government funded programs

The RSA Program lacks a clear and effective image, either in local communities or across the State. There is a clear need to raise awareness of the Program and the benefits of the services delivered. There exists an inability of community groups to separate the Program from the provider organisation and this contributes to a lack of Program profile.

There is demand, and therefore an opportunity, for RSA Program providers to enhance many aspects of their operations, including facilitation and/or delivery of training (of sport officials and coaches), volunteer management (recruitment and retention), advocacy, information distribution, media coverage and networking.

## ■ Importance Performance analysis

Eighty responses were received to an Importance Performance analysis survey conducted of both Program provider and club and community representatives who attended focus groups as part of the evaluation.

Responses received enabled a range of program functions to be categorised into four broad categories as summarised below:

- ◆ **Keep up the good work** – features that fall into this category are deemed as being high in importance to respondents and in terms of service delivery, satisfaction levels are also relatively high
- ◆ **Overkill** – respondents satisfaction levels with these features are high, however their importance is relatively low and consequently management could be seen to be placing too much emphasis on these features
- ◆ **Low priority** – features identified as a low priority for management are those identified as being low in terms of both importance and satisfaction
- ◆ **Needs more work** – those features that are seen as being of high importance but have a low satisfaction level are identified as potential weaknesses and ‘need more work’

A summary of responses is outlined below and as detailed, the core business of the RSA Program such as information collection and dissemination, strengthening organisations and supporting volunteers are key features that are seen to be conducted well within communities. (Refer Background and Research Findings Report for additional information).

**Table 1: Importance Performance Analysis Summary**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ <b>Keep up the good work</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Strengthening organisations</li> <li>● Information collection and dissemination</li> <li>● Supporting volunteers</li> <li>● Sourcing grants</li> <li>● Community development</li> <li>● More and better opportunities</li> <li>● Education and training programs</li> <li>● Identifying sport and recreation needs</li> <li>● Responsive to sport and recreation needs</li> <li>● Planning for sport and recreation organizations</li> <li>● Links with health</li> <li>● Links with local government</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ <b>Needs more work</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Access and inclusiveness</li> <li>● Support state wide associations</li> <li>● Strengthening social fabric</li> <li>● Increasing physical activity</li> <li>● Maximising geographical coverage</li> <li>● Accessing and utilising information</li> <li>● Links with other providers</li> <li>● Links with welfare and police</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ <b>Overkill</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Nil</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ <b>Low priority</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Delivering sport and recreation</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

## 1.6 Policy context

Key Government documents that provide direction for the RSA Program include:

- ◆ Ministerial Statement: A Focus on Community Sport and Recreation
- ◆ RSA Program Guidelines 2003-2006
- ◆ DVC Business Plan 2004-2005
- ◆ DVC Corporate Plan 2004-2007
- ◆ Sport and Recreation 2005-2010: A Discussion Paper

The following provides a brief summary of their relevance to the Program and their impact on the future direction of sport and recreation in Victoria.

### ■ Ministerial Statement: A Focus on Community Sport and Recreation

Victoria's leading contribution to Australia's international sporting reputation is 'built on grass roots participation' which:

- ◆ contributes to the creation of stronger, healthier communities
- ◆ makes a significant contribution to individual self-development and achievement across all ages and
- ◆ is a major driver of community interaction and pride.

Funding initiatives direct SRV's research focus towards an emphasis on community sport and recreation participation, with an additional \$4.3 million to State Sporting Associations and Regional Sports Assemblies. Goals to be achieved by 2010 are:

- ◆ a culture of inclusiveness and participation in Victoria
- ◆ access to sustainable activities and facilities in all communities
- ◆ a co-operative approach to improve service delivery across the sector and
- ◆ a leading sport and recreation sector providing opportunities for all Victorians to achieve their goals.

### ■ RSA Program Guidelines 2003-2006

The guidelines outline a commitment to community-based sport and recreation by:

- ◆ encouraging participation in sport and active recreation
- ◆ increasing opportunities for participation in sport and recreation
- ◆ assisting voluntary organisations, departments, statutory bodies, councils and others concerned with sport and active recreation
- ◆ promoting cooperation between voluntary organisations, and
- ◆ seeking the attainment of a high standard of safety.

Government is committed to increasing participation in sport and physical activity and acknowledges the need to:

- ◆ strengthen the capacity of those, often volunteer-based, organisations which deliver opportunities for the community to be involved, and
- ◆ develop partnerships with and across community-based providers to implement initiatives targeted at groups in the community who are under-represented in participation in physical activity.

In achieving Program objectives, providers are required to maximise their geographic coverage, respond to local area needs, optimise partnerships, maximise their own capacity to achieve the objectives and have an ongoing impact on local communities.

### ■ DVC Business Plan 2004-2005

The Business Plan identifies the Government's *Physical Activity Strategy* as a means of building community participation across Victoria. A key outcome of the strategy is that more people from a range of backgrounds will be physically active and participate in sporting activities.

The plan also details the Government's intentions to strengthen the capacity of Victorian communities to respond to, and participate in, sporting and recreational activities through improved accessibility and strengthened networks and partnerships. Key partners identified in achieving this deliverable include state sport and recreation organizations and local government authorities<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> RSA Program Providers are not identified as a potential partner to achieve this objective.

## ■ DVC Corporate Plan 2004-2007

The DVC outcomes framework includes a range of measures for successful community strengthening. The *Revised Outcome Framework* endorsed by DVC in August 2005 includes the following objectives compatible with the RSA Program:

- ◆ with government support more people work together to plan for and address community issues
- ◆ more people involved in making decisions about community issues
- ◆ people from a range of backgrounds are involved in volunteering
- ◆ more people from a range of backgrounds are encouraged to participate in sporting or physical activity
- ◆ community facilities used for a greater range of purposes
- ◆ greater usage of, attendance at and ongoing participation in events held in new and improved facilities developed for the Commonwealth Games
- ◆ there are more initiatives that involve partnerships between community groups and government and business
- ◆ information on government policy and grant programs is more readily available and more accessible to a greater range of communities
- ◆ more Victorians have opportunities to develop careers and participate in elite sports activities.

Strategies to ensure that Victoria remains the leading sport and recreation State:

- ◆ partnerships to improve the capacity of organisations
- ◆ well planned and high quality facilities at a community level
- ◆ a strategy for the sport and recreation industry that aims to capitalise on major events
- ◆ strategies for a secure, accessible and safe sporting environment.

The **2006 Commonwealth Games** in Melbourne provides an opportunity for people to become involved in delivering lasting economic, social and environmental benefits. Specific programs include: involving communities, increasing sports participation and promoting opportunities for regional and rural Victoria.

## ■ Sport and Recreation 2005-2010: A Discussion Paper

Strategic direction and desired goals for 2005-2010 are listed in the table below.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION	GOALS
<b>Active People and Active Communities</b>	<p><i>Aiming to maximise the benefits of participation and the development of cohesive communities through sport and recreation.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase the positive impact of involvement in sport and recreation on individuals and the community</li> <li>• Imbue the value of being physically active in the community</li> <li>• Recognise opportunities and plan to leverage off the Melbourne 2006 Commonwealth Games and Victoria's major events calendar to increase sport and recreation participation</li> <li>• Promote appropriate spectator behaviour and sportsmanship</li> </ul>
<b>Building Capacity for Tomorrow</b>	<p><i>All Victorians have access to quality sustainable sport and recreation activities and facilities</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhance planning and greater resource sharing</li> <li>• Develop the capacity and number of partnerships across the sector and community</li> <li>• Support accessibility for diverse communities</li> <li>• Ensure sustainable sport and recreation provision</li> </ul>
<b>Collaboration for Development</b>	<p><i>A cohesive sector based on skill development, enhance collaboration and partnerships</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthen self advocacy across the sector</li> <li>• Improve the skills base</li> <li>• Support volunteers</li> <li>• Build community collaboration</li> </ul>
<b>A State of Achievement</b>	<p><i>Supporting organised sport and recreation providing the opportunity for all Victorians to achieve their goals</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support organised sport and recreation in Victoria</li> <li>• Promote a high standard of ethics and fairness</li> <li>• Maintain elite sports systems</li> <li>• Uphold Victoria's leadership in event attraction</li> </ul>

The Discussion Paper also identified the following key issues relevant to the RSA Program:

### **Rural and regional communities**

The challenge for the sport and recreation sector to develop more flexible and inclusive sport and recreation opportunities to overcome barriers to participation is acknowledged, particularly in the case of rural and regional communities, which have:

- ◆ generally lower participation rates than metropolitan areas and
- ◆ an above average proportion of the population whose sole activity occurs in an organised setting

### **Volunteers**

Volunteers constitute the basis of sport and recreation organisations and are increasingly facing burdens such as legislative compliance, fear of litigation and the general complexity of managing sport and recreation. The Paper outlines Government's commitment to supporting volunteers through the continued development of better standards, training, recognition and coordination of information and local resources.

## 2. ABOUT THE PROGRAM

### 2.1 Catchments

Over the years, the RSA Program has been delivered by a range of provider organisations. Currently there are ten RSA catchment areas. One RSA Program Provider (Gippsport) is funded to deliver the program in two catchment areas and in some areas the Program is delivered by a broader community organisation, as opposed to a sports assembly.

**Table 2: Summary of RSA Program Providers**

CATCHMENT AREA	SERVICE PROVIDER	POPULATION	AREA (SQ KM)	ESTIMATED NO. OF SPORT & REC CLUBS	LOCAL GOVERNMENT AUTHORITIES
<b>Barwon</b>	Leisure Networks	266,112	8,942	1800	Colac Otway, Golden Plains, Greater Geelong, Queenscliff, Surf Coast
<b>Central Gippsland</b>	Central Gippsland Sports Assembly trading as Gippsport	163,650	9,590	650	Bass Coast, Baw Baw, Latrobe, South Gippsland
<b>East Gippsland</b>	Central Gippsland Sports Assembly trading as Gippsport	82,276	31,865	650	East Gippsland, Wellington
<b>Central Highlands</b>	Central Highlands Sports Assembly Inc.	146,185	11,977	650	Ararat, Ballarat, Hepburn, Moorabool, Pyrenees
<b>Goulburn Valley</b>	Goulburn Valley Sports Assembly Inc. trading as ValleySport	163,651	22,769	600	Benalla, Greater Shepparton, Mansfield, Mitchell, Moira, Murrindindi, Strathbogie
<b>Loddon Campaspe</b>	Loddon Campaspe Sports Assembly trading as Sports Focus	210,424	19,081	800	Campaspe, Central Goldfields, Greater Bendigo, Loddon, Macedon Ranges, Mt Alexander
<b>Mallee</b>	Mallee Sports Assembly Inc	91,619	40,049	680	Buloke, Gannawarra, Mildura, Swan Hill
<b>North East</b>	The Centre for Continuing Education	95,935	17,821	850	Alpine, Indigo, Towong, Wangaratta, Wodonga
<b>South West</b>	South West Sports Assembly Inc.	101,008	23,034	730	Corangamite, Glenelg, Moyne, Southern Grampians, Warrnambool
<b>Wimmera</b>	Wimmera Regional Sports Assembly Inc	50,812	33,884	540	Hindmarsh, Horsham, Northern Grampians, West Wimmera, Yarriambiack

## 2.2 Objectives and Funding

All RSA Program providers currently receive an annual amount of \$58000 per catchment area from DVC.

Current agreements require that weightings be developed by providers to show how they intend to allocate resources across the four program objectives:

1. Strengthen the capacity of grassroots sport and recreation organisations to operate in a robust fashion and deliver quality opportunities for participation.
2. Increase the quality and availability of information about local sport and recreation issues, infrastructure and opportunities.
3. Enhance networks between grassroots sport and recreation organisations and other key stakeholders in the community to ensure that sport and recreation services address local community needs and issues.
4. Increase opportunities for the activities of statewide organisations to be delivered at a local level.

DVC establishes minimum and maximum weighting requirements to indicate to providers the level of resources expected to be directed towards achieving each objective. The final agreed weighting is negotiated between the provider and the contract manager to reflect the specific needs of the local community.

Table 3 below outlines current minimum and maximum weightings allowed:

**Table 3: Minimum and maximum weightings, and funding, by objective**

OBJECTIVE	MINIMUM WEIGHTING	MAXIMUM WEIGHTING	AVERAGE WEIGHTING %	AVERAGE FUNDING PER OBJECTIVE
1	25	55	41	\$23,780
2	10	25	16	\$9,280
3	10	25	18	\$10,440
4	25	25	25	\$14,500
<b>Total</b>			100	\$58,000

Table 4 below provides a summary of agreed weightings by catchment area for the 2004/05 year.

**Table 4: Agreed weightings summary**

CATCHMENT	OBJECTIVE 1	OBJECTIVE 2	OBJECTIVE 3	OBJECTIVE 4
<b>Barwon</b>	35	25	15	25
<b>Central Gippsland</b>	50	15	10	25
<b>East Gippsland</b>	50	15	10	25
<b>Central Highlands</b>	40	20	15	25
<b>Goulburn Valley</b>	45	15	15	25
<b>Loddon Campaspe</b>	40	10	25	25
<b>Mallee</b>	25	25	25	25
<b>North East</b>	40	10	25	25
<b>South West</b>	35	15	25	25
<b>Wimmera</b>	55	10	15	25
<b>Average</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>25</b>

## 2.3 Partnerships

RSA Program providers throughout the State initiate, develop and maintain relationships with a wide range of local and state based organisations to enhance the delivery of sport and recreation within their communities – apart from their primary relationship with the Department for Victorian Communities.

Providers identified local sport and recreation clubs as their dominant partner for the delivery of activities. In fact, strengthening the capacity of these organisations to deliver their own programs is one of the Program objectives.

Given the difference in operation of RSA Program Providers, key partners identified in the delivery of programs varied significantly. However common partners identified included:

- ◆ sporting clubs and associations
- ◆ local government
- ◆ community organisations
- ◆ Sport and Recreation Victoria
- ◆ VicHealth
- ◆ educational institutions
- ◆ selected state sporting associations

## 3 KEY ISSUES

Five key issues were distilled from research undertaken for this evaluation:

- ◆ clarifying the role of RSA Program Providers
- ◆ RSA Programs' need for a stronger profile
- ◆ improving relationships with state organisations
- ◆ reporting and monitoring
- ◆ funding the Program.

### 3.1 Role of the RSA Program

There was no consistency across the sector in terms of levels of awareness and perceptions about the role of the RSA Program. For instance, the lack of a consistent approach and understanding of what the RSA Program providers could do for them was regularly identified by SSAs in relation to the constraints of the Program. Many SSA representatives were also unaware that one of the current objectives specifically relates to assisting delivery of their activities. Even clubs that utilise RSA Program provider services are generally unaware of what their overall function is.

Further, there is a lack of clarity about how RSA Program Providers relate to the AAA Program and PICSAR Scheme, although providers are particular about keeping reporting and financing of programs separate.

#### ■ Generally RSA Program providers are seen as facilitators, rather than program deliverers.

Where there is clarity about the role of providers, it centres on the understanding that they are indeed facilitators and not program deliverers. Clubs however, identify positively with events and activities conducted by provider organisations such as Regional Games, volunteer and player awards and major promotional days although these events are not necessarily funded via the RSA Program.

#### ■ RSA Program providers are being all things to all people with limited funds to achieve it.

While the physical presence of providers within their local communities is a key strength of the Program, it raises expectations - by clubs particularly - that all needs can be met. While this is a positive view, it places pressure on RSA Program providers, given that their current funding arrangements are based on the outcomes of an agreed annual service plan that may provide little flexibility for dealing with *ad hoc* issues. Providers are reluctant to defer enquiries for assistance from their communities – and this is one of the reasons some RSA Program providers are so warmly regarded.

#### ■ The key role in information dissemination is limited due to membership-style structures and database information.

While most RSA Program providers have become efficient clearing houses for information useful to the sector – and this role is highly valued - those provider organisations whose structure is built around a membership system may inadvertently disadvantage some clubs and associations. Most of the providers have developed membership categories and thus limit their regular dissemination of information via newsletters and e-news to registered members. While developing memberships assists in creating ownership of the Program and raises a small amount of revenue, it tends to create a division between clubs that are linked to the program and those that are not. Because information dissemination has grown to be a core role, sport and recreation clubs that are not members of the organisation, or included on their database, may be disadvantaged.

Providers are sometimes limited in their ability to disseminate information efficiently and effectively due to constraints in information technology resources and staff skills and knowledge.

■ **Community and clubs have limited awareness about what RSA Program providers' role is and what the Program objectives are.**

Providers see the current objectives as broad and ambiguous, leading to providers operating differently throughout the State. While this may enable providers to deal more effectively with the needs of their local catchment area, it has generated a lack of consistency in approach and some confusion in the community about what services the RSA Program provides.

Whilst there are core similarities between RSA Program providers, the differences in their catchment, histories and demographics mean that providers utilise different delivery mechanisms.

■ **Flexibility in meeting local community needs.**

RSA providers perceive that community needs often differ from RSA Program objectives and feel that the current structure of standardised service planning restricts their ability to effectively meet community needs. RSA providers feel the current weighting system is a constraint, arguing that it does not allow them the flexibility to deal with the individual requirements of their catchment area, and, in particular, devise programs to meet them.

Given the need for the program to be delivered and promoted in a consistent manner throughout regional Victoria, sufficient flexibility is currently provided within the existing weighting systems for the delivery of program objectives.

Some RSA Program Providers have undertaken local demand analyses and studies as part of their RSA Program to determine what the actual needs of their communities are in terms of sport and recreation provision. It is acknowledged that this is good management practise and has been encouraged by DVC. This could be further encouraged within the scope of normal operations and potentially undertaken in association with local government authorities.

■ **Role in relation to working with SSAs**

RSA Program providers recognise the importance of the objective of increasing opportunities for the activities of statewide organisations to be delivered at a local level, however have great difficulty in achieving this. While providers are required to commit 25% of RSA Program resources to the objective, there is no requirement on the part of SSAs to work with RSA Program providers, thus making relationships difficult to nurture. SSAs generally associate the Program with local club development and do not necessarily identify with the role RSA Program providers are able to play and the potential benefits available through the Program.

Some SSAs, particularly those well resourced with development staff, recognise RSA Program providers as a key conduit to local clubs and participants and highly value this role.

■ **There is some debate about whether schools should be targeted.**

Sporting clubs, and in particular smaller non-mainstream sports clubs, are constantly seeking opportunities to promote their sport throughout the community and often seek support from RSA Program providers to assist in this process. Lack of formal connections into schools was seen as a weakness, however it was recognised that other programs are designed to increase participation and establish links with schools. Community clubs have regularly identified targeting schools as a means of attracting participants to their sport and the Program could be used to a greater extent to assist in establishing links between schools and clubs.

■ **Role in relation to local government.**

In some catchment areas and across catchments, local government authorities have recreation staff able to offer professional support to communities. In some local government areas there exists a duplication of roles such as information dissemination, database updates, advice to clubs and support of Government programs, eg Go For Your Life.

■ **Commonalities do exist between RSA Program Providers**

There are consistencies in service delivery across RSA Program Providers that may be used to assist in establishing a greater program profile. These include information dissemination, volunteer support and club development.

◆ **Information dissemination**

This mainly involves information about grants and funding rounds, but by offering a clearing house for information about events and activities that may be occurring in a catchment at club or association level, providers perform a valuable function. In fact, community-based clubs are heavily reliant on RSA Program providers for information in relation to sport and recreation. Providers generally disseminate information through personal contact, meetings and forums, website, email, newsletters and via the media.

The use of modern technology has enhanced providers' ability to disseminate information but some clubs still do not have email and internet access, and some club administrators prefer hard copy material.

RSA Program providers should be able to simply and effectively communicate with all clubs on their database (whether members or not) through regular email newsletters and updates. However, a major issue identified in communicating information to target groups is maintaining current, accurate database information.

Local media (radio and newspaper) is a valuable resource in distributing information and regular updates are well received by club representatives. However, providers have advised of the challenge of disseminating information through newspapers throughout the catchment due to the number of papers covering their area and the various deadlines to be met.

◆ **Volunteer support**

RSA Program providers provide support to clubs and associations about managing volunteer organisations. In fact, providers identified the delivery of training programs for volunteer club administrators as a key function in strengthening grassroots sport and recreation organisations.

All RSA Program providers are active in facilitating and developing training programs on a range of topics including risk management, strategic planning, fundraising and general governance and legal issues. At a state level, Sport Education Victoria is active in establishing relationships with Program providers to support the delivery of a range of training programs. It is anticipated that the continued turnover of volunteer administrators and constant need for volunteers to be up-to-date and skilled in many areas will require the ongoing delivery of such training and education programs within regional Victoria.

Although the issue of insurance for sports clubs has received a great amount of attention recently, it is still an issue of concern for many clubs

In addition to the training requirement of volunteers, the recruitment and retention of volunteers is a constant issue faced by clubs. There is a need to link those in the community willing to volunteer with clubs and community groups in need of volunteer services (while also continuing to encourage community members to volunteer).

Facilitating and conducting workshops has been identified by providers as one of their most common and important activities.

◆ **Club development opportunities and advice**

RSA Program providers have developed resource kits to provide club administrators with ongoing information and support to assist with administration and club development. Topics covered within kits include finance, planning, marketing, volunteers and general governance issues. The kits are well received by local clubs and are a positive initiative. Other initiatives include assistance with strategic planning and fundraising.

The core business of the RSA Program is to increase the capacity of grass roots clubs. Generally RSA Program providers focus on this, ie on increasing club development and increasing club capacity, rather than increasing participation.

## ■ RECOMMENDATIONS

- ◆ Redefine program objectives or prepare specialised roles to establish a clear direction and focus on key functions of:
  - information and advice
  - club development
  - volunteer support and training.
- ◆ Negotiate with RSA Program providers to establish clear performance measures as part of annual service plans.
- ◆ Concentrate objectives on providing advice and assistance to smaller non-mainstream sports – high profile, well resourced state sports associations such as football, cricket and tennis are in a better position to provide support to their local clubs, leagues and associations. Larger SSAs could be encouraged to fund providers to deliver local programs such as the existing Tennis Victoria relationship.
- ◆ RSA Program providers to continue to work with schools in creating and maintaining schools/club links.
- ◆ Maintain RSA Program delivery through a neutral service provider and not an arm of Government.
- ◆ Formalise links between the RSA Program and state and national volunteer support agencies.
- ◆ Identify opportunities for RSA Program providers and SSAs to work in collaborative partnerships.
- ◆ RSA Program providers to maintain an extensive up to date database of sport and recreation club contacts within their catchment - this may be internet based and updated and maintained by clubs.
- ◆ Ensure all clubs on database - not just members - receive electronic newsletters containing relevant information regarding the Program.
- ◆ Assist all registered clubs to have a generic email address that is transferable between club administrators from year to year.
- ◆ RSA Program providers to distribute electronic information via a generic email address – current information received by club representatives from individual staff addresses can be overlooked or deleted due to representatives being unfamiliar with the sender
- ◆ Distribute regular information in relation to activities within catchment areas to all SSAs.
- ◆ Establish regular forums between SSAs and RSA Program providers or a representative of providers.
- ◆ Some activities undertaken by RSA Program providers may be better delivered centrally – eg marketing, club administration manuals. This would avoid unnecessary competition between RSA Program providers, and duplication of effort.

## 3.2 Profile of the program

Community groups and club representatives are generally familiar with the organisation delivering the RSA Program but are not aware of the Program itself and associated objectives. Providers acknowledge that the Program they administer lacks a presence in the community and an increased profile is needed. The need for more promotion and an improved image was raised in eight of the nine staff and board focus groups and ten of eleven stakeholder workshops.

There is no evidence to suggest that any one organisation or individual has responsibility for promoting the Program and positioning it within the overall Victorian sport and recreation sector. While service providers are looking to SRV to take on this responsibility, the perceived differences and lack of consistency in how providers deliver the Program has, in the past, been seen as a barrier to effectively promoting the Program.

While providers wish for the program to be promoted collectively, they also wish to be given flexibility in terms of service delivery making it difficult to market the program as one. As previously highlighted however common tasks that could be used as a basis of promotion are information dissemination, volunteer support and club development opportunities and advice.

Some DVC/SRV representatives have also acknowledged this lack of profile as a potential threat to the maintenance of the Program and acknowledged that the Program's image is reduced due to a lack of clear and consistent set of functions.

An issue that highlights this lack of profile is that State Sporting Associations, while generally aware of the Program, are not familiar with the opportunities available through the Program and how their association could benefit. SSAs generally view the Program as being aimed at clubs and associations at a local level only.

Promotional materials to assist in increasing the RSA Program's profile are needed.

Summarised, profile-related issues are listed below.

### ■ The name does not indicate what the RSA Program does.

There exists a general lack of awareness in the community and amongst sports bodies about the RSA Program and its providers. Even clubs who have heard of the program were unsure what it stands for or what services it provides. The name 'Regional Sports Assembly' is considered outdated by many. It does not adequately reflect what the Program currently stands for, and many in the community confuse it with Responsible Serving of Alcohol (RSA) programs.

### ■ RSA Program providers do not believe that they are funded to market the Program.

Providers cite their lack of funding and resources and the need for a statewide image as their reason for not further promoting the RSA Program services within the broader community.

Providers look to DVC to promote the Program on a statewide basis and this as a function that could be performed at a state level.

There is a need to better promote the benefits RSA Program providers are able to offer both local and state organizations.

## ■ RECOMMENDATIONS

- ◆ Rebadge, rename and relaunch the program.
- ◆ Consider the use of RSA Program providers as a distribution and contact point for other State sport initiatives.
- ◆ Consider allocating responsibility for promoting and increasing the profile of the Program centrally.
- ◆ Develop materials to assist in raising the profile of the Program.
- ◆ Update and develop RSA Program website on SRV site including contact details and links to local providers.
- ◆ Consider undertaking some promotional activities for the Program at a state level.
- ◆ Consider the provision of additional funding to enable providers to increase the profile of the program within their local community.
- ◆ Refine the current objectives to establish clear direction and core benefits that may be promoted to community and state sporting organizations.
- ◆ Develop a state wide promotional strategy that communicates the benefits of the Program.
- ◆ Investigate the inclusion of current regional award programs for volunteers into existing state level awards.
- ◆ Review the name of the Program to better reflect its current role within the community and make it more identifiable.
- ◆ Establish regular forums with SSAs to assist in establishing networks, partnerships and educate SSAs about the role of providers and opportunities available in regional Victoria.
- ◆ Require providers to use the Program name on all relevant correspondence and written material.
- ◆ Initiatives such as ParticiPaction Day conducted in the Loddon Campaspe catchment could be encouraged to provide local clubs with the opportunity to promote themselves while also promoting the services provided by the Program.

### **RSA INNOVATION: Regional presence**

*A valuable initiative within the larger geographical regions is the physical presence of program staff within townships throughout catchments. Whilst some regions have established links with local government to house staff, clubs in rural and isolated areas rarely see RSA program staff. Providers have trialled establishing a fortnightly visitation program within each of their LGAs, with technical and office support provided by each Council. Although program staff will be stretched thinly across the region, a physical presence in all areas was highly requested by clubs and Councils alike.*

### 3.3 Relationships

Program providers generally have a very positive relationship with community groups and clubs within their catchment area, however the most important relationship that needs management is the one between RSA Program providers and DVC/SRV.

Current reporting and monitoring requirements, issues associated with receiving funding within agreed time frames, and a lack of overall Program funding and profile contribute to some providers' sense of an 'us against them' mentality.

There exists potential for DVC to further develop its relationship with VicHealth in relation to the development of annual service plans and monitoring reports. The main issues are summarised below.

#### ■ The role of contract manager colours the relationship between providers and regional offices.

There is a perception amongst providers that the current relationship with DVC is seen as a contract management arrangement rather than a relationship management role. While there clearly exists a contract management function, providers are frustrated and confused with the role played by regional managers and DVC representatives in relation to the development of service plans and monitoring reports. This has the potential to create unnecessary tension between the provider of funds and the service deliverer.

#### ■ Some aspects of RSA Program activities may be better done centrally

There is some scope for the conduct of activities, such as marketing the program centrally. Other activities that could be considered as appropriate for centralised coordination include the coordination of forums and meetings between providers and SSAs and the development of templates and manuals for use by all providers.

#### ■ The compatibility of the RSA Program with other statewide programs.

Most providers currently deliver both the AAA Program on behalf of DVC and the PICSAR scheme on behalf of VicHealth. Their objectives are outlined below:

- ◆ **PICSAR** - is designed to increase levels of participation in sport and active recreation, particularly among population groups that are currently inactive or who may encounter barriers to participation.
- ◆ **AAA Program** – objectives are to
  - increase awareness of the benefits of sport and recreation environments that are inclusive of people with disabilities
  - influence local level planning so it delivers sport and recreation environments that are inclusive of people with disabilities
  - increase the number and range of sport and recreation environments that are inclusive of people with disabilities.

Each of these programs is closely aligned to the RSA Program and a cross over of staff functions regularly occurs.

RSA Program providers see themselves as being regularly bypassed in relation to the roll out of other state wide programs (eg Go for Your Life) and see themselves as playing an important role in assisting with the delivery of these programs, although not currently funded for this purpose.

Further developing the existing relationship with VicHealth should be explored by DVC, particularly in relation to reporting and monitoring requirements. While different reporting processes are currently used for the PICSAR and RSA Program, similar information is required from the same organizations and time savings could be made at both regional and state level by more collaborative reporting procedures.

## ■ SSA relationships.

While RSA program providers are required to work with state associations in the implementation of programs in regional Victoria, SSAs are generally unaware of the benefits offered of the program and frustrated by the inconsistency of service delivery throughout the State. In some instances, SSAs have indicated their frustration at RSA Program providers duplication of programs in regional Victoria. SSAs advocated strongly for increased networking opportunities and improved communication processes with RSA Program providers.

The general relationship with SSAs needs improving with many not appreciating or fully understanding the role RSAs are able to provide in terms of assisting in delivery of their programs.

## ■ Local government relationships.

Generally positive relationships exist with local government authorities although each council differs in terms of resources, role and directions. Most providers have Council representation at Board level and this assists in maintaining positive relationships and differentiating roles.

## ■ Community organizations

Local sporting and community organizations view the program providers in a very positive manner but have difficulty in separating the RSA Program from the organisation. Relationships however are generally limited to community groups that are members of the organisation and providers should be encouraged to expand their breadth of contact to all sport and recreation clubs within their catchment.

## ■ RECOMMENDATIONS

- ◆ Clarify and allocate overall responsibility for development of service plans and monitoring of reports to either state or regional level.
- ◆ Consider the allocation of some responsibilities centrally.
- ◆ Coordinate regular networking opportunities amongst RSA Program providers and SSAs.
- ◆ Clarify the role played by RSA Program providers and provide a clear direction to enable greater understanding of benefits and to promote consistent service delivery.
- ◆ Review the role played by RSA Program providers in increasing opportunities for the delivery of programs of SSAs in regional Victoria.

### **RSA INNOVATIONS: Clubs network**

*The development of a Club Network within one region is seen as a successful way of providing clubs with an opportunity to meet and develop networks and partnerships. The network brings together volunteers and staff from a range of support and funding agencies to keep volunteers informed and to provide relevant training where needed. Club representatives have identified the relaxed social atmosphere surrounding the network as a very positive initiative.*

### 3.4 Reporting and monitoring procedures

The issue of reporting and monitoring procedures was raised in each focus group conducted with providers and comments in relation to reporting procedures such as ‘too detailed and onerous’ ‘clarify purpose of reporting system’ and ‘make the reporting system more strategic’ were received during the DVC/SRV workshop.

Each RSA Program provider enters a three year funding agreement with the Government, which places obligations on the provider organisation. An Annual Plan must be prepared outlining how the Program will be delivered in the coming year, as well as a mid-year report and full year reports.

As part of the reporting requirements, providers are also required to collect data for two one week periods to provide a snapshot of their Program activities. Providers record their daily contacts with other organisations and groups through either phone, fax, email or face-to-face.

Program providers generally view current reporting and monitoring procedures as a time consuming restriction to effective service delivery. Some Managers see little value in preparing reports when they believe they get little feedback that assists in delivering the Program objectives.

There appears to be inconsistencies across the state between providers and contract managers about what and how they deliver their information. There is a degree of tension between some providers and contract managers as a result of contract negotiation requirements. It is understood that while agreement can be reached with local contract managers in relation to service plans and reporting, SRV may require amendments. Contract negotiations need to be either managed solely by Regional Managers or by SRV.

Although providers claim to receive no feedback on the information supplied, mid year and end of year feedback reports are prepared and distributed by DVC. Given providers perceptions regarding a lack of feedback, the information contained in these reports should be reviewed to ensure that providers can learn from the information and can identify the benefits in preparing and submitting reports required by DVC.

The two key issues related to reporting and monitoring appear to be the detailed process to reach agreement between the provider, contract manager and DVC and the time taken to comply with requirements given the amount of funding received. Both issues may be resolved by clarifying responsibility for contract management negotiations at either a state or local level.

Opportunities should also be explored to establish joint reporting arrangements with other funding bodies eg VicHealth, and to provide options for on line submission of reports.

Major reporting and monitoring issues are summarised below.

■ **In terms of their level of funding, there is a concern that reporting mechanisms are inefficient.**

The information received through the regular reporting and data collection regime is used by SRV to monitor program outcomes. However, the data collection process is not seen as an adequate measure for evaluation purposes as it concentrates on quantitative measures rather than qualitative outcomes.

The level of information provided in relation to the amount of funding received is not seen by providers as being comparable with the requirements of other funded Programs. Providers spoke positively of the reporting and monitoring requirements of VicHealth regarding the delivery of the PICSAR scheme, however it is acknowledged that this process is limited in relation to the information it provides. While similar types of information is required, the use of technology and higher level of funding appears to contribute towards the greater satisfaction levels of providers with this system.

The requirement to provide separate reports for similarly funded programs, such as AAA and PICSAR, create inefficiencies and methods to overcome this duplication of effort should be explored.

■ **Both regional and state levels have a role in the reporting path leading to some confusion and frustration on the part of RSA Providers.**

RSA Program providers report frustration with the amount of information required in return for a relative small amount of funding in comparison to other programs. They are also frustrated and confused by different reporting expectations at a state and regional level, and across the various regional areas.

■ **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- ◆ Determine responsibility for overall contract management, either at a regional or state level.
- ◆ Investigate options for a collaborative approach to reporting with other funding bodies, such as Vichealth, allowing for organisations to submit one report only.
- ◆ Refocus evaluation procedures on qualitative outcomes of activities rather than concentrating on quantitative measures through the data collection process.
- ◆ Develop consistency in approaches across catchment areas in relation to the information required.
- ◆ Ensure providers receive relevant feedback in relation to the information supplied and outline to providers its value to SRV and role played in ongoing decision making.
- ◆ Investigate options for providing providers with benchmarking information based on the information supplied – ie let them know how they are going.
- ◆ Consider the development of criteria for the evaluation of long term projects that do not fall within one planning/reporting period.
- ◆ Devise mechanisms for RSA Program outcomes to be fed into DVC Senior Management and used for ongoing decision making.

### 3.5 Funding

The issue of funding was the first item raised in all provider workshops and was also acknowledged in eight of the eleven stakeholder workshops.

All RSA Program providers currently receive an amount of \$58000 per annum per catchment area. While a great deal of valuable work is being undertaken throughout the regional Victoria, the amount of funding does not allow the Program to effectively meet the needs of the community and achieve its own stated objectives to a satisfactory level.

From the point of view of clubs, the outstanding issue is the constant pressure they face to source funding for their activities. Clubs identify RSA Program Providers as playing a vital role in this process. This is backed up by reports from providers that one of the most common activities undertaken by staff is the provision of information and assistance to clubs about grants and funding opportunities. In fact, most RSA program providers provide more than advice about what funding opportunities exist: they also give clubs practical assistance in the completion of funding applications.

Table 5 provides a summary of average costs for the Program across all providers. The majority of funding is absorbed in staffing costs. If average staff costs are roughly 70% of the total grant, this equates to an allocation of less than \$40,000 per annum for an average salaried position in an average RSA Program provider - an insufficient sum to attract staff with the range of skills or experience required to fulfil the potential role of RSA Program provider in a large catchment area.

With staff costs accommodating the majority of the budget, little room is spared for other operating costs and providers are reliant upon the goodwill of the community, most often local government, to assist in meeting costs: eg some local councils provide office space rent free.

**Table 5: Summary of expenditure**

Budget Expense	Average % allocation	Average expenditure
Overheads	23.9%	\$13862
Program Costs	8.8%	\$5104
Staff Costs	67.3%	\$39034
TOTAL	100%	\$58000

#### ■ For the funding provided, significant benefits are delivered.

The amount of extra support garnered by providers from the broader community, both financial and in kind, is evidence that the work of providers is held in high regard.

The RSA Program is recognised for the following main inputs into grass roots sport and recreation activities:

- ◆ provision of a skilled, knowledgeable and locally-accessible service
- ◆ provision of easy to understand information, packaged and distributed to clubs
- ◆ expertise and support in obtaining funds for specific projects.
- ◆ promotion of clubs and sport around - and sometimes beyond - a catchment area
- ◆ delivery of training programs that assist in maintaining the viability of clubs and organisations in rural and regional areas
- ◆ support for club development (eg club resource kits, planning advice and support)
- ◆ networking opportunities (eg coordinating club networks).

The success of the RSA Program, and the esteem in which it is held by many, seems to revolve around a level of trust that has developed over time between RSA Program providers and clubs and organisations, who are able to source advice from the field, ie from people who know sport.

Many providers are frustrated by the often late receipt of funding from DVC that has serious implications on their cash flow. It is understood that late payment issues are associated with annual plan negotiations and in some instances late submission of annual and mid year reports by providers.

■ **RSA Program providers receive insufficient direct funding to deliver up to community expectations and to meet existing Program objectives.**

It is clear from the consultation that providers are under-funded in terms of meeting their current broad objectives. Provider organisations have been open in acknowledging that while the RSA Program is seen as their core business activity, its effective administration is reliant upon the funding received for the delivery of other programs. In particular both PICSAR and AAA funding enables organisations to access the information technology and transport requirements needed to operate effectively. It could be argued that an organisation operating the RSA Program on a budget of \$58,000 would not be viable.

Significant community benefit is achieved from the Government's investment and Program providers see themselves and are seen by others as providing valuable services in comparison with the funds they receive. All providers require - and source - extra support from community and other funded programs to ensure they effectively deliver program outcomes. Current funding levels contribute towards

- ◆ high staff turnover
- ◆ involvement of inexperienced staff with the program
- ◆ limited geographical coverage
- ◆ limited levels of performance across all objectives.

If funding was to be increased under the current objectives, it is anticipated this would result in:

- ◆ increased salary payments to existing staff with a view to establishing stability and appropriately rewarding staff for effort
- ◆ less reliance on community goodwill to achieve objectives
- ◆ RSA Program providers continuing to do what they currently do but across a greater geographical area
- ◆ RSA Program providers accessing more clubs within their catchment
- ◆ RSA Program providers continuing to do what they currently do but a little better.

■ **Differences exist in the cost of delivering programs across regions.**

Although the defined catchment areas differ greatly, all providers currently receive the same funding and this needs to be addressed. Differences in catchment areas include:

- ◆ number of local government authorities within catchment
- ◆ resources of local government authorities
- ◆ number of townships
- ◆ size of townships
- ◆ number and variety of sport and recreational clubs
- ◆ geographical area
- ◆ population numbers.

See Table 2 above for an analysis of population and catchment figures.

## ■ RECOMMENDATIONS

Future funding options for the Program are numerous and can be summarised as:

- ◆ Continue funding at current levels.
- ◆ Continue funding at current levels plus indexation.
- ◆ Increase funding to a level to enable satisfactory delivery of the Program across all objectives and throughout the catchment area.
- ◆ Review objectives and fund the Program in accordance with objectives – eg establish an appropriate funding amount for the realistic achievement of each objective.
- ◆ Maintain current funding levels but reduce scope of the Program.
- ◆ Fund providers based upon a funding model or formula, taking into consideration staff requirements, geographical coverage, population and club numbers.

## 4 RECOMMENDATIONS

The following provides a summary of all recommendations made as part of the evaluation of the RSA Program.

### ■ Key recommendations

- ◆ Retain the RSA Program but bring it up to date to reflect current DVC objectives.
- ◆ Refine the roles and objectives of the RSA Program - this will clarify the position of the Program within the sport and recreation sector, assist with raising the Program's profile, enable a better assessment of outcomes and better reflect the current objectives of DVC.
- ◆ Consider marketing the Program centrally to assist in raising the overall profile of the Program and provide clarity about Program functions.
- ◆ Develop materials to assist building the profile of the Program.
- ◆ Provide a level of funding to providers that is commensurate with the specified roles and objectives of the Program.
- ◆ Refine reporting arrangements and contract management responsibility.
- ◆ Address the RSA Program providers role in relation to SSA operations in regional Victoria.
- ◆ Promote the role and benefits of the Program to SSAs, local government and the broader community.

### ■ Role of the RSA Program

- ◆ Redefine program objectives or prepare specialised roles to establish a clear direction and focus on key functions of:
  - information and advice
  - club development
  - volunteer support and training.
- ◆ Negotiate with RSA Program providers to establish clear performance measures as part of annual service plans.
- ◆ Concentrate objectives on providing advice and assistance to smaller non-mainstream sports – high profile, well resourced state sports associations such as football, cricket and tennis are in a better position to provide support to their local clubs, leagues and associations. Larger SSAs could be encouraged to fund providers to deliver local programs such as the existing Tennis Victoria relationship.
- ◆ RSA Program providers to continue to work with schools in creating and maintaining schools/club links.
- ◆ Maintain RSA Program delivery through a neutral service provider and not an arm of Government.
- ◆ Formalise links between the RSA Program and state and national volunteer support agencies
- ◆ Identify opportunities for RSA Program providers and SSAs to work in collaborative partnerships.
- ◆ RSA Program providers to maintain an extensive up to date database of sport and recreation club contacts within their catchment - this may be internet based and updated and maintained by clubs.
- ◆ Ensure all clubs on database - not just members - receive electronic newsletters containing relevant information regarding the Program.
- ◆ Assist all registered clubs to have a generic email address that is transferable between club administrators from year to year.

- ◆ RSA Program providers to distribute electronic information via a generic email address – current information received by club representatives from individual staff addresses can be overlooked or deleted due to representatives being unfamiliar with the sender.
- ◆ Distribute regular information in relation to activities within catchment areas to all SSAs.
- ◆ Establish regular forums between SSAs and RSA Program providers or a representative of providers.
- ◆ Some activities undertaken by RSA Program providers may be better delivered centrally – eg marketing, club administration manuals. This would avoid unnecessary competition between RSA Program providers, and duplication of effort.

## ■ Profile of the Program

- ◆ Rebadge, rename and relaunch the program.
- ◆ Consider the use of RSA Program providers as a distribution and contact point for other State sport initiatives.
- ◆ Consider allocating responsibility for promoting and increasing the profile of the Program centrally.
- ◆ Develop materials to assist in raising the profile of the Program.
- ◆ Update and develop RSA Program website on SRV site including contact details and links to local providers.
- ◆ Consider undertaking some promotional activities for the Program at a state level.
- ◆ Consider the provision of additional funding to enable providers to increase the profile of the Program within their local community.
- ◆ Refine the current objectives to establish clear direction and core benefits that may be promoted to community and state sporting organizations.
- ◆ Develop a state wide promotional strategy that communicates the benefits of the Program.
- ◆ Investigate the inclusion of current regional award programs for volunteers into existing state level awards.
- ◆ Review the name of the Program to better reflect its current role within the community and make it more identifiable.
- ◆ Establish regular forums with SSAs to assist in establishing networks, partnerships and educate SSAs about the role of providers and opportunities available in regional Victoria.
- ◆ Require providers to use the Program name on all relevant correspondence and written material.
- ◆ Initiatives such as ParticiPaction Day conducted in the Loddon Campaspe catchment could be encouraged to provide local clubs with the opportunity to promote themselves while also promoting the services provided by the Program.

## ■ Relationships

- ◆ Clarify and allocate overall responsibility for development of service plans and monitoring of reports to either state or regional level.
- ◆ Consider the allocation of some responsibilities centrally.
- ◆ Coordinate regular networking opportunities amongst RSA Program providers and SSAs.
- ◆ Clarify the role played by RSA Program providers and provide a clear direction to enable greater understanding of benefits and to promote consistent service delivery.
- ◆ Review the role played by RSA Program providers in increasing opportunities for the delivery of programs of SSAs in regional Victoria.

## ■ Reporting and Monitoring Procedures

- ◆ Determine responsibility for overall contract management, either at a regional or state level.
- ◆ Investigate options for a collaborative approach to reporting with other funding bodies, such as Vichealth, allowing for organisations to submit one report only.
- ◆ Refocus evaluation procedures on qualitative outcomes of activities rather than concentrating on quantitative measures through the data collection process.
- ◆ Develop consistency in approaches across catchment areas in relation to the information required.
- ◆ Ensure providers receive relevant feedback in relation to the information supplied and outline to providers its value to SRV and role played in ongoing decision making.
- ◆ Investigate options for providing providers with benchmarking information based on the information supplied – ie let them know how they are going.
- ◆ Consider the development of criteria for the evaluation of long term projects that do not fall within one planning/reporting period.
- ◆ Devise mechanisms for RSA Program outcomes to be fed into DVC Senior Management and used for ongoing decision making.

## ■ Funding

Future funding options for the Program are numerous and can be summarised as:

- ◆ Continue funding at current levels.
- ◆ Continue funding at current levels plus indexation.
- ◆ Increase funding to a level to enable satisfactory delivery of the Program across all objectives and throughout the catchment area.
- ◆ Review objectives and fund the Program in accordance with objectives – eg establish an appropriate funding amount for the realistic achievement of each objective.
- ◆ Maintain current funding levels but reduce scope of the Program.
- ◆ Fund providers based upon a funding model or formula, taking into consideration staff requirements, geographical coverage, population and club numbers.