

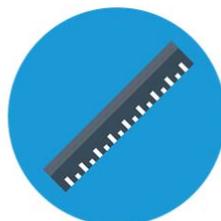


# Metropolitan Local Government Waste and Resource Recovery Fund (Metro Fund) Final Evaluation

Prepared for  
Metropolitan Waste and Resource Recovery Group



RESEARCH



EVALUATION



DESIGN

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## Executive Summary

### The Metro Fund and this evaluation

The Metropolitan Waste and Resource Recovery Group (MWRRG) administered the Metropolitan Local Government Waste and Resource Recovery Fund (Metro Fund) between 2011 and 2017. The Metro Fund was a \$5.5 million Victorian Government initiative that aimed to assist councils in metropolitan Melbourne to implement best practice waste collection and management systems.

The six objectives of the Metro Fund were to:

- support best practice waste management solutions to avoid, reduce and reuse waste being generated through the municipal solid waste (MSW) stream
- maximise economic value and environmental outcomes for local government and the community
- deliver co-ordinated metropolitan-wide approaches in waste management, waste reduction and resource recovery
- improve collection arrangements, material sorting and source separation systems
- pilot new approaches that have potential broader application or provide models for other councils to use
- complete an evaluation of the Fund to assess its performance in achieving its objectives.

This evaluation reports on the overall effectiveness and delivery of the Metro Fund in line with the Department of Treasury and Finance guidelines and as required by the Sustainability Fund Memorandum of Understanding.

The principal evaluation methods included:

- Review and analysis of relevant documents and data across the program, the 48 funded projects and other relevant research and government policies.
- Interviews with and a survey of contacts at funded councils (15 responses from 23 councils)
- Interviews with external stakeholders managing the Sustainability Fund (2), working on aligned programs within Sustainability Victoria (1) and a group interview with relevant MWRRG staff (4)
- Presentation of the draft results to MWRRG staff to sense-check findings and discuss how they may be used into the future.

### Rationale for the program

Despite waste management and resource recovery systems receiving increased attention over preceding decades, the volume of waste being generated by Melbourne’s population continues to grow and valuable resources continue to be sent to landfill. Councils face a range of challenges in addressing these issues—resource constraints, capacity constraints and the emergence of problems such as multi-unit developments, which are difficult systems in which to implement resource recovery systems. There is **a clear need for a program such as the Metro Fund to help councils and communities address the problem of and challenges associated with waste generation and resource recovery.**

While there are several smaller-scale initiatives available to help councils deal with MSW, none of them had the same scale and focus as the Metro Fund. All council survey respondents noted a need for a similar grants-based program in future.

### Outcomes and achievements

**The Metro Fund has achieved or has made good progress towards achieving all of its objectives.** It supported 33 local government projects through competitive grants and a further 15 MWRRG-led strategic projects with benefits across the metropolitan region. Of the \$5.5 million, approximately \$4.9 million was invested in these projects between 2012 and 2017, and \$0.6 million was allocated to Metro Fund program governance. The fund leveraged an additional \$6.6 million in cash and in-kind contributions from councils and partners. The MWRRG provided a further \$1.6 million in in-kind administration and project management. This supported:

- 15 infrastructure projects
- 18 research and development and demonstration projects
- 29 projects with elements of behaviour change and capability building
- 5 innovation projects (noting that some projects spanned a range of areas).

**The scale of the Metro Fund's reach was substantial.** Projects communicated and engaged (with varying levels of intensity) with:

- residents of 315,850 households
- residents of 131 multi-unit developments (MUDs)
- 4,817 businesses
- 40 schools
- 80,432 individuals – who engaged in some capacity with the project (from an unknown number of households)

Around 197,000 households—10% of Melbourne—received some form of physical information or collateral.

An estimated **6,284 tonnes of materials are expected to be diverted annually because of infrastructure improvements.** Based on the outcomes of education and behaviour change programs, it is likely an additional **6,020 tonnes of waste could be diverted if the level of behaviour change can continue to be sustained by participants.** On a per annum basis, this is equivalent to diverting around one average council's entire waste stream.

In total, approximately 40,472 tonnes of materials were diverted from landfill as a result of the Metro Fund over its course.

Nine projects also addressed contamination in the recycling stream, reducing it by an average of 19% per project (impacting over 30,000 households).

Based on the figures above, **councils may save in the order of \$1.5 million per annum in landfill fees—\$4.9 million over the life of the program alone.**

Eighteen projects also contributed to learning and innovation around best practice waste management. This includes five projects that were specifically ‘innovative’ in that they developed and tested substantively new approaches to address the challenges in this space, leading to and demonstrating how waste and resource recovery systems can be improved—for example a flexible plastics collection service trial with 900 households led to a broader roll out of the service across four councils and over 163,000 households.

Importantly, **the program also helped to build councils’ ability to deliver best practice waste and resource recovery initiatives**, including fostering connections and learning between councils. Nine of the projects were run as partnerships between councils.

At a strategic level, **15 projects were funded for MWRRG to deliver coordinated approaches to waste management, waste reduction and resource recovery across the metropolitan region, such as undertaking research and providing information and tools for addressing common and emerging issues**. This includes, for example, improved resources for working with MUDs, systems for sharing information between councils and data that has helped provide a solid evidence base for strategic planning around infrastructure investment.

### Program delivery

**The Metro Fund has been delivered in scope and within budget.** The timelines for the end of the program have been extended three times to accommodate project delays and to help several projects maximise the impacts of their funding

Improvements in MWRRG’s systems and capacity have seen the program administered more efficiently as well as encourage projects to make more strategic use of funds across the metropolitan region.

Given funding for the program is already intended to end in June 2017, the impacts of ceasing the program will be the lost opportunities from further investment and collaboration including establishment of partnerships in this space.

Should ongoing funding be provided, however, **the MWRRG is in a good position to build on its and councils’ work over the preceding six years, with a range of potential efficiencies and lessons identified for future programs.**

### Recommendations

1. The managers of the Sustainability Fund should consider funding a program of similar scale and focus as the Metro Fund to support delivery of Metropolitan Waste and Resource Recovery Implementation Plan priorities.
2. The design of future programs should consider the lessons identified here, particularly with respect to providing sufficient timelines and encouraging cross-council partnerships.
3. The MWRRG should continue to provide guidance and advice to councils in dealing with key issues in waste and resource recovery.

4. The MWRRG should consider commissioning work that assesses the relative environmental and economic costs and benefits across different intervention types.
5. That any projects funded through future programs should deliberately review and demonstrate awareness of previous relevant work in this space.
6. Future programs in this space should ensure that they have a well-considered evaluation plan developed at the outset of the program.
7. MWRRG should share the lessons from this program and the funded projects outside of the metropolitan Melbourne region.