The Royal Society OF VICTORIA
Promoting science since 1854

VICTORIA State Government | Department of Education

Australian Government
Department of Industry, Science and Resources

Inspiring AUSTRALIA Victoria

Inspiring Victoria Program – 2024 Report

Contents

Executive Summary

Overview

The Inspiring Victoria Program continues to drive science engagement across Victoria through strategic partnerships, broad community involvement, and impactful events. The 2024 report highlights the program's governance, key activities, and outcomes, with a focus on National Science Week.

Governance & Partnerships

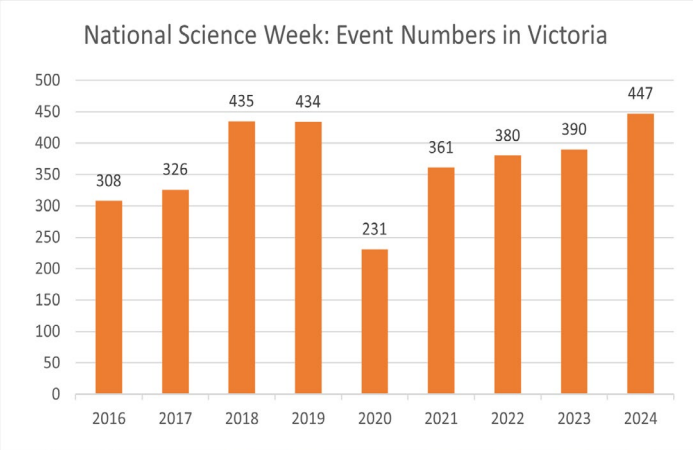
The Inspiring Victoria Partnership Board, led by representatives from institutions including the Royal Society of Victoria (RSV), Public Libraries Victoria, Neighbourhood Houses Victoria, Parliament of Victoria, Museums Victoria, Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria and Zoos Victoria, played a central role in guiding and developing program delivery.

Strong collaboration across scientific, educational, and community organisations enabled diverse and accessible science engagement initiatives.

National Science Week 2024 Highlights

Broad participation: Events were hosted across regional and metropolitan Victoria, ensuring accessibility to diverse audiences.

Community-driven engagement: Local partnerships empowered libraries and community centres to lead science-themed activities.



Hyperlocal programming: "Grass roots" events featured hands-on workshops, public lectures, and interactive exhibits, emphasising climate action, sustainability, and emerging science fields.

Funding & Grants: Financial support facilitated regional outreach, removal of financial barriers to program participations, community grants, and engagement strategies tailored to different demographics.

Key Achievements

Strong Engagement: From rural and underserved communities to metropolitan centres, 2024 was a peak year for a program that featured targeted outreach by major institutions and local event cofunding by community partners.

Cross-Sector Collaboration: Strengthened relationships between academia, government, and grassroots community organisations.

Diverse Programming: Programs incorporated women in STEM initiatives and a focus on groups underrepresented in the STEM workforce to promote inclusivity.

The Inspiring Victoria Partnership Board

The Inspiring Victoria Partnership Board is convened to guide, govern and collaborate in delivering the Inspiring Australia program in Victoria. In 2024, the Board was comprised of the following members, variously representing their organisations:

- Dr **Djuke Veldhuis** (Director, Science Advanced – Global Challenges, *Monash University* and Councillor, *The Royal Society of Victoria*) – Chair
- Dr **Catriona Nguyen-Robertson** – (Science Communication Officer, *Royal Society of Victoria*) - Executive Officer
- Mr **Mike Flattley** (CEO, *Royal Society of Victoria*) - Manager, Inspiring Australia Victoria
- Dr **Angela Savage** (CEO, *Public Libraries Victoria*)
- Mr **Cameron MacRae** (COO, *Neighbourhood Houses Victoria*)
- Mr **Andres Lomp** (Community Engagement Officer, *Parliament of Victoria*)
- Ms **Kate Phillips** (Senior Curator, Science Programs, *Museums Victoria*)
- Ms **Émer Harrington** (Head of Programming & Audience Development, *Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria*)
- Ms **Mel Wyatt** (Senior Manager Education, *Zoos Victoria*)
- Ms **Joanne Phillips** (Executive Director, *Science Teachers Association of Victoria*)

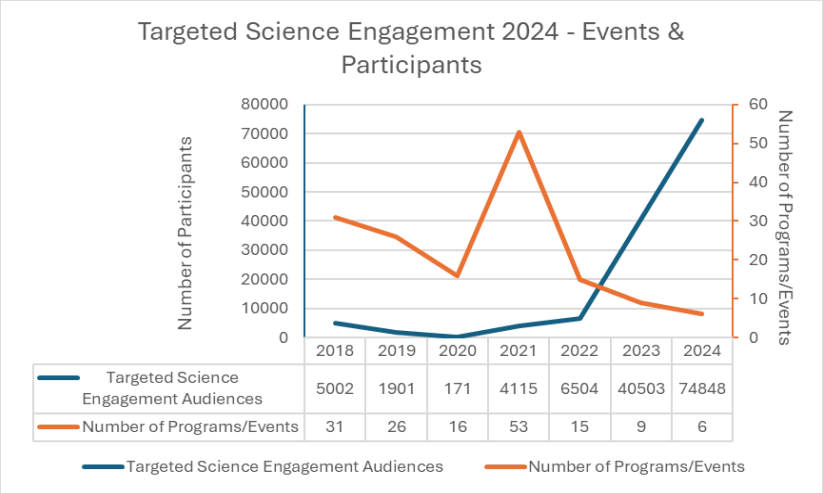
Targeted Science Engagement Program

The year-round program is comprised of two main elements: convening public events with a "science and society" theme ("Scientists in Focus"), and the publication and distribution of Science Victoria magazine, both digitally and in hard copy.

Scientists in Focus

The program was reduced to six main events outside National Science Week in 2024 to focus efforts on winning greater audience numbers, particularly through hybrid and online offerings.

This proved a successful approach, with the 74,848 people reached far exceeding numbers from earlier years, as the graph to the right illustrates. The six events were:



Leadership in a Time of Change: International Day of Women and Girls in Science

23 February, 2024
Audience: 403

This event convened four remarkable women leaders in the fields of science, technology, engineering, mathematics, and

medicine (STEMM) in the Parliament of Victoria's Legislative Assembly with a group of senior secondary students from Princes Hill Secondary College, Brunswick Secondary College and Mac.Robertson's Girls High School. Discussion explored the cultural and structural barriers to the advancement of women in Australia's STEMM workforce, and the increasingly dynamic nature of leadership in a world that is changing rapidly in many ways.

Having just returned from a warming Antarctica as part of the acclaimed Homeward Bound program, our speakers brought fresh insights to the pivotal role leadership plays in navigating the unknown and the uncertain, both in the scientific realm and beyond.

Hosted by the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, The Hon **Maree Edwards** MP, discussion was led by ABC science journalist **Natasha Mitchell** with panellists Ms **Fern Hames** PSM (Arthur Rylah Institute for Environmental Research), Dr **Catherine Lopes** (Board Member, Environmental Protection Authority), Associate Professor **Jen Martin** (Leader of the University of Melbourne's Science Communication Teaching Program) and Associate Professor **Vanessa Wong** (Soil Scientist, Monash University).

Space to the Rescue: Australia's National Dependencies on Space Technologies

15 March, 2024

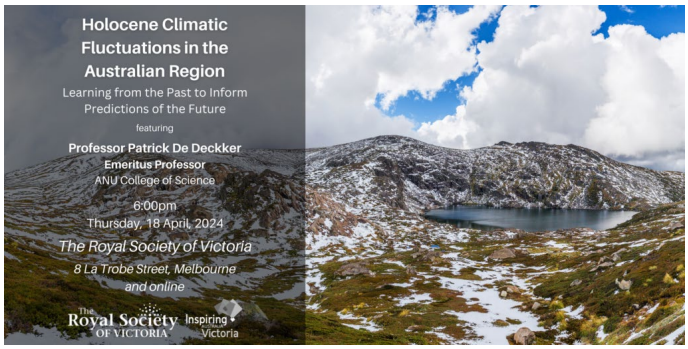
Audience: 39,624

Why should we be concerned about investing in space technologies at all, when there are so many pressing issues on Earth, and at home in Australia?

The missing piece in most of the debates has been a clearer explanation of how space technologies and infrastructure form a major part of our country's dependencies, our critical infrastructure, and our priorities on an individual and national level. Climate change, disaster response, agriculture, mining, urban planning and housing, water and coastal region health, fisheries, Indigenous land and water management, telecommunications and internet access in remote, rural and regional areas, and geopolitical stability in Asia and the Indo-Pacific – all of these issues depend in large part on space-based services and infrastructure.

Dr Cassandra Steer, Chair of the Australian Centre for Space Governance, delivered the good news about how much "space" Australia already does, and some concerning stories about the risks we face due to our foreign and commercial dependencies.

Holocene Climatic Fluctuations in the Australian Region



18 April, 2024

Audience: 16,830

In the last Ice Age, Australia endured very dry conditions and sea levels were up to 125m lower compared to today. Since then, life on Earth has enjoyed about 12,000 years of the more accommodating climatic conditions of the current interglacial period, the Holocene.

This comfortable epoch has nonetheless demonstrated significant variability due to interactions between the major drivers of the Earth's climate system. Acclaimed palaeontologist Professor **Patrick De Deckker** revealed the methods used across a lifetime of research to understand how this period's climate was driven by the Southern Annular Mode and the commencement of the now familiar El Niño Southern Oscillation. Compellingly, Patrick demonstrated how human activities in southeastern Australia changed in response to the changing climate, with more sedentary activities along the major rivers and an enhancement of food production in organised settings suggestive of villages, in stark contrast with human migrations across North Africa during the Holocene.

Australian Desert Rivers: So Cool, So Dry, So Dynamic

27 June, 2024

Audience: 6,007

Iconic names like Cooper Creek, Kati Thanda-Lake Eyre and the dusty Diamantina have a big footprint in our national narratives. Despite this, we generally only notice them when they become least like themselves: when it has rained, and the bushes are green, with water flowing in the channels.

Australia's dryland rivers are qualitatively different from "normal" (temperate zone, perennial) rivers. Aridity creates special conditions for rainfall, run-off, vegetation-landform relationships, biotic life cycles, and the pace of landscape evolution.

These conditions affect the fundamental aspects through which Earth scientists typically understand rivers, such as flow regime, sediment transport, boundary roughness, catchment area, and channel-forming discharge. Even the most basic conceptual models (channel, floodplain, hillslope) sometimes need reappraisal. Researchers must use interlaced theoretical perspectives for this work, including fluvial geomorphology, tectonic and regolith geology, Quaternary climatology, geochronology, while management applications for better drylands fluvial geomorphology extend across everything from local town planning to broadscale hydrologic modelling.

Fluvial geomorphologist Dr **Gresley Wakelin-King** challenged the misconception of this continent's "dead heart" and explored the dynamic nature of the dryland rivers that support life and land in the landscapes of Australia's arid interior.

Science, Media & the Law: Lessons from the Kathleen Folbigg Case

14 August, 2024

Audience: 1,186

Kathleen Megan Folbigg was arrested in 2001, accused of murdering her four infant children. She was convicted in 2003 and sentenced to 40 years imprisonment, with a non-parole period of 25 years.

Scientific and medical research suggesting the daughters might have died of natural causes was rejected by a judicial inquiry in 2019. Subsequent research published in 2020 led ninety

eminent Australian scientists and medical professionals (led by the Australian Academy of Science) to petition the NSW Governor to pardon Ms Folbigg. The petition succinctly demonstrated that all four deaths could be explained as the effects of very rare genetic factors. In June 2023, Ms Folbigg was unconditionally pardoned by NSW Governor Margaret Beazley and released from prison, having served 20 of her minimum 25-year sentence. Her convictions were overturned in a subsequent decision by the NSW court of criminal appeal in December 2023.

While ultimately successful, the voice of scientific expertise was difficult to establish in the emotionally-charged circumstances of this challenging case; reopening the inquiry with fresh scientific perspectives relied on the discretion of the Attorney General of New South Wales. Public opinion is overwhelmingly shaped by the Australian media and sustaining the attention of the political and legal system required a sustained campaign by a team of friends, philanthropists, scientists and legal professionals championing the cause.

Key members of "Team Folbigg" related the barriers they experienced to considering complex genetic science as robust legal evidence in an Australian judicial system and made their case for change. Featuring Dr **Peter Yates** AM (Board Member & Director), Ms **Anna-Maria Arabia** OAM (CEO, Australian Academy of Science), Professor **David Balding** (Statistical Geneticist, The University of Melbourne), and Ms **Tracy Chapman** (personal advocate).

Young Scientist Research Prizes – 2024 Competition

Inspiring Victoria · The Royal Society of Victoria
Young Scientist Research Prizes
Recognising Excellence in Early Career Scientific Research

Generously sponsored in 2024 by:
Australian Government – Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Agency
Australian Government – Geoscience Australia

24 October, 2024

Audience: 10,798

To foster and recognise excellence in Victoria's early career scientists, the Royal Society of Victoria established four prestigious competitive prizes to support and celebrate the achievements of Victoria's upcoming high achievers, open to students in their final year of doctoral candidature at a Victorian research institution, in all areas of the Biomedical & Health Sciences, Biological Sciences (Non-human), Earth Sciences and Physical Sciences.

Following assessment of applications across the four categories, assessors selected eight PhD finalists to present the outcome of years of painstaking research to our judges and audience members in ten short minutes.

Category Prize Winners included:

Biological Sciences

First Prize: **Darcy Watchorn,** Deakin University – "Advancing Mammal Conservation in the Face of Fire and Invasive Predators"

Second Prize: **Eliza Thompson,** The University of Melbourne – "Promoting bird diversity in plantation forests of Western Victoria"

Biomedical & Health Sciences

First Prize: **Leesa Lertsumitkul**, The University of Melbourne – "Designing targeted cellular therapies to cure brain cancer in preclinical models"

Second Prize: **Dimuthu Harshana Ysakeerthi Angage**, La Trobe University – "Discovery of broad-spectrum single antibody therapy against malaria, toxoplasmosis, and babesiosis"

Earth Sciences

First Prize: **Calla Gould-Whaley**, The University of Melbourne – "Extreme southward displacement of the Australian monsoon during the abrupt climate events of the Last Glacial Period"

Second Prize: **Vinícius Werneck Salazar**, The University of Melbourne – "Metagenomic and oceanographic data integration reveals restructuring of global picoplankton biogeography under climate change"

Physical Sciences

First Prize: **Bennet Sam Thomas,** Monash University – "Extraction and separation of rare Earth elements from Victorian brown coal fly ash"

Second Prize: **Suraj Loomba,** RMIT University – "Synthesis of scalable two-dimensional materials for industrial-scale electrochemical seawater splitting"

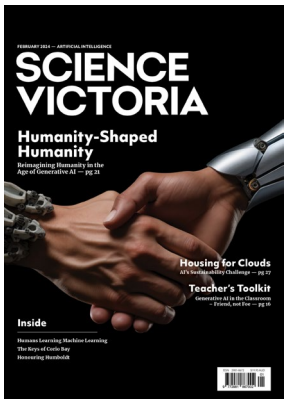
The 2024 Finalists, from left: Leesa Lertsumitkul, Darcy Watchorn, Suraj Loomba, Calla Gould-Whaley, Eliza Thompson, Bennet Sam Thomas, Vinícius Werneck Salazar, Dimuthu Harshana Ysakeerthi Angage.

Science Victoria Magazine

Science Victoria is exactly that: everything science, especially in Victoria, in a monthly magazine. We work with scientists to communicate their expertise clearly to readers, and tackle issues with relevance and currency to Victorian communities with a scientific, evidence-based approach.

11 monthly issues were published digitally and in a limited print run (200 copies) in 2024:

February 2024: **Artificial Intelligence (6 articles)**



From speech recognition and search algorithms to the many types of machine learning models that can recognise patterns in data, AI has fundamentally changed the course of humanity. Whether it will be for better or worse remains to be seen. In this edition, we looked at some of the different types and uses of AI.

March 2024: Victoria's Fauna (4 articles)

Victoria is home to more than a thousand native animal species, but as of June 2023, 378 of these are under threat of extinction. As with our unique flora, the pressures from climate change risk this number rising unless we act. In this edition, we looked at the value of and threats to Victoria's native animals.

April 2024: The Four Planetary Crises (6 articles)

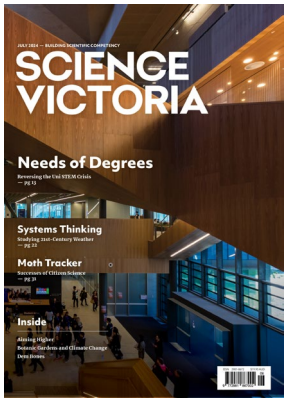
Climate Change. Loss of Biodiversity and Extinction. Pollution. The Rise of Misinformation. In this edition, we focused on these four human-driven crises that currently threaten life on Earth, and what needs to be done to meaningfully address them.

May 2024: Accessibility & Inclusion in STEMM (2 articles)

If only one group of people encountered barriers in accessing STEMM education and careers, we might consider that group as an outlier. However, when many different groups of people encounter multiple barriers related to access and inclusion in STEMM, it suggests a systemic issue rather than isolated and unrelated incidents.

June 2024: Victoria & Climate Change (4 articles)

The impacts of human-driven climate change are increasingly visible. Temperature records are being repeatedly broken, extreme weather events are increasing in frequency, ice sheets are melting, and coastal communities increasingly under threat. In this edition, we focus on climate change in our corner of the planet, and what needs to be done to avoid reaching a point of no return.



July 2024: Building Scientific Competency (5 articles)

A solid foundational understanding of science and the scientific method is an increasingly valuable tool. Whether it be adapting our communities and industries to the changing climate, pursuing a career in a STEMM field, or using critical thinking to review information, building the level of scientific competency in our state is essential for our future.

August 2024: STEMM Throughout Victoria (4 articles)

Learning and the application of scientific concepts aren't confined to a high school class or a capital city – there are opportunities to engage with STEMM fields right across our state. This month, we looked at the education, engagement, and application of STEMM in Victoria. Also in this edition, we celebrated National Science Week 2024 (10 - 18 August) and showcased some of the events on offer in-person and online.

September 2024: Pollution in Victoria (4 articles)

The smog from cars and trucks, the lead in our soil from leaded fuel, the sewage overflows, the agricultural and stormwater runoffs, the light and sounds from humans at night, and the remains of macro- and microplastics *everywhere*. This is just a fraction of the pollution issues in our state. In this edition, we looked at our polluted environments: the sources, impacts, and potential solutions to the pollution problems.

October 2024: Victoria's Ecosystems (10 articles)

Victoria is home to a diverse range of environments, which vary based on factors like local climate, water availability, elevation, geology, geomorphology, soils, and others. In turn, these environments are home to different ecosystems, comprising all manner of life that have lived in these niches for centuries. This month, we took a look at some of these different ecosystems, and how we might better value and protect them.

November 2024: Science and Policy (8 articles)

Government policies are plans and guidelines that inform and direct actions on topics such as the environment, health, and infrastructure. Effective policies are informed by evidence, after consideration and weighting of relevant data, while also being responsive to new findings. In this edition, we look at the intersection of science & policy, particularly how evidence-based approaches lead to more effective and adaptable decision making.

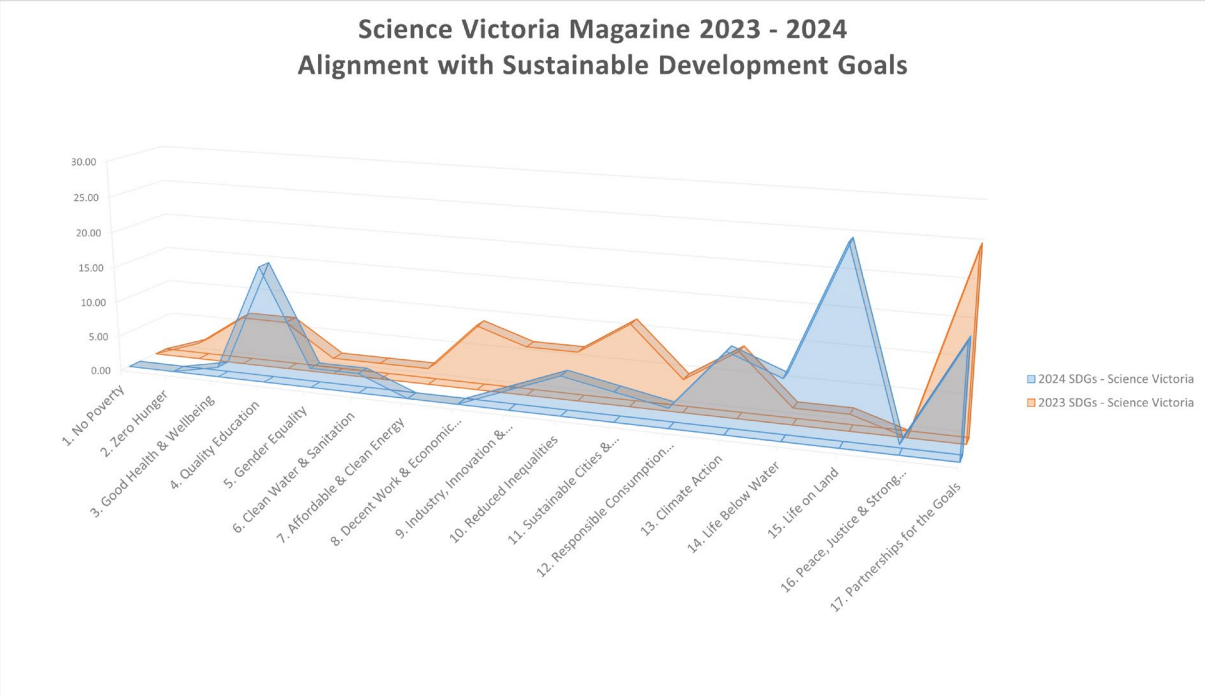
December 2024: Science and Business (5 articles)

With research predominately publicly funded in Australia, much of the work and study is focused on scientific advancement, publications, and securing grants – rather than 'science' as a commercial product or service. In this edition, we looked at the intersection of Science &

Business, and some of the ways that science and scientists are succeeding in the market.

Science Victoria – Alignment with UN Sustainable Development Goals

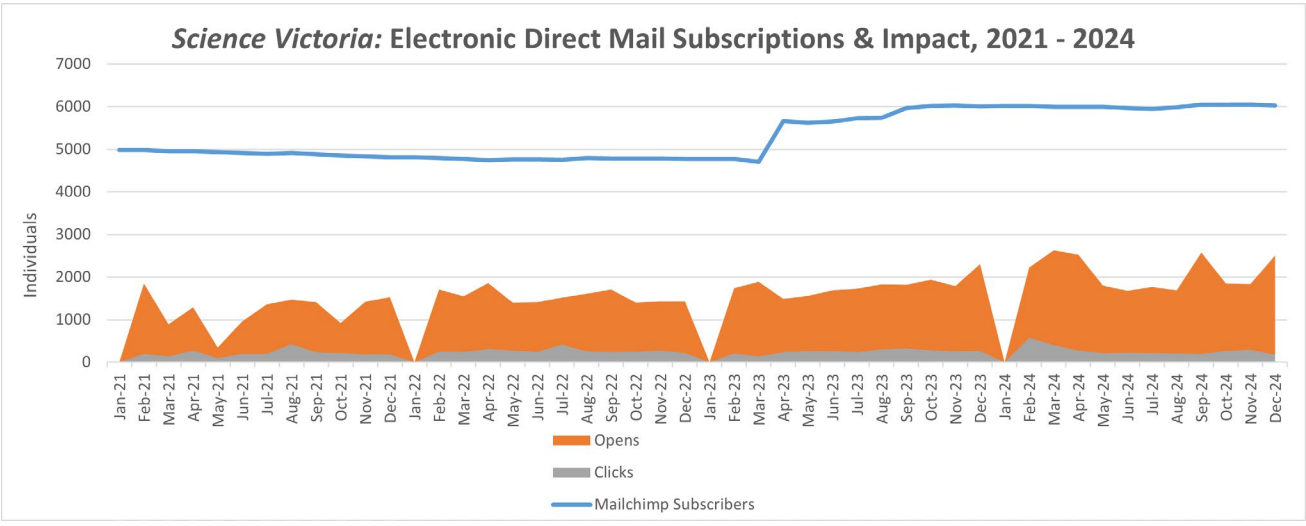
Each edition and the 52 articles produced over the course of 2023 and 2024 were mapped to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals. "Life on Land" took the lead this year, followed by a bump in "Quality Education" and "Climate Action." "Partnerships" provide a natural peak due to the nature of the program.



Science Victoria - Audience Share

Electronic Direct Mail (EDM) - Mailchimp

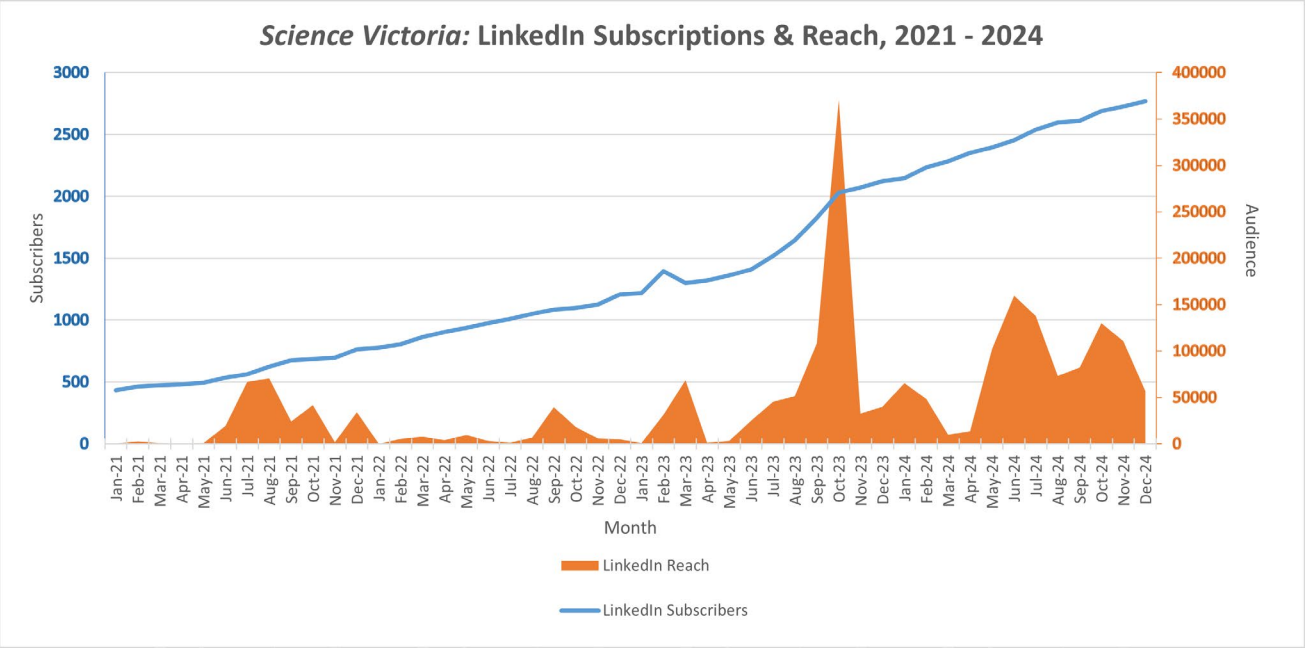
Distribution via email, through use of the subscription and audience interaction tools provided by Mailchimp, remained the most intensive use of staff resources beyond the peak output of editorship, compilation and graphic design, requiring a 'digest' format to aid the readership in navigation either to the PDF file hosted online, or the individual articles published as posts on the RSV's website.



Mailchimp subscriptions have remained steady around the 6,000 mark over the course of 2024, with historically high rates of opens by subscribers, and also click-throughs to the full magazine and web articles, than in previous years. The strongest response was to the first three editions of the year, with September and December also performing above average.

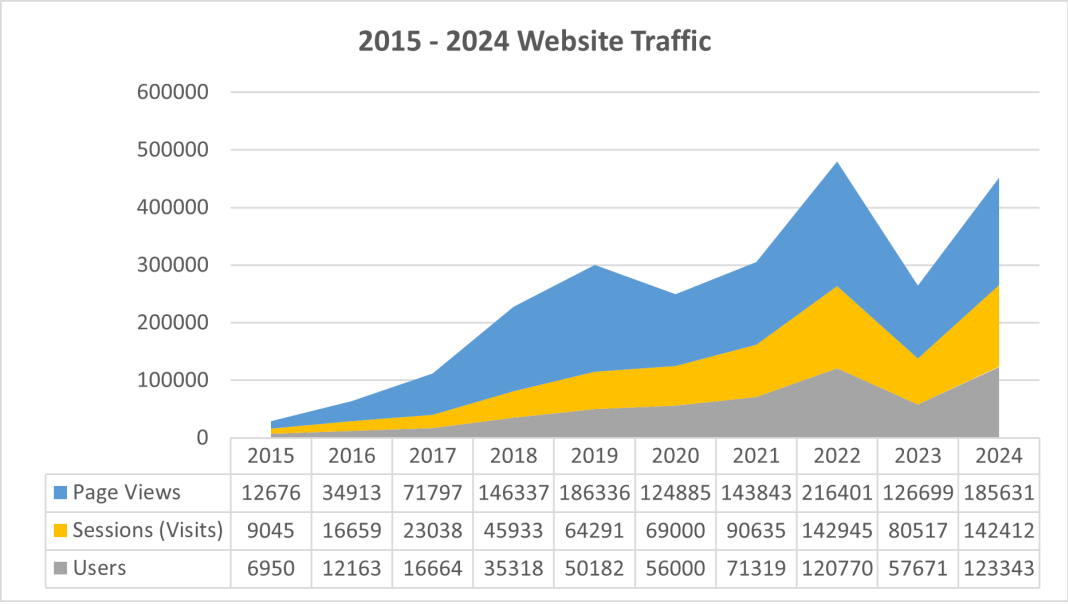
Social Media

LinkedIn has been the magazine's key delivery platform to the professional community for the past four years, and subscriptions have grown steadily over this time, with the broader audience reach also growing considerably over the course of 2024. Over the course of the year, *Science Victoria* has had 9,079 direct engagements, and enjoyed a total audience reach of 990,000 users.



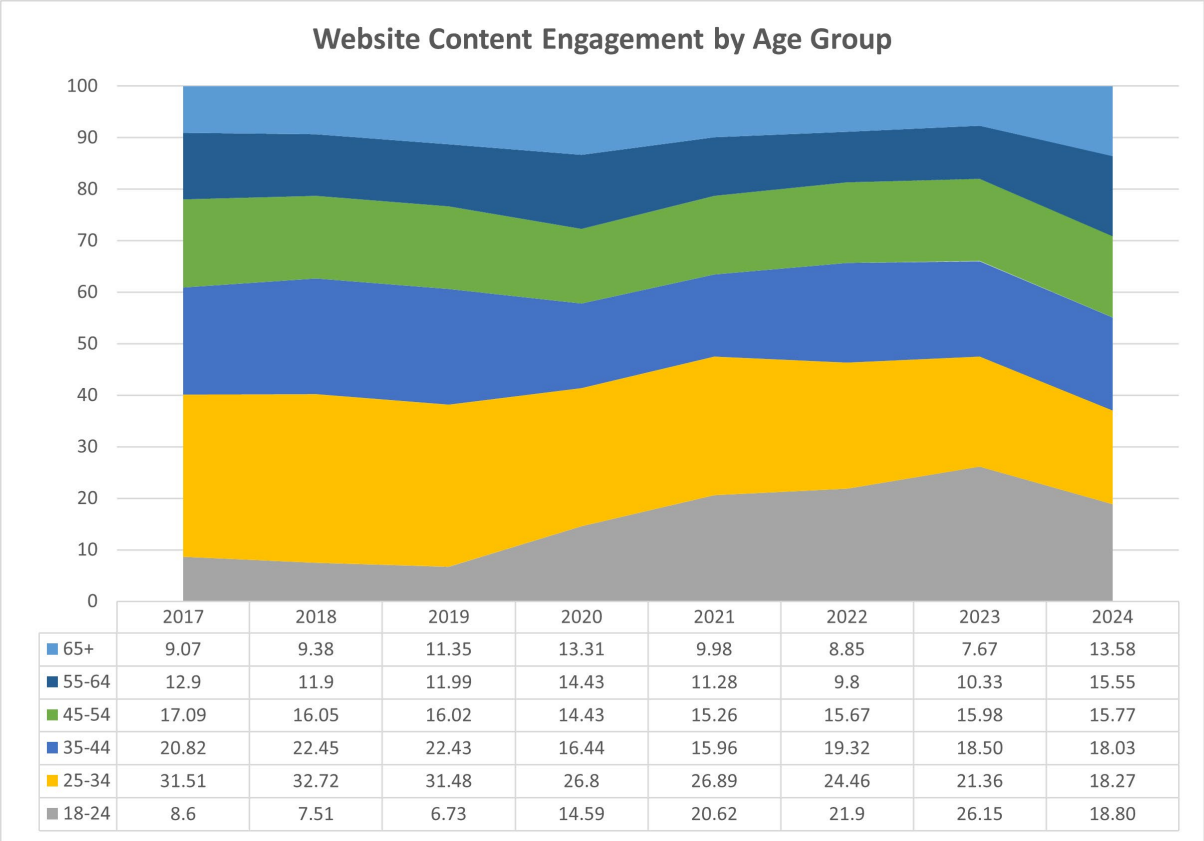
Website Traffic – Google Analytics

The website remains the most impactful platform for reaching large audiences, hosting content to share through various communication channels. 2024 saw an historically strong performance, with 123,343 users variously accessing the digital magazine and related web articles.



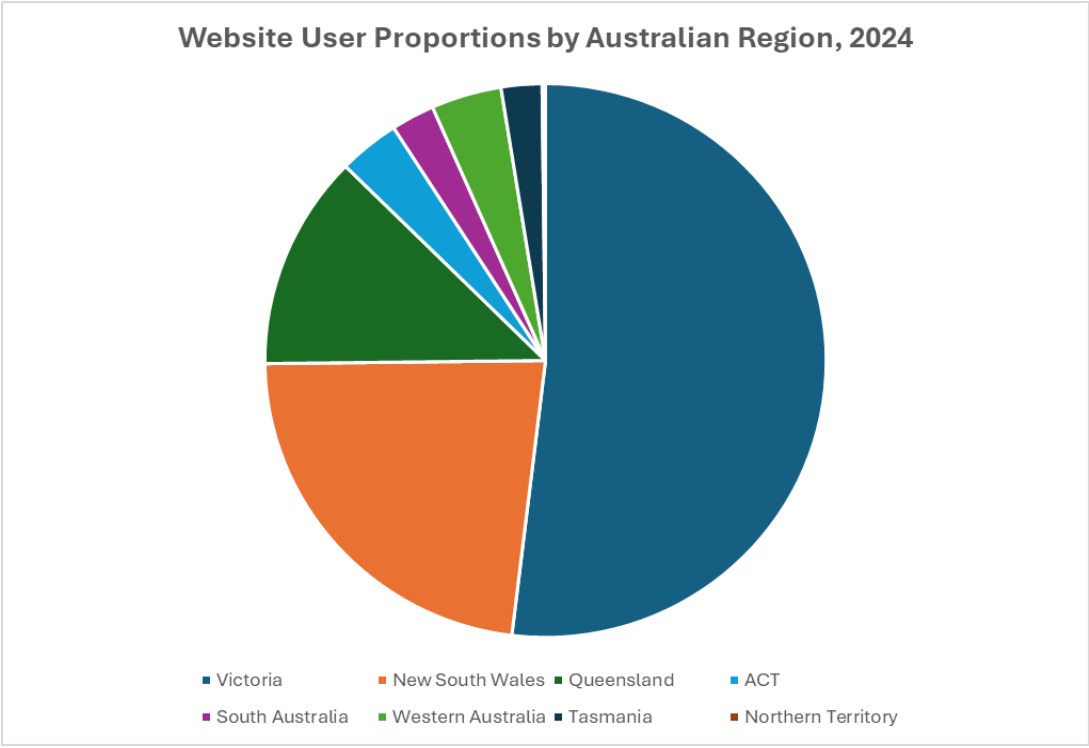
	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Page Views	12676	34913	71797	146337	186336	124885	143843	216401	126699	185631
Sessions (Visits)	9045	16659	23038	45933	64291	69000	90635	142945	80517	142412
Users	6950	12163	16664	35318	50182	56000	71319	120770	57671	123343

Google Analytics provides some insight to audience demographics. This year saw a reasonably even spread of access across the age groups, with reflecting growth in audience share by people over 55 years of age.

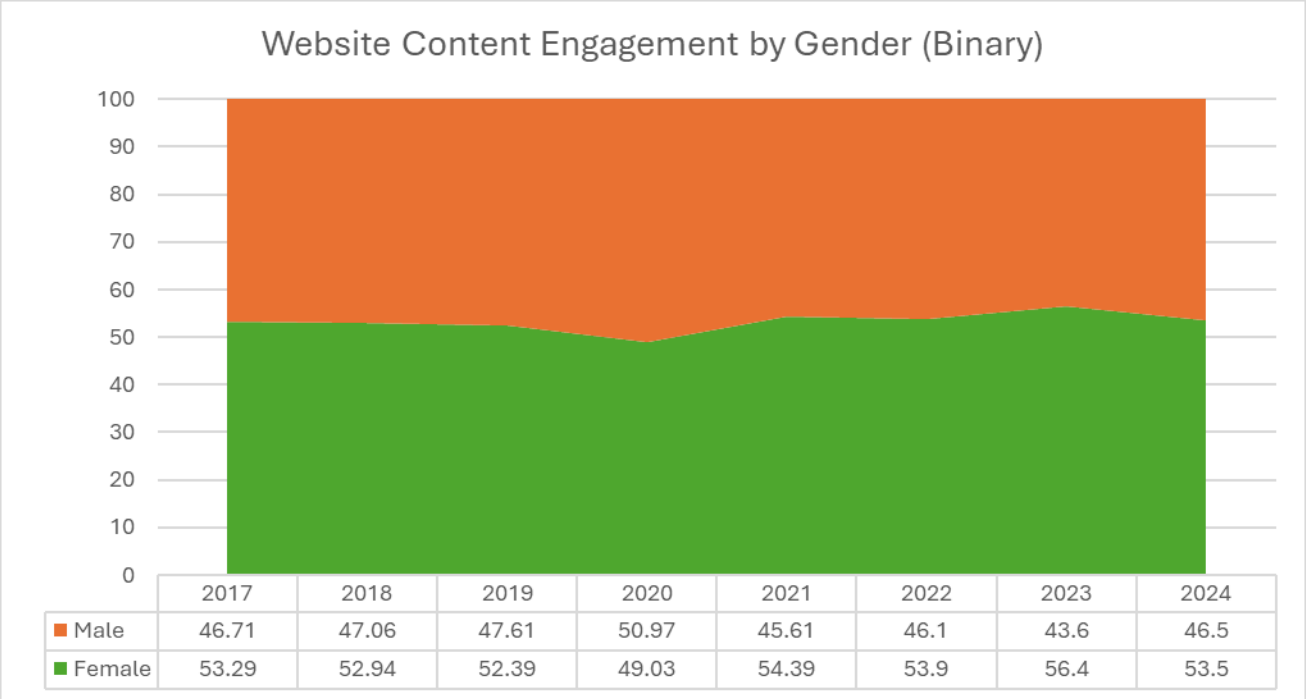


	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
65+	9.07	9.38	11.35	13.31	9.98	8.85	7.67	13.58
55-64	12.9	11.9	11.99	14.43	11.28	9.8	10.33	15.55
45-54	17.09	16.05	16.02	14.43	15.26	15.67	15.98	15.77
35-44	20.82	22.45	22.43	16.44	15.96	19.32	18.50	18.03
25-34	31.51	32.72	31.48	26.8	26.89	24.46	21.36	18.27
18-24	8.6	7.51	6.73	14.59	20.62	21.9	26.15	18.80

The Australian audience (47%) remains overwhelmingly Victorian, with New South Wales and Queensland showing the strongest interstate interest. Our international audience comprised 53% of the online audience in 2024, with a noteworthy share from both the United States (16.2%) and Singapore (23.1%).



Finally, interest by gender (Google works in binary) is given in the trend below. Women continue to retain the strongest audience share, although not by a large margin.



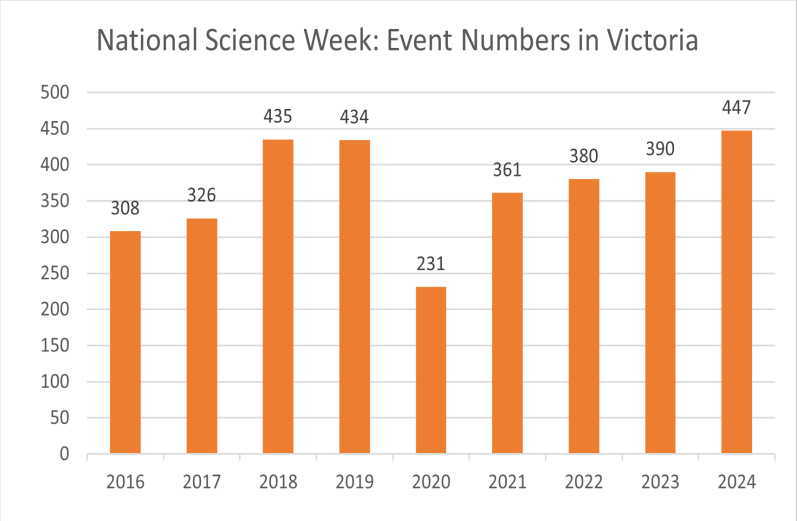
	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Male	46.71	47.06	47.61	50.97	45.61	46.1	43.6	46.5
Female	53.29	52.94	52.39	49.03	54.39	53.9	56.4	53.5

Grateful thanks are extended to the hardworking editorial, copywriting and graphic design team in 2024:

- Mr **Scott Reddiex**, Editor-in-Chief
- Dr **Catriona Nguyen-Robertson**, Senior Editor
- Ms **Rosie Everett**, Graphic Designer (Brand Warrior)

The National Science Week Program in Victoria

In 2024, National Science Week in our state was a record-breaking and inclusive celebration of science, showcasing the state's rich diversity of events, participants, and scientific disciplines. A total of 447 events were held, surpassing the previous peak of 435 in 2018. These events engaged audiences across metropolitan Melbourne, regional centres, and rural areas, providing opportunities for all Victorians to make a connection with scientific endeavours.



This year's major program, "Survive and Thrive," hosted at key venues by Museums Victoria, Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria and Zoos Victoria, drew 1,160 attendees, achieving the highest participation since the return of in-person events post-pandemic.

Audience feedback across the grant-funded program showed that 97.44% of participants reported learning something new, with a strong positive response to the inclusivity of the program.

The State enjoyed an excellent spread of events across regional, rural and remote areas, a great result considering 75% of Victoria's population resides in metropolitan Melbourne.

Grant holder event locations across Victoria in 2024

The Victorian Science Week Coordinating Committee

Victoria's National Science Week Coordinating Committee was convened in June 2024 as a subcommittee of the Partnership Board. Membership was comprised of:

Dr **Catriona Nguyen-Robertson** (Royal Society of Victoria, Chair)

Mr **Mike Flattley** (Royal Society of Victoria, Inspiring Victoria Manager)

Ms **Phoebe Melvin** (Museums Victoria)

Mr **Ben Liu** (Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria)

Ms **Arabella Eyre** (Zoos Victoria)

State Coordination of Events

Institutional members of the Inspiring Victoria Partnership Board developed early plans for a "takeover" public event at the Parliament of Victoria during National Science Week titled "Moonbase Victoria," exploring the challenges of surviving travel and settlement beyond the protection of the Earth's atmosphere and magnetosphere and the lessons this can impart to caring more effectively for our home planet. This was abandoned due to long delays in securing agreements and funding with the Commonwealth and, consequently, the State of Victoria. Major event programming was then outsourced to Science Gallery Melbourne to construct a scratch program across Science Week titled "Social Animals." See item 3(c) below.

The Board offered small grants to stimulate statewide activities via two 'grass roots' knowledge networks across the State of Victoria, these being member organisations of Public Libraries Victoria and Neighbourhood Houses Victoria.

The small grants were managed through two programs:

A Community Seed Grant Round

This grant program was managed directly by the Royal Society of Victoria for Victorian public libraries and incorporated community organisations. $18,789 was disbursed to support 20 events across Victoria during National Science Week, as follows:

- **Bubblemania Workshop** – Gannawarra Library Service (Cohuna)
- **National Science Week Storytime** – Campaspe Regional Library (Echuca & Kyabram)
- **Get Scientwisted!** – Frankston City Libraries (Frankston)
- **Wild Art with Trace Balla** – Goldfields Libraries (Bendigo)
- **Science Week at Grovedale Toy Library** – Grovedale Toy Library (Grovedale)
- **Climate Change Impacts – Mornington Peninsula Fieldtrip** – Geography Victoria (McCrae)
- **MYLI STEM Zone** - Myli – My Community Library (Drouin, Warragul, Baw Baw, Trafalgar)
- **National Science Week at Ferntree Gully Library** – Your Library (Ferntree Gully)
- **Greenhouse Gardening** – East Gippsland Shire Libraries (Bairnsdale, Omeo, Lakes Entrance, Paynesville, Orbost, Mallacoota)
- **DIY Greenhouse Gardening for Kids** – Corangamite Moyne Library Service (Timboon, Camperdown, Terang, Koroit, Port Fairy, Mortlake, Derrinallum, Cobden)

- **The Science of Snot with Mr Snotbottom** - Caroline Springs Library & Learning Hub (Caroline Springs)
- **Coding Craze Hits Pakenham** – MYLI (Pakenham)
- **What is Dark Matter? An evening with Dr. Elisabetta Barberio, Physicist** – Merri-Bek Libraries (Brunswick)
- **Musical Plants** - Mornington Peninsula Libraries (Rosebud)
- **Celebrating Science – STEM Story Time, Science Showcase, & Family Science Trivia** – Moonee Valley Libraries (Flemington)
- **Get Scientwisted Science Show** – Greater Dandenong Libraries (Dandenong)
- **The Man Who Invented Vegemite – Cyril's Lab Pass** – Cyril Callister Museum (Beaufort)
- **Toy-tally Messy Science Spectacular** – Belgrave South Toy Library (Belgrave)

$10,638 in value from event holders' organisations and partners supported these events as in-kind contributions.

A Neighbourhood Houses Seed Grant Round

A further $20,000 was granted to Neighbourhood Houses Victoria to directly manage Seed Grants for their network members. This funded a further 20 events and activities across Victoria.

Activities included:

- **West Warrnambool Neighbourhood House** - Sea the Science (Warrnambool)
- **Selby Community House -** Nature Walk & Exploration of Minak Reserve (Selby)
- **Fraser Rise Children's and Community Centre** - Bee Hive Science (Fraser Rise)
- **Aspendale Gardens Community Service** - Science Explorers (Aspendale Gardens)
- **Notting Hill Neighbourhood House** - Wildlife Wonders (Notting Hill)
- **South Kingsville Community Centre -** Science Explorers (South Kingsville)
- **Horsham Neighbourhood House -** Science Week Celebration (Horsham)
- **Seymour & District Community House Inc.** - Kids Science Week (Seymour)
- **Keysborough Learning Centre -** Technology for All – Robotics and 3D Designing Workshop (Keysborough)
- **Japara Neighbourhood House** - Circuits of Fun (Kilsyth)
- **Kyneton Community House -** Digging With Dinosaurs (Kyneton)
- **Glenroy Neighbourhood House -** Let's Get Experimental (Glenroy)
- **Mountain District Learning Centre** – Robotics (Ferntree Gully)
- **Cann River Community Centre** - Cann Go Green (Cann River)
- **Noble Park Community Centre -** Illuminating Species Survival: Throwie and Ladybug Workshops (Noble Park)
- **Hampton Park Community House -** Eco-Explorers: Mini Beasts and Rivergum Adventure (Hampton Park)
- **Yarraville Community Centre -** Science Adventure: Hands-On Discovery Day (Yarraville)
- **Mackie Rd Neighbourhood House** - Science is Fun (Mulgrave)
- **Balla Balla Community Centre -** Species Survival – Beyond Sustainability (Clyde North)
- **Dallas Neighbourhood House -** Eco-Friendly Cleaning Workshop for Seniors (Broadmeadows)

$9,046 in value from event holders' organisations and partners supported these events as in-kind contributions.

This represents over 50 hours of activities delivered to a reported 1040 attendees across all events.

The Victorian Launch of National Science Week

The Melbourne Museum was once again commissioned to host this year's launch, which was held in the Treetops Function Centre. We gathered a collective of educators, science engagement professionals, researchers, policy makers, civics professionals, grant holders and leaders of Victoria's public science institutions to network and celebrate the collaborative effort that is National Science Week.

Following welcoming remarks from Dr **Nurin Veis,** Director of the Museums Victoria Research Institute and A/Professor **Djuke Veldhuis**, Chair of Inspiring Victoria, we enjoyed short talks from representatives of our three main public science institutions: Dr **Noushka Reiter**, Senior Research Scientist (Conservation) from the Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria; Dr **Marissa Parrott**, Senior Conservation Biologist from Zoos Victoria; and Dr **Ken Walker**, Senior Curator of Entomology from Museums Victoria.

Once presentations were over, guests networked and enjoyed the Melbourne Museum's "Nocturnal" program, an adult-focused evening of curator talks and exhibits at one of Australia's largest natural history museums.

From left: Kieren Topp & Tanya Ha from publicity agency Science in Public with Victoria's National Science Week Coordinating Committee Chair, Dr Catriona Nguyen-Robertson, during the Victorian State Launch.

The Major Event Program – "Survive & Thrive"

Museums Victoria, Zoos Victoria and Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria joined forces to highlight conservation efforts, habitat restoration, and science-backed efforts to help plants and animals adapt to changing conditions and new environments. Experts in conservation and nature recovery shared their knowledge to help us address the challenges facing thousands of Australia's native plant and animal species, and also their work towards growing thriving ecosystems to support human exploration in the hostile conditions of space.

The program ran as follows:

MUSEUMS VICTORIA

The Martian Garden

Sat 10 – Sun 18 August
10:30am – 3:30pm

Venue: ARC Centre of Excellence in Plants for Space, Scienceworks, Spotswood

In the next 30 years, missions to the Moon and Mars will explore habitation in new and extreme environments. We explored how we can create sustainable new ecosystems off-world (and on Earth). Participants discovered the challenges and innovative solutions for growing plants in extreme environments, and learned how we can provide a nutritious, varied food supply to people living beyond Earth.

Science on Show

Sat 10 & Sun 18 August
10:00am – 2:00pm

Venue: Melbourne Museum, Carlton

Science on Show showcased some of the rarest and most fascinating species from the vast collections held by the Melbourne Museum. Audiences joined scientists who specialise in ancient fossils and underwater marvels, discovered rare specimens, learned about endangered species and created something special to take home.

Journey Beyond: A Morning with Astronaut Katherine Bennell-Pegg

Sun 11 August
10:30am – 12:00pm

Venue: Scienceworks, Spotswood

Katherine Bennell-Pegg touched down at Scienceworks to kick off National Science Week! Audiences attended her interview, watch her launch a rocket, and then got an autograph from Australia's first astronaut.

Species Survival Day

Sat 17 August
10:00am & 5:00pm

Venue: Kyabram Fauna Park

Kyabram Fauna Park provided the region with an exciting opportunity to connect with Australia's native wildlife and learn how to become a conservation champion.

Dedicated Zookeepers and Educators shared their expertise and passion for wildlife conservation through engaging keeper talks, interactive workshops, creative craft activities, and family-friendly entertainment.

Botanical Time Capsules

Thu 15 August
6:30pm

Venue: Mueller Hall, Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne

Documenting biodiversity through time! Audiences joined Alison Vaughan, Manager of the RBGV Collections, for a rare chance to deep dive into the history of the 1.5 million preserved specimens housed in the National Herbarium of Victoria.

Documenting the presence of a plant, algae or fungus at a particular place and time, each specimen is a botanical time capsule that helps us understand past and present biodiversity. They allow us to track how plants, algae and fungi respond to environmental changes, helping inform the conservation work that supports species survival.

Raising Rarity Revealed

Sat 17 August
11:00am & 2:00pm

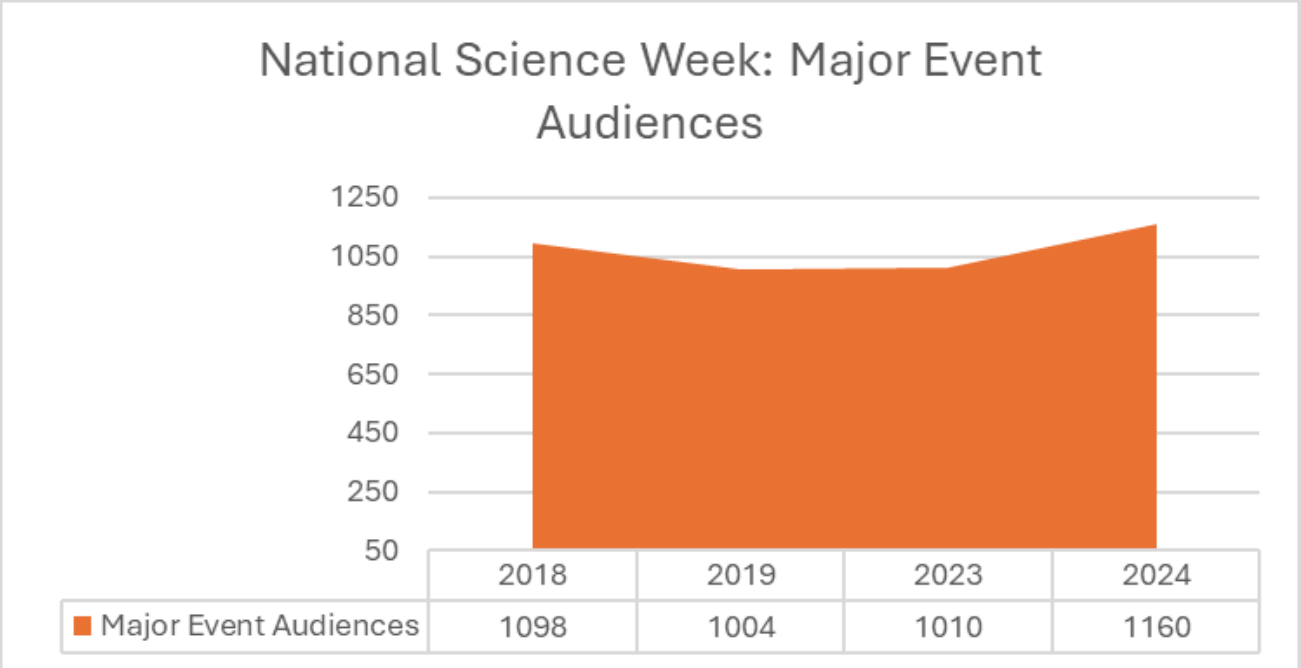
Venue: Royal Botanic Gardens Cranbourne

We explored the critical conservation work of Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria on this special Raising Rarity tour. Our audience headed behind the scenes to the RBGV nursery, where they learned about the specialist production and propagation techniques used to save Victoria's most threatened plant species. Then, they joined a guided tour of the research garden, delving into the vital conservation efforts and cutting-edge research supporting these rare species.

At the end of the tour, each participant received their very own threatened plant species to take home – so they could do their bit in contributing to the preservation of our precious botanical heritage and make a difference, one plant at a time.

Major Event Audiences in Victoria

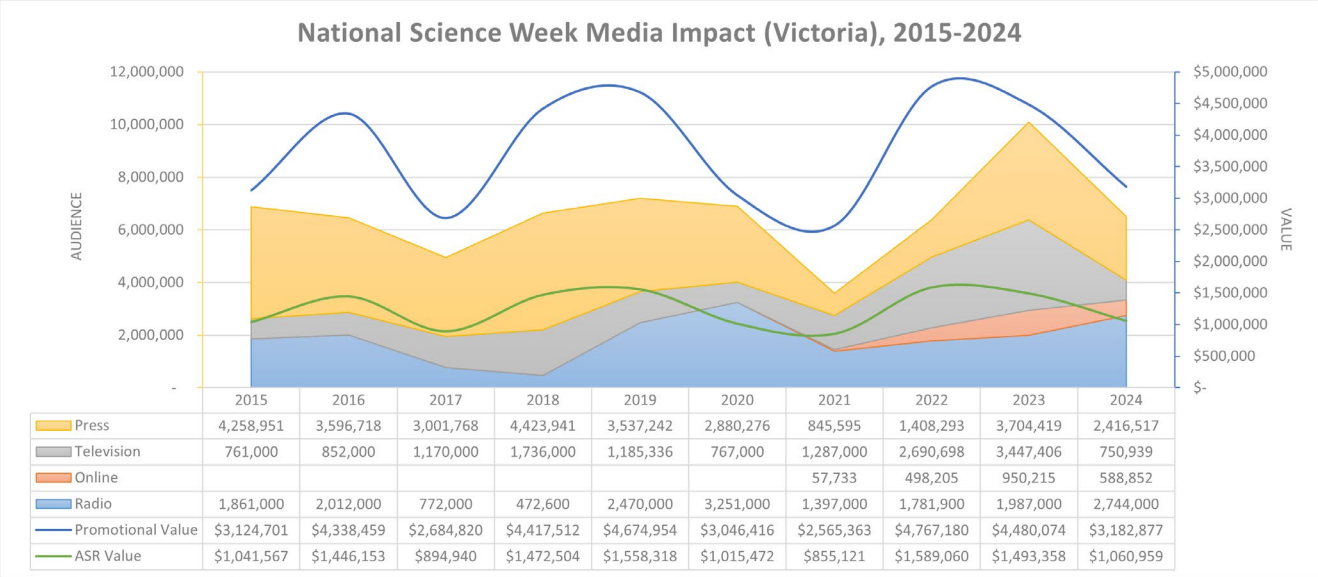
While holding outdoor activities during winter remains a challenge for Victoria – Kyabram Fauna Park in particular suffered a 'wash out' from a particularly rainy weekend – we exceeded our goal of attracting over 1000 attendees across the major event program, with 1,160 attendees reflecting our highest in-person audience since pre-pandemic levels. Programs delivered in 2020 – 2022, while generally reporting over 100,000 attendees, were entirely delivered online and not a suitable addition to this particular trend, which targets an in-person attendance goal.



Promotional Activities

Media events and coverage

While not as strong as the recent peak in interest from last year, 2024 was a solid year for media coverage in Victoria, with a cumulative circulation of Science Week-related news items to over 6.5M audience members. Radio news channels represent the strongest growth in new engagement. Television news fell off dramatically, while print media sustained a decent rate of interest.



	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Press	4,258,951	3,596,718	3,001,768	4,423,941	3,537,242	2,880,276	845,595	1,408,293	3,704,419	2,416,517
Television	761,000	852,000	1,170,000	1,736,000	1,185,336	767,000	1,287,000	2,690,698	3,447,406	750,939
Online							57,733	498,205	950,215	588,852
Radio	1,861,000	2,012,000	772,000	472,600	2,470,000	3,251,000	1,397,000	1,781,900	1,987,000	2,744,000
Promotional Value	$3,124,701	$4,338,459	$2,684,820	$4,417,512	$4,674,954	$3,046,416	$2,565,363	$4,767,180	$4,480,074	$3,182,877
ASR Value	$1,041,567	$1,446,153	$894,940	$1,472,504	$1,558,318	$1,015,472	$855,121	$1,589,060	$1,493,358	$1,060,959

Isentia conduct media monitoring at the national level and provide us with reports on performance in Victoria, substantively driven by the efforts of national publicist Tanya Ha (Science in Public). A part of this assessment is the ASR (Advertising Space Rate) value of media mentions, reflecting the cost of running a paid advertisement on the same channel that the new item appears on. Given a lot of National Science Week coverage is provided by the ABC as a national media partner - which does not raise funds through advertising and thus provides no data to this particular picture - this obviously provides a very blunt measure of program impact, but it helps in communicating some sense of "return on investment" to our funding bodies.

We further apportion a Promotional Value to the impact of mainstream media, which is a standard measure of ASR times three to reflect the higher promotional impact of an informative article (making the news) over placing an advertisement (paying for eyeballs). Based on these two scales, we can determine the following return on investment in Victoria for National Science Week in 2024:

Investment:

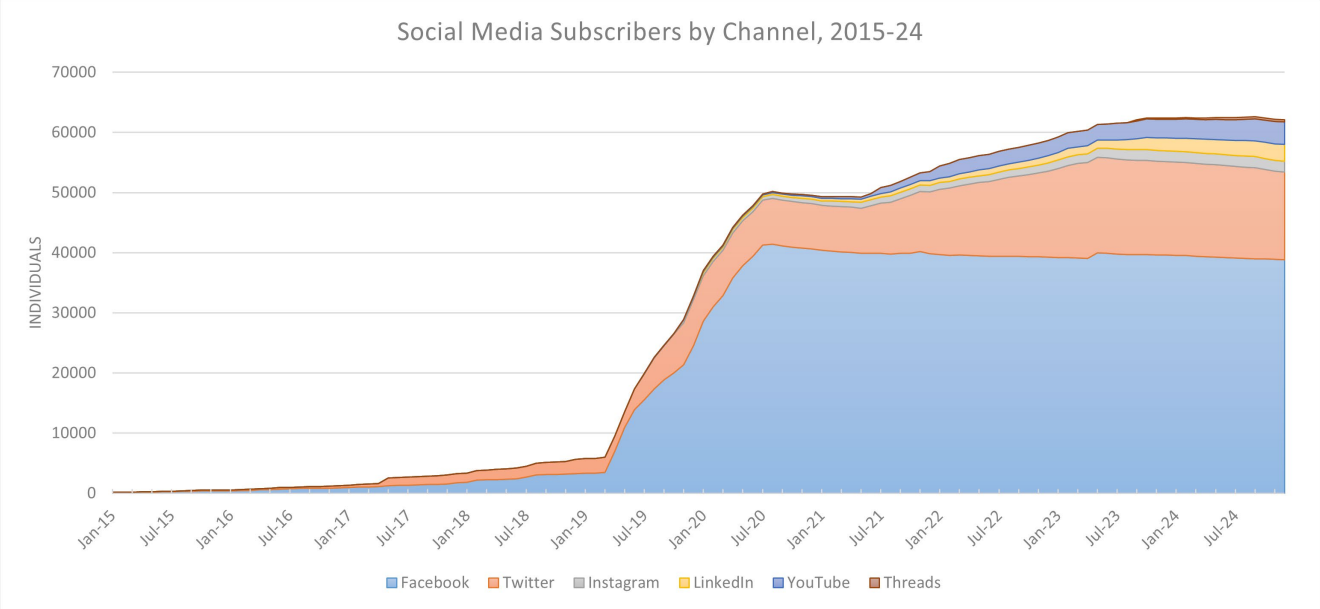
National Science Week Program Budget for Victoria - $90,000 (100%)

Return:

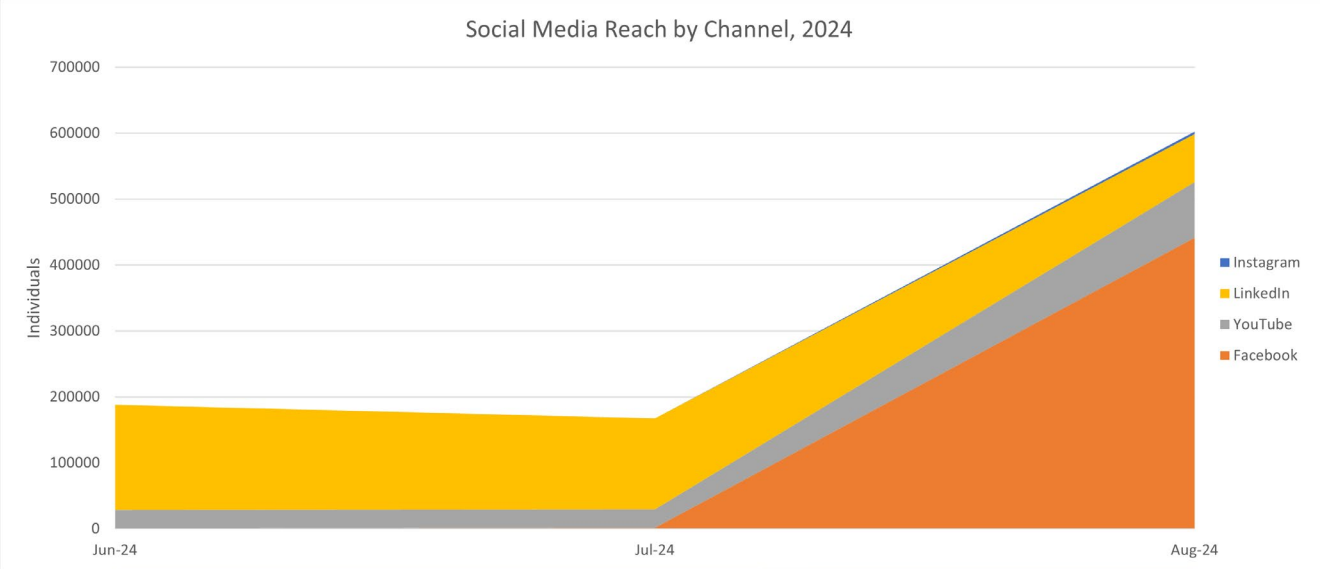
ASR Value - $1,060,959 (1178%)

PR Value - $3,182,877 (3537%)

Advertising and Other Promotions



Social media remains the clearest avenue for direct promotion of National Science Week beyond securing the scant attentions of the mainstream media, and we continue to vigorously promote event holders and their activities through our channels. Notwithstanding this continues to deliver reach beyond the abilities of current mailing lists, the decline of the Twitter/X platform has transformed the ability of many in the not-for-profit and science community to engage our broader society through these channels.

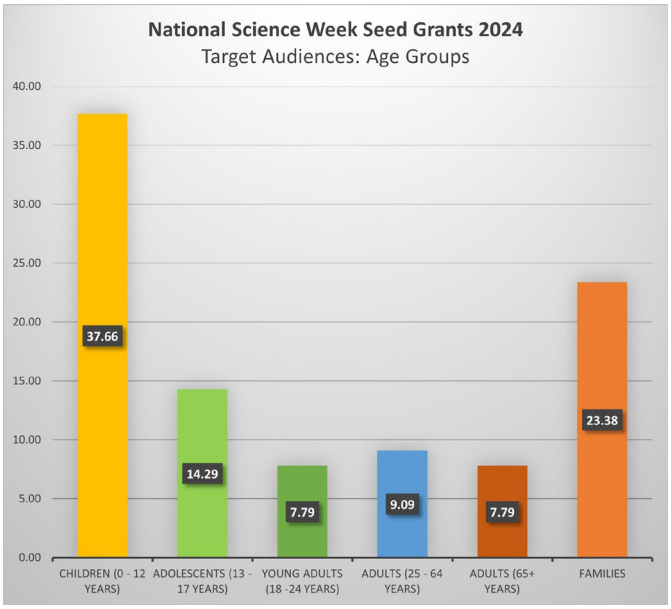


LinkedIn remains our key engagement platform, while Facebook still offers a decent impact from paid advertising in the leadup to Science Week. We continue to communicate and advertise National Science Week activities via Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and Google, with $27,822 spent on advertising, promotion and website upkeep across the Inspiring Victoria program in 2024.

Beyond this, members of our Partnership Board have also promoted National Science Week via their various institutions' social media networks, and that impact is not reflected in our report data. Generally, our major public institutions have far greater reach via social media than the RSV, making their participation exceptionally valuable for audience engagement.

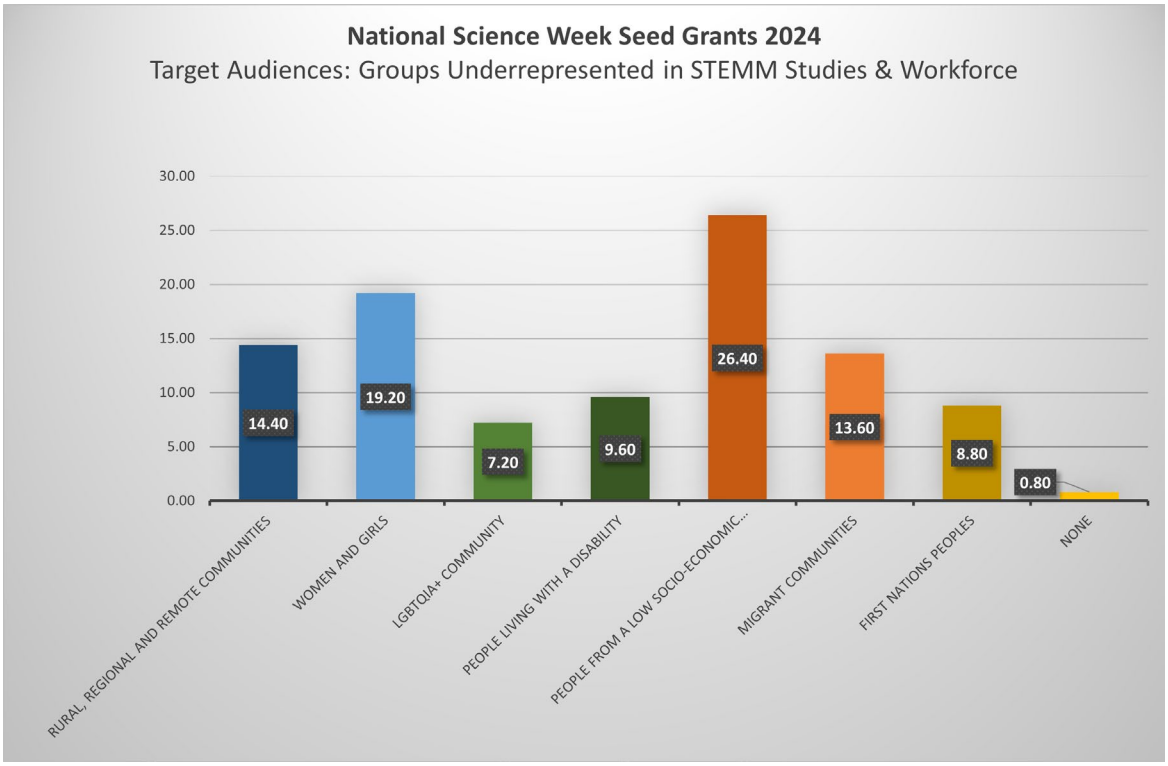
Target audiences

Grant applicants were asked to identify their target audiences by age group, with "families" providing a more general term for inter-generational engagement.



As with the previous year, 2024 outcomes returned a strong focus on children and adolescents (collectively, 52%) that likely represents over 70% of the total audience once the "families" category is taken into account. The grant program is not inclusive of school events, which are ineligible within this specific component of the Inspiring Australia program, so this result reflects libraries and neighbourhood houses drawing their audiences from early childhood programs and after school programs, and the general public looking for meaningful activities to enjoy with the children in their lives.

Applicants were also asked to indicate whether they were targeting groups under-represented in STEMM professions and enrolments. Once again, there was a vigorous response, indicating a pervasive commitment to principles of social equity among the many community-focused organisations convening these events for National Science Week.

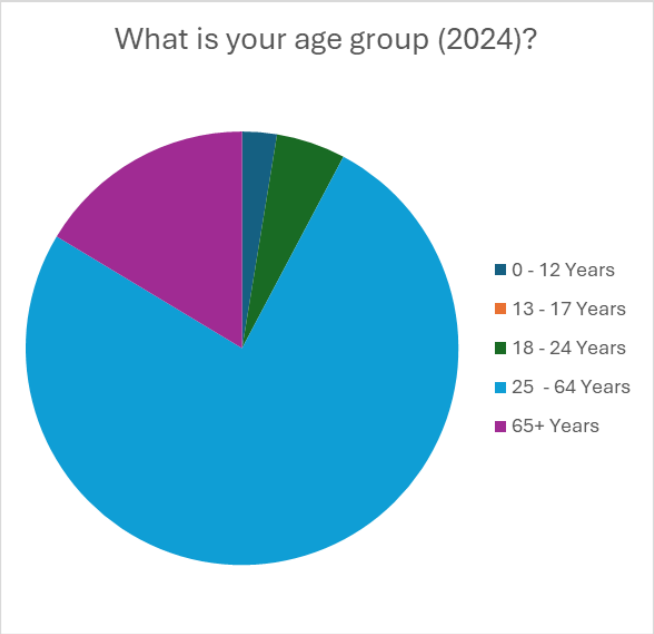


While "People from a Low Socioeconomic Background" remains a dominant concern, this year there was a stronger focus on "Women and Girls" than "Rural, Regional and Remote Communities," with these three groups collectively representing 60% of the target audience, down from 79% in 2023. This reflects a welcome redistribution of focus to other equity groups, notably migrant communities, people living with a disability, and First Nations peoples.

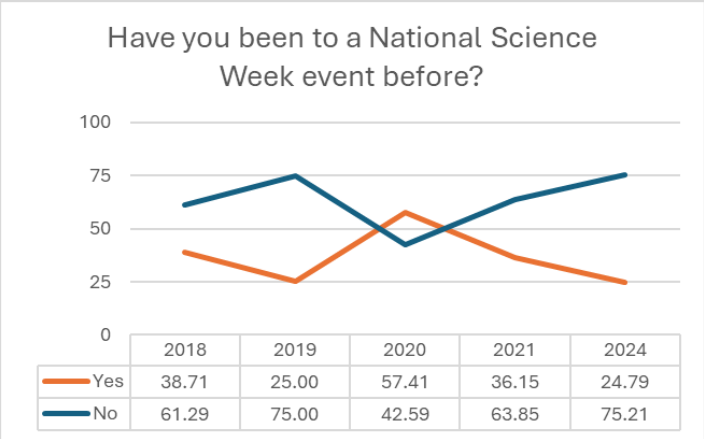
Program Evaluation

This year, the program returned to requiring universal scoring mechanisms to gain insights from survey respondents against the main program goals of the Inspiring Australia program. The results indicate an excellent outcome across both the major event and seed grant programs.

Respondents were overwhelmingly drawn from the 25 – 64 years age group. This parameter is defined through the national program, and it is suggested that such a broad demographic category is not meaningful or helpful to analysis, reporting or planning. Regardless, it generally canvasses career-active adults, who are also most likely to be engaged in care-giving roles, either to children or older adults.

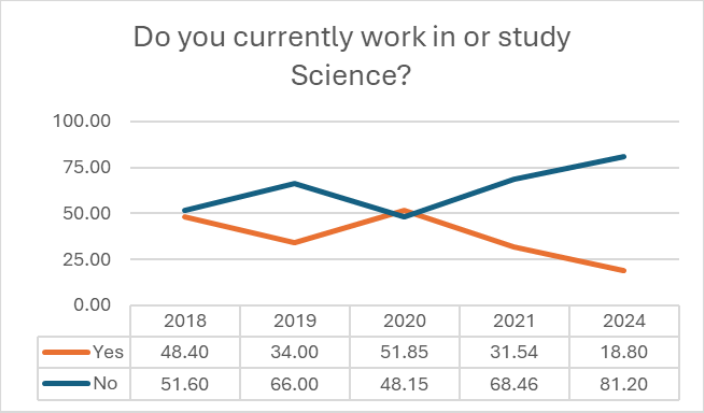


Reaching New Audiences



	2018	2019	2020	2021	2024
Yes	38.71	25.00	57.41	36.15	24.79
No	61.29	75.00	42.59	63.85	75.21

We reached a larger proportion of people who had never (knowingly) attended a National Science Week event before, revealing that profiling the often unseen and unremarked scientific endeavours of major public institutions like Zoos, Museums and Botanic Gardens offers an excellent way to frame learning experiences within the context of 'a day out' - for families in particular. Likewise, community hubs like Neighbourhood Houses and public libraries are go-to activity centres for young families, the un- or under-employed and retirees in particular, where science-related events and workshops can be developed by community development and engagement managers hungry for meaningful content, then integrated into established programs with an active subscriber base.

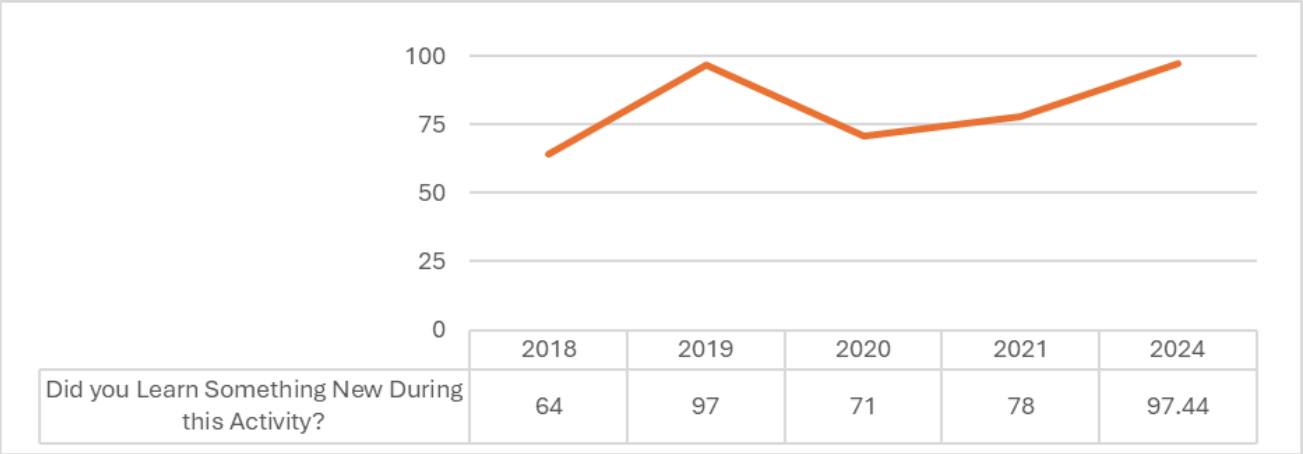


	2018	2019	2020	2021	2024
Yes	48.40	34.00	51.85	31.54	18.80
No	51.60	66.00	48.15	68.46	81.20

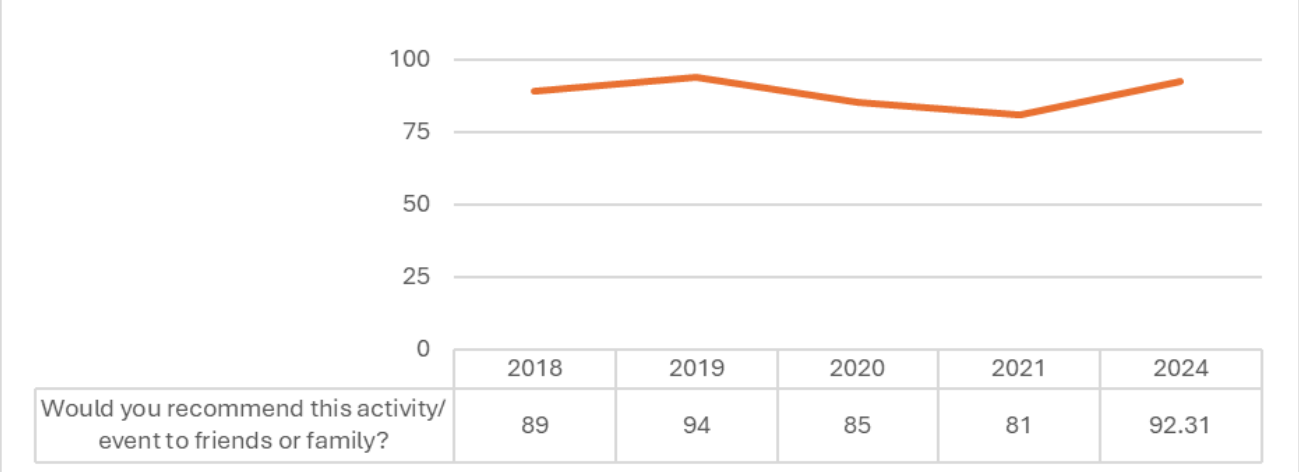
Another key indicator for program success is reaching people who are not already engaged with the science community, in this case determined by either working in the sciences or studying scientific disciplines. Again, a great outcome: 2024 was our strongest result for this indicator thus far, with 81.2% of respondents identifying as being essentially uninvolved with or disengaged from the sciences.

Quality

Finally, we sought feedback on the efficacy and appeal of the many diverse activities on offer across the State. Our major partners and grant holders have clearly conducted outstanding work across the board, with historically high rates of new learning and a willingness to recommend activities/events to friends or family members.



	2018	2019	2020	2021	2024
Did you Learn Something New During this Activity?	64	97	71	78	97.44



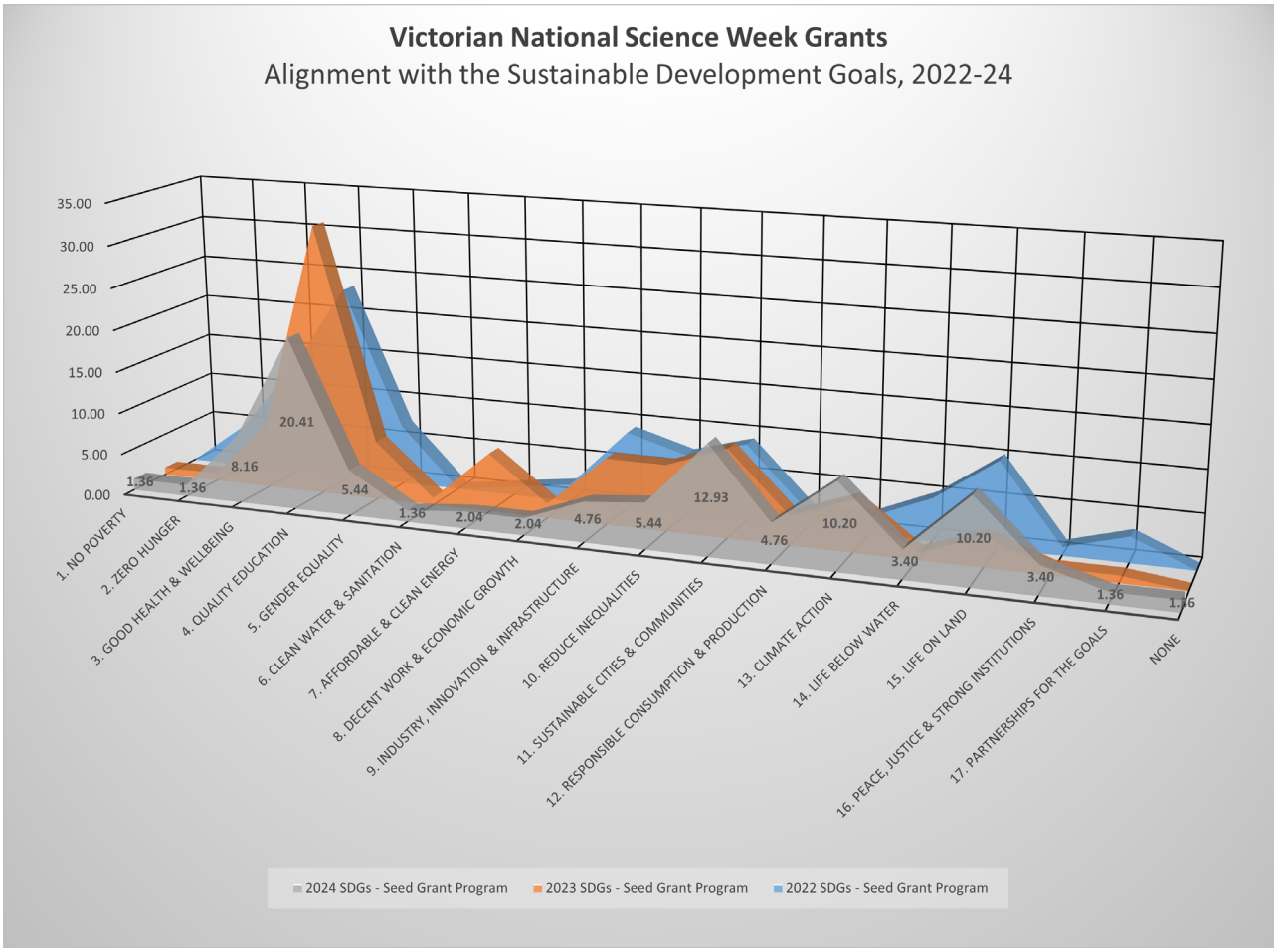
	2018	2019	2020	2021	2024
Would you recommend this activity/ event to friends or family?	89	94	85	81	92.31

We refer readers to the **Appendices** to draw on participants' feedback across the various programs.

Alignment with the UN Sustainable Development Goals

As with editions of *Science Victoria*, we track our Seed Grants against the Sustainable Development Goals to assist several Partnership Board members track their involvement against their institution's strategic reporting requirements, including the RSV. These alignments are self-selected by event holders.

Unsurprisingly, "Quality Education" continues to rank highly in this lifelong learning program, with "Sustainable Cities and Communities" a distant second in 2023 and 2024. Of interest is a shift in community focus from "Affordable and Clean Energy" and "Industry, Innovation & Infrastructure" in 2023 to "Life on Land" and "Climate Action" in 2024.



This is my last report as the Manager of the Inspiring Australia program for the State of Victoria, and I would like to record my thanks and appreciation to the many colleagues with whom I've collaborated to deliver science engagement programs to Victorians and ensure the health and persistence of this most valuable initiative at the national level. It has been an honour to be involved, and I wish all involved in delivering the Inspiring Australia program every success for the future.

- **Mike Flattley, Manager, Inspiring Victoria**

Budget Performance

The Royal Society of Victoria - Inspiring Victoria Program
For the year ended 31 December 2024

Account	*Partnership Network*	*Science Week Large Event*	*Science Week Statewide*	*Staffing*	*Total*
Revenue					
Donations and Bequests	0.00	0.00	90.00	0.00	90.00
Grants	58,875.00	41,000.00	51,000.00	181,925.42	332,800.42
Total Revenue	58,875.00	41,000.00	51,090.00	181,925.42	332,890.42
Gross Surplus/Deficit	58,875.00	41,000.00	51,090.00	181,925.42	332,890.42
Operating Expenses					
Advertising, Promotion and Website	18,812.71	5,000.00	4,009.06	0.00	27,821.77
Catering	112.80	0.00	0.00	0.00	112.80
Event Management	3,817.42	0.00	0.00	0.00	3,817.42
Grants and Sponsorships	1,890.00	36,000.00	45,789.00	0.00	83,679.00
Printing, Publishing & Productions	26,953.24	0.00	0.00	0.00	26,953.24
Professional Services	3,500.00	0.00	2,000.00	38,429.42	43,929.42
Travel and Accommodation	3,356.59	0.00	480.00	0.00	3,836.59
Wages and Salaries - Permanent	0.00	0.00	0.00	133,260.00	133,260.00

Account	***Partnership Network***	***Science Week Large Event***	***Science Week Statewide***	***Staffing***	***Total***
Staff					
Wages and Salaries - Provision for leave	0.00	0.00	0.00	5,118.00	5,118.00
Wages and Salaries - Superannuation	0.00	0.00	0.00	5,118.00	5,118.00
Total Operating Expenses	58,442.76	41,000.00	52,278.06	181,925.42	333,646.24
Net Surplus/Deficit	432.24	0.00	(1,188.06)	0.00	(755.82)

Appendices

Appendix A – Neighbourhood Houses Seed Grant Acquittals 2024

Appendix B – Museums Victoria National Science Week Report