

Sexual Assault Services Victoria Community Priorities Panel

Process Design

June 2025

Victim survivor perspectives are key to effective action on preventing, responding to and ending sexual violence in Victoria. Victim survivors should have the right to inform the systems that impact them.

Sexual Assault Services Victoria (SASVic), as the peak body for specialist sexual assault and harmful sexual behaviour services in Victoria, wishes to enhance its engagement with victim survivors through deliberative processes and to increase opportunities for incorporating survivor perspectives into its work.

This pilot project aims to deliver the best process for listening to victim survivors and incorporating survivor perspectives into SASVic's 2026 advocacy agenda, so that these perspectives are heard by and acted on by policymakers.

01 What is the problem?

Sexual violence involves an attempt to take away a person's power, control and agency. In this context, sexual violence is an area of social policy where listening to the community and involving them in decisions should be of the highest standard. However, many victim-survivors of sexual violence feel silenced, ignored and, often, harmed, particularly by legal and social systems.

Sexual Assault Services Victoria (SASVic), the peak body for specialist sexual assault and harmful sexual behaviour services in Victoria, works to promote rights, recovery and respect of victim survivors and others impacted by sexual violence. SASVic understands that government policy frameworks that overlook the perspectives of victim survivors can lead to inadequate protection of victim survivor rights.

If government policies are mainly designed through a top-down approach, with little input from victim survivors, such policies may not align with the challenges faced by survivors. This can lead to a disconnect between the people who create policies and the people who rely on them. SASVic is therefore committed to promoting the voices of victim survivors of sexual violence at the highest level, and as such, wish to call on victim survivors and the broader Victorian community to submit their policy ideas. A panel of Victorian victim survivors will then choose one of these ideas, which will then be championed by SASVic to all parties in the lead-up to the November 2026 state election. This process seeks to shift the balance towards more collaborative, responsive, and adaptive policy solutions to support victim survivors.

SASVic understands that the nature of the trauma so many victim survivors endure requires a sensitive and considered engagement approach if outcomes for victim survivors are to improve. Any engagement must be genuine and not easily dismissed as just "another committee".

There are several obstacles that impede deep engagement with their community:

- Many victim-survivors don't feel heard by governments. Trust is low. So, a new approach is difficult unless it is transformatively different.
- Victorian victim survivors come from disparate groups located across the state, likely experiencing different challenges.
- The agency, safety and privacy of victim survivors is a higher-level consideration in the sexual violence context.
- Cost-effective online engagement tools frequently used by governments and other organisations attract trolls, often produce only shallow engagement on decisions that appear to have already been made and garner few responses.
- How to engage effectively within the confines of a small not-for-profit budget.

SASVic wishes to address these engagement challenges by exploring whether integrating a deliberative model of citizen engagement, with a re-thought online process, can overcome many of the traditional shortcomings of the online environment.

In meeting the specific needs of the victim survivor community, newDemocracy is basing this advice on previous experience with an initiative in Europe called '*Decide Madrid*' - an innovation of the Madrid City Council - that invited citizens to submit proposals directly to the local government authority using a software platform called Consul.

The core idea is a simple one. Most government engagement online involves a draft plan against which citizens are invited to comment. Believing that the decision has already been made, incentives to participate are low and thus generally only a handful of comments are received. Incentives to think more deeply (considering evidence and trade-offs) before posting are a well-known limitation of the online environment. We think this can be addressed. We will do seven things differently:

1. There is **no draft proposal** being put forward by SASVic. They are asking an open question rather than trying to 'sell' their decision.
2. The community is not being asked to comment and critique an expert's plan, but to **submit their own ideas**.
3. The tool will give them **structure to assist them** to best present their case.
4. To avoid over-simplification (and incentives for gaming and trolling) there will be **no use of 'Likes'** to determine the relative merits of an idea.
5. **Ownership** of an idea and the questions/discussions which ensue will be held by the idea proposer to improve / shape the incentives for constructive questions.
6. To counter the widespread perception that decisions have already been made, the final decision for the advocacy idea to be campaigned on will be determined by a group of up to 16 panelists. This will be comprised of a **randomly selected group of 12 victim survivors and 4 victim survivors as identified at the discretion of SASVic**. This formulation has been designed to balance for any demographics or experiences missed by the lottery selection. Ideally (and with their opt-in) a subset of this group will promote the online tool, including via traditional and social media.

This process is usually referred to as a "citizens jury", but in the sexual violence context, the framing of "jury" can have negative connotations, so we are adopting the title "panel". The democratic value lies in the panel doing the difficult task of *prioritising* one idea over another. They will be given extended time (~10-12 hours over 1-2 months) to think, fact-check and find common ground – three things unachievable if operating solely online.

These ideas may appear obvious. But we cannot find another example in Australia of online engagement being approached on this basis. If we can construct an environment where the community sees it is worth their time and where the worst elements of online behaviour are 'designed out', then we have a potentially valuable process model for how we can better listen to a wide range of communities.

SASVic acknowledges that beyond the highly impacted victim-survivor community, sexual violence is a *whole of community problem* and that it is important to identify solutions that are grounded in the

community and emerge from here. As such, it is important that the whole community has an opportunity to contribute ideas.

02 Project Rationale

A constructive public discourse in an online environment is the missing link in scalable, effective community engagement. Examples of this being done successfully are incredibly rare.

We aim to prove that:

1. Ideation and prioritisation that emerges from victim survivors who are empowered to contribute directly to how systems and services can be improved has considerable value. SASVic can ensure this engagement is grounded in the scope and resources of the organisation thus providing 'guardrails' for a useable output.
2. Ideas and contributions can be filtered and responded to in a trusted manner by an organisation specialising in sexual violence, which in turn encourages contributions and manages the 'wish list' risk for SASVic. People must be heard *and* feel heard.
3. The process can scale beyond the victim survivor community to a wider public conversation but with control for survivors being integral to the concept.

The benefits for SASVic are numerous. The 'Decide Madrid' model opens the door to innovative ideas and solutions, allowing unique insights into how services can be improved, what new models of care could be implemented, imperatives around the legal process, or to identify gaps in current offerings. It also gives voice to victim survivors in their own time, while providing full anonymity if preferred, thereby making victim survivors active agents in shaping the environment in which they are expected to recover and preventing further victimisation. When victim survivors advocate for themselves, they can highlight the multifaceted nature of the harm they have experienced, prompting society to address all dimensions of sexual violence - from prevention to recovery. Victim survivor participation is key to creating a society that does not just react to sexual violence but works proactively to prevent it whether through legal frameworks, educational programs, workplace regulations, or through changing social attitudes that reduce the occurrence of sexual violence.

By better engaging with victim survivors on policy matters, SASVic can foster a sense of agency and empowerment to reinforce the notion that victim survivor voices matter and that their experience is valued in societal and institutional change. By elevating the voices of victim survivors in this way, it makes it that much harder for governments to ignore calls for change.

03 PROCESS SNAPSHOT

During elections, SASVic advocates to political parties to promote rights, recovery and respect of victim survivors of sexual violence.

This state election cycle, they want a leading idea in this advocacy to come from victim survivors.

Proposed Remit: What do we need to ask the Government to do differently?

PHASE ONE: Open Call for Ideas/ Proposals via Online engagement

- The open call for policy ideas will come from two distinct streams: the clients of SASVic's member organisations (to be confirmed following a member organisation briefing) and the general population.
- If deemed appropriate, the initial outreach (pre-launch) will be to victim survivors via SASVic's member organisations. Separating cohorts of contributors by time will aid with verification and norm-setting.
- Ideas will be submitted via an online platform housed on the SASVic tailored website.
- As an additional accessibility measure, victim survivors can register their details and policy idea via a phone call-back option. Email: yoursay@sasvic.org.au and your call will be returned.
- The platform structure aims to assist citizens to present their case as strongly as possible (being mindful that 'not everyone is an advocate')
- The call for submissions will remain open for 6-8 weeks with an anticipated closing date in November 2025.
- SASVic commits in advance to substantively and meaningfully respond to the shortlisted idea and to featuring one policy idea in their campaign, and in so doing, create a genuine conversation among victim survivors.

PHASE TWO: Victim-Survivor Panel handles Prioritisation

- The idea submissions will be reviewed by a random selection of jurors from among victim survivor communities who will come to common ground agreement on the idea(s) to be taken forward for advocacy after ~10-12 hours of deliberation.
- The panel members will self-write a short note (2-3pgs) reflecting on the ideas they considered and why they made the recommendation they did.

04 DELIVERY OF PHASE ONE: ONLINE ENGAGEMENT

There are four critical tasks to having the online environment work successfully:

- a. Ensuring this community's natural expectation / right to the highest standards of privacy.
- b. Ensuring the submission fields help people make their case so the platform contains substantive proposals, not solely complaints. The environment needs to assist people for whom writing at length is not a normal part of their day.
- c. Ensuring the community is aware of the opportunity.
- d. Ensuring those who make submissions have ownership and control of questions that are raised about their idea without risking veering into the worst of online behaviour.

How will we do this?

A. User Registration

Users will be able to register with a choice of an email address— this allows for the panel to contact them in the event their idea is shortlisted. A real name will be requested but never disclosed or displayed unless permission has been given.

In the initial fortnight, and if deemed appropriate, the only communications regarding the platform will go through member organisations, meaning that the expectation is that the overwhelming majority of users will be victim-survivors from the community. This allows us to onboard anonymous users / pseudonyms without verification.

B. Submission Fields – Helping People Make Their Case

In newspaper environments, which most people are familiar with, a lengthy article is followed by the word 'Comment', so that's what people do. Notably, this rarely leads to new insight and understanding.

We will help submitters of an idea by giving them structure - akin to having a willing listener seeking to understand them which in turn helps the idea be best presented. The initial four fields, with their companion prompts, are:

What do we need to ask the Government to do differently?

- What is your idea? *(1-2 sentences; a basic summary)*
- What is your reasoning? Why do you think this is worthwhile? *(3-5 paragraphs; share the problem you are solving and why you think this would make a difference)*
- Can you offer any supporting evidence? *(This can be your story, or something you have read about happening outside Victoria, or a statistic that supports your idea and reasoning)*
- Do you want people to consider any other sources or reading? *(Insert links: if you were persuaded or want everyone to be aware of a story you have read, then provide a link so they can read that and be on the same page as you)*

We will *equally* assist visitors to the website who are considering the idea by again avoiding the ‘Comment’ prompt in favour of prompting questions that should assist the owner of the submission to better make their case. Specifically:

“Do you have a question for the person who authored this idea?”

“Do you have any evidence that you think needs to be considered when weighing up this idea?”

“Are there any media stories that you think are relevant to this idea?”

In each case we are priming the reader to make a substantive contribution that serves to improve the quality of the submission, while reducing the avenues available for negative behaviour.

Questions will need to be moderated, which we propose as a single daily task. We will publicly note this moderation is occurring to set the correct expectation for “why hasn’t my question appeared?”

Within the online environment, the original submitter should be given control over which questions appear and be given the first option to answer.

C. Ensuring the community is aware of the opportunity

One of the biggest challenges with online engagement is the risk of a ghost town: online communities take a long time to come together, while the engagement periods are short by comparison.

In an ideal world we would “fish where the fish are” and have this discussion on large popular platforms, but the absence of features listed above removes that as an option. Instead, we need to go to those locations, make the best democratic offer to be heard that people will have encountered, then bring them back to this site.

The key here is an element of saturation: people need to hear the same request a few times for it to cut-through. With limited resources, we propose:

1. If feasible and appropriate, SASVic member organisations encourage their communities to submit ideas through their communications channels.
2. SASVic use highly targeted online advertising to specific victim survivor communities
3. As a final (delayed) step, SASVic and newDemocracy aim for broadsheet media with population-wide reach. This will have a spillover beyond the victim survivor community which we intend to use as a ‘feature’ not a ‘bug’.
4. By recruiting the panel prior to the online engagement phase going you can potentially use a subset of panel members (those who are willing) as a central part of the media story.

Supporting high quality submissions

A baseline information kit of around 10-20 pages in length should be supplied by SASVic.

A key principle we apply is that the task should match the time, and in an online environment we think that is the maximum practical reading length.

The document should provide **key statistics and data** and a concise outline of the challenges facing the sector. By way of example, if citizens know the total level of spending in the sector then this helps with context for ideas they may propose. Similarly, the number of people affected - and where they come from across the state - will help people understand the scalability of solutions they wish to propose.

A commitment to anonymity

The nature of the subject matter carries unique challenges around anonymity and the need for asynchronous communications so people can speak when they are ready to speak.

The interface for collecting submissions will cater to two cohorts:

- 1) SAS Members (referred by networks only if possible): Must provide a name and contact details for verification purposes but can remain anonymous on public-facing documents.
- 2) Open community engagement: Policy ideas can come from all sections of the community not just victim-survivors from within the SASVic network and they must provide name and contact details for verification purposes.

05 DELIVERY OF PHASE TWO: Panel deliberations

The panel role in this project is simple and deployed for three reasons.

1. The incentive to participate (submit an idea) is far higher when an organisation can overcome the public cynicism that a decision has already been made. The offer that your idea will be judged by an independent panel with lived experience) is easy to understand and transparently fair.
2. Online engagement has poor incentives for fact-checking and contextualising, resulting in popular suggestions that cannot – even with the best of intentions – be implemented. The incentives for the small group of 12 are radically different, and this, combined with extended time and access to assistance, means that the proposal they recommend is much more likely to be actionable.
3. The combination of open access to contribute and judgment without ‘elite control’ leads to a much more publicly trusted result.

As ever, we apply five principles of deliberative practice in designing the operation of this process. These are common from the largest high-budget national projects to local ‘zero dollar’ projects:

- i. Representative: Primarily through the use of democratic lottery (stratified random selection) we provide a central, substantive role for a cross-section of the population rather than solely the voices of active advocates.
- ii. Information driven: We design for a diversity of sources and engagement with information rather than simply canvassing raw public opinion.
- iii. Time: We offer extended time formats which give people the opportunity to consider trade-offs, think at length and find common ground as a group.
- iv. Open question: We offer an open democratic opportunity to be heard rather than a “rubber stamp” of a government-led proposal.
- v. Authority: What will happen as a result of the deliberation is pre-agreed and committed to publicly.

The online component of the project adheres to principles (iv) and (v) above. This is a natural limitation of the online environment; thus we add the panel component to complement this with items (i) through (iii) such that the end result has good coverage and adherence to the principles.

A DEMOCRATIC LOTTERY: THE PANEL

Assembling the panel in this context has a number of unique and complex elements, principally around the confidentiality needs/expectations of the affected community.

The key criteria for nominating for random selection to the panel is that the nominee is a victim survivor of sexual violence. Other stratification categories are: age bracket (<25, 25-44, 45+); sex and gender status; simple geography (postcode); Aboriginal and/ or Torres Strait Islander; LGBTIQ+; disability status; and CALD status.

(i) How will we reach this community to conduct a draw?

Our approach here is to print up to 500 invitations and supply these proportionally across SASVic member organisations for onward distribution. Whether this is feasible is still to be confirmed. A digital invitation may be more suitable.

An early call to introduce the project with the member organisations will open up this approach for discussion and refinement. We are mindful that this could be one area where email invitations (for privacy reasons) are more appropriate as a first option.

In most projects we operate RSVPs via www.newdemocracy.com.au/RSVP. However, in this instance we propose placing this RSVP form on the SASVic client page. Traditional projects suffer from public cynicism that panel selection will be manipulated, hence our independence is valued. In this instance the reverse is true: SASVic will be the more trusted entity rather than any external third party.

Selection confirmations will also be handled differently. In usual circumstances, newDemocracy handles confirmation calls to finalise panel participation, answer questions and let them know the next steps prior to the first meeting. We are once again mindful that victim survivors may not wish to engage with an out-of-sector organisation, so we propose training 1-2 SASVic staff on the process and goals for these calls and having this handled in-house. With a small panel of up to 16 the time overhead required to do so is only 2-3 hours.

As we do with other panels, it is strongly recommended that jurors be paid a stipend out of respect for their time, notionally ~\$250 covering full attendance.

Democratic lottery in a small population

Pending confirmation of feasibility, SASVic's member organisations will be asked to send an email invitation to a random extract of 25% of their membership database, inviting victim-survivors to nominate for a position on the panel.

SASVic members are estimated to support about 20,000 victim survivors per year, meaning a potential sample of ~5000 is available which is still sufficient to generate a truly random representative sample. Panel members will be recruited from the pool of those who respond to the email invitation, indicating their interest and availability to participate in the deliberations.

Notably, the delivery of the panel online overcomes any geographic obstacles to participation in this process and perhaps more importantly, gives the victim survivor control over their participation (use of camera; location).

The invitations will be drafted by SASVic emphasising the remit and commitment to the final recommendation and sent to each of their 19 member services. The member services will be asked to on-send the invitation to their victim survivor networks with RSVPs to be collected by SASVic for stratification and final panel selection.

Invitations will clearly note that a payment will be made for time spent. Should there be any requests for assistance to access the internet / a computer, SASVic will provide advice on how that can be done using free public services (such as local libraries).

(ii) How will we meet the information needs of the panel?

At the outset, it should be noted that this is not an audit of all possible policy responses in the area of sexual violence. Rather, it is an effort to bridge the gap between submissions that resonate with the group ("sounds good") with a basic sense check. To draw a parallel with the City of Madrid project upon which this is based: in their early iterations for ideas online, a highly popular idea (drawing 100k+ 'Likes') was for a single public transport ticket across all modes of transport. However, public transport was a regional government responsibility not one for local government, making it unimplementable. We aim to empower people to submit ideas, while having the panel handle the question of *"is this actionable?"*

The first way their information needs will be met is via the concise (10-20pg) information kit mentioned above. This will provide a solid first-point reference.

The second way the information needs will be met is via the online submissions probing for links and information from the submitter, with the additional capacity for the panel to contact them to request more information.

Importantly, SASVic should provide liaison assistance to help the group get factual answers to questions. To accommodate this, the panel meetings will be spaced 2-3 weeks apart in order that answers can be received and considered.

(iii) How do we assess the time required?

Candidly, there are unknown elements in this project: Are we expecting 20 submissions or 300?

We respond to this problem with flexibility in two design elements. One is a 'soft start' which recruits the panel early, giving them an incentive to follow the submissions from the launch date (i.e. well before their first scheduled meeting). The second is a buffer that will allow for additional meetings if the volume of submissions is sufficiently high that panel members feel rushed. We will let them specify how much time is needed and have methods on hand (self-facilitation activities) to manage this.

Key: Ultra low-cost facilitation

A central part of the brief for this project has been to keep the budget as low as possible: a community/advocacy organisation of this type does not have public sector engagement budgets. Traditionally in a deliberative environment, facilitation of the group is the largest single cost. In this project, we will remove that cost entirely because the task is significantly more constrained (i.e. simplicity of task) than a more open Citizens' Jury project

'Facilitation in a box' materials will be produced by an experienced facilitator and provided by newDemocracy. While newDemocracy will be on hand in the background (for support as needed; effectively 'join by invitation' at the request of the panel), the intent is to provide session agenda and activities that are simple enough for self-directed work by the panel.

Panel Remit

Noting (and complementing) the task for the online submission component is *‘What do we need to ask government to do differently?’* – which provides the source materials for consideration – the task is just made slightly sharper for the deliberating group.

What one idea do you agree should be featured in our advocacy to all political parties for the 2026 Victorian State election?

This task is the one question they are being asked to answer and is what keeps a group on track.

Operations and Basic Session Outline

Online deliberation using Zoom (or equivalent) allows panel members to control whether to reveal their name and/or whether to appear on screen. In a face-to-face citizen deliberation, a key dynamic comes from seeing and hearing from ‘people just like me’ in the discussion. This is an unknown, but we do not foresee a critical barrier.

Pre-zoom meeting prep: Approximately one working day but this could be longer or shorter based on the number of submissions. Alternatively, panel members can track submission ideas as they are published on the Yoursay.sasvic.org.au website throughout the campaign. Each panel member will be asked to read all the submissions and bring to session two a list of their top five ideas.

Session one (~1.5 hours): Introduction to the process and getting to know you (weekday evening)

- An explanation of the process and why SASVic is undertaking this exercise. Chatham House rule.
- A short introduction by each panel member / Icebreaker, something unrelated to the subject matter.
- Questions on the discussion paper.
- Opportunity to discuss the selection *criteria* the group sees as important (e.g. practical vs transformational; preventative vs remedial).

Session two (2-3 hours): Long-listing (weekday evening)

- Which ideas from the victim survivor community did each panel member like the most?
- Which ideas from the general community did each panel member like the most?
- By the end of the session the panel should agree on 8-10 of the standout ideas
- Output is any requests for further information from the authors of (or related to) your shortlisted submissions to advance discussion at the next meeting.

Session three (2-3 hours): Decision-making (weekday evening)

- Deliberation on the finalist ideas. What are their merits? Consider how each policy idea would sit against the suite of policies that SASVic is taking to the election.
- Take a vote by show of ‘virtual hands’ on which idea you’d like to prioritise
- Report writing

Authority Commitment

This key element is the ‘glue’ that makes the project work by providing a clear incentive for participation. We recommend the following commitment is made:

The CEO of SASVic will make the leading recommendation as selected by the panel a feature of their election advocacy and take this idea to the leaders of all political parties in the lead-up to the 2026 Victorian State election.

07 Milestones and key tasks*:

May 2025:

- Begin preparing baseline information kit v1 (discussion paper)
- Brief media team on the project to give them time to devise a strategy and media assets
- Apply for grant funding
- Commence Consul platform development

June 2025:

- Brief member organisations on the project – June 10 meeting. You may wish to pre-circulate this document in advance.
- Circulate invitations to jurors. Ensure SASVic website can receive RSVPs.
- Software testing and trial
- Discussion paper v2

September 2025

- Panel selection confirmation process and completion
- Final sign-off / publish the discussion paper

August / September 2025:

- Member networks to notify victim survivors about the pre-launch of the online engagement phase
- Pre-launch of the online engagement website goes live with the discussion paper for two weeks.

October / November 2025

- Media campaign goes live calling for submissions from the general community. Online engagement phase continues for 4-6 weeks with regular media calls to maintain momentum.
- SASVic to monitor submissions as they come in
- Online engagement phase closes.
- Panel receives the discussion paper and digital access to all submissions with names redacted (hard or soft copies).

Meeting One – Panel meeting 1 (date February 2026)

Meeting two – Panel meeting 2 (date two weeks after meeting one)

Meeting three – Panel meeting 3 (date two weeks after meeting two)

+ within 30 days (Feb/ March 2026):

- SASVic accepts the recommendation of the panel and goes public with its acceptance and response.
- Finalise payments if required.

08 Appendices

Appendix 1: Potential structure of Panel RSVP nomination form

Name (for verification purposes only)	
Do you wish to nominate for the SAS Victoria Community Priorities Panel?	
Age (by range)	
Postcode	
Phone number	
Email	
Do you identify as...? (mark all that apply to you): Female Male Non-binary Aboriginal and / or Torres Strait Islander From the LGBTQI community Having a disability Culturally Linguistically Diverse Prefer not to say Other	
What interests you in joining the Victim Survivor Community Priorities Panel? (200 words max)	
Would you like to be contacted by SASVic about other advocacy opportunities?	
Do you wish to receive further communications from SAS Victoria about our events, services and advocacy? Y/N	

Appendix 2 Consul platform user registration

Username (public)	
Email (not published)	
Password	
Confirm password	

Privacy note: (to be written by SASVic and published with this registration form).