

Strategic Plan 2024-2028

The Victorian Bar



Overview

This strategic plan sets out the direction for the Victorian Bar (**VicBar**) over the next four years. The plan will help to shape the work of the Bar Council to achieve our vision and purpose.

The plan was developed in consultation with members and other interested parties, across the legal profession, clients, government and the judiciary.

VicBar is a body of independent advocates, who serve the administration of justice and the rule of law by providing frank and fearless advice and advocacy. This fact is critical to the identity of VicBar, and each of its member barristers. The strategy set out in this strategic plan uses VicBar's independence as a touchstone by which all other strategic objectives are informed and achieved.

This strategy will support VicBar to be responsive to member feedback by delivering services that members use and value. The plan will help VicBar to attract and develop talented members to foster excellence and enhance performance. The plan will also support VicBar's efforts to draw on the expertise of members to influence policy, legislation and the justice system.

The plan aims to position VicBar to address the challenges and take advantage of the opportunities presented by a rapidly changing legal market, so that VicBar and its members thrive, now and into the future.

Vision

Independence, excellence, collegiality, leadership, growth

Purpose

To ensure VicBar and its members thrive, now and into the future

Objectives

To support and promote a strong and independent Bar

To foster excellence in and enhance the performance of Victorian Barristers

To maintain and increase the diversity of VicBar to reflect the community which it serves, in a manner consistent with VicBar’s standards of professional excellence

To provide services to members to support and enhance their practices

To ensure that members can build and maintain sustainable and successful practices both now and into the future

To provide leadership and a strong, authoritative voice

Strategies

- Raise awareness and understanding of the importance of independent, specialist advocates to the administration of justice and the proper functioning of the legal system
- Work effectively with the regulator in the regulation of barristers’ conduct

- Encourage professional excellence among members
- Support members’ ability to provide high quality legal services on competitive terms
- Maintain and enhance standards of professional conduct
- Attract, retain, and develop talented and diverse (that is, reflective of the community which VicBar serves) members

- Put in place programs and initiatives that support and increase diversity of VicBar, via the attraction, retention and progression of traditionally under-represented groups at VicBar (in a manner consistent with VicBar’s standards of professional excellence)
- Implement and observe VicBar’s Reconciliation Action Plan

- Enhance professional opportunities for all our members
- Listen to our members to design and deliver valuable services
- Represent the interests of members
- Broaden VicBar’s revenue streams
- Work with Barristers’ Chambers Limited to ensure physical and technical infrastructure supports members’ needs

- Raise awareness of barristers’ distinctive competencies and value as independent specialist advocates among clients, governments and the community
- Actively engage with clients, the legal profession and the community to position VicBar members as leading experts in the provision of legal services including alternative dispute resolution services
- Enable members to contribute to VicBar’s marketing
- Position VicBar to meet emerging challenges and prepare the profession for the future
- Build a closer collaborative relationship between VicBar and the clerks, to further the achievement of shared objectives

- Encourage professional excellence among members
- Support members’ ability to provide high quality legal services on competitive terms
- Maintain and enhance standards of professional conduct
- Attract, retain, and develop talented and diverse (that is, reflective of the community which VicBar serves) members

What success looks like

VicBar is recognised as being a crucial contributor to the administration of justice by the legal profession, governments and the community - which drives the achievement of VicBar’s other strategic goals

We attract and develop high quality barristers who thrive at VicBar

The diversity of our society is appropriately reflected in the membership of VicBar

We are responsive to member feedback and provide services that members use and value

Our members are able to develop and maintain sustainable and successful practices

We draw on members’ expertise and views to influence policy, legislation and the justice system

Core Enablers

Fit-for-purpose governance that promotes continuity and effective decision making

Proactive data collection and performance measurement

Our vision: *Independence, excellence, collegiality, leadership, growth*

Independence - VicBar is a strong and independent group of professionals who uphold the rule of law. Our work is built on the tradition of providing fearless legal representation and advice to all in the community. We provide impartial and objective representation and advocacy. The Bar Council will work to maintain and enhance the independence of VicBar.

Excellence - VicBar supports its members to provide legal representation and advocacy of the highest quality. We will provide members with services to develop skills, foster talent and promote a collegiate culture. The Bar Council will build the conditions to sustain high-quality performance across VicBar. We recognise that professional excellence encompasses a diverse range of styles and approaches.

Collegiality - VicBar is one Bar, united by respect for: (a) the administration of justice, (b) the rule of law and (c) each other, as frank and fearless advocates who play an integral role in the legal system.

Leadership - VicBar calls upon its unique blend of expertise and authority to lead and support efforts to advance the rule of law and improve access to, and the efficient administration of, justice. VicBar will work collaboratively with other legal bodies to best support the justice system in Victoria. The Bar Council will agree areas of legal reform that are strategic priorities. It will ensure that VicBar speaks with a single, authoritative voice on these issues.

Growth - VicBar will support its members to maintain and expand their practices by building awareness of barristers' (and members') distinctive competencies, developing marketing initiatives and leveraging the specialist skills of members to implement strategies and contribute to VicBar's marketing.

Our purpose: *To ensure VicBar and its members thrive now and into the future*

Fundamentally, the purpose of VicBar is to ensure its continued existence and relevance to the community and the administration of justice which it serves. VicBar's ability to do so depends, in turn, on its members being able to develop and maintain sustainable and successful practices.

Objective 1 - To support and promote a strong and independent VicBar

To achieve this objective the Bar Council will support VicBar members and the interests of VicBar by:

Raising awareness and understanding of the importance of independent, specialist advocates to the administration of justice and the proper functioning of the legal system amongst clients, the legal profession, courts, governments, communities and other external stakeholders.

Working effectively with the regulator in the regulation of barristers' conduct.

WHAT SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE | VicBar is recognised as being a crucial contributor to the administration of justice by the legal profession, governments and the community - which drives the achievement of VicBar's other strategic goals

The independence of VicBar is critical to its ongoing survival and success. In this context, 'independence' means that barristers of VicBar provide their services without fear or favour, as barristers are neither employed by nor beholden to any person or entity. Barristers are an important part of the legal system, and occupy a unique role between clients, instructing solicitors and the courts. This aspect of VicBar should be specifically promoted, as it is a key way in which barristers serve the administration of justice.

We will monitor the following indicators of this outcome:

- Share of market for legal services attributable to barristers, drawing on member feedback and data from barristers' clerks
- Growth in new and emerging markets for barristers' services, including advice and mediation, drawing on feedback from members and clients
- Changes to client perceptions of barristers and purchasing decisions, including how early barristers are briefed on legal issues
- Feedback from external stakeholders (including but not limited to clients, government and courts and tribunals) about how VicBar is perceived within the legal profession more broadly and within the community (specifically insofar as independence is concerned)

Objective 2 – To foster excellence in and enhance the performance of Victorian barristers

To achieve this objective the Bar Council will support VicBar members and the interests of VicBar by:

Encouraging professional excellence among members, including by continuing VicBar’s high-quality education and training programs and developing new programs to respond to areas of need or potential growth.

Supporting members’ ability to provide high quality legal services on competitive terms, including by ensuring that operational systems and processes work efficiently and serve the interests of barristers and their practices.

Maintaining and enhancing standards of professional conduct, including by promoting a collegiate culture that demands ethical practice, professional excellence, and regard for the interests of clients.

Attracting, retaining and developing talented and diverse (that is, reflective of the diversity of the community which VicBar serves) members, including by promoting VicBar as a desirable place to work, ensuring VicBar remains accessible to prospective and current members, and supporting junior barristers to access opportunities that set them up for future success.

WHAT SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE | We attract and develop high quality barristers who thrive at VicBar

We are committed to attracting and developing talent at VicBar and supporting our members to thrive. We will know we have been successful in this objective if talented lawyers from a range of professional and personal backgrounds continue to want to join VicBar, and if VicBar increasingly reflects the diversity of the community that we seek to serve. We will also know that we have been successful against this objective if we provide high quality legal training and education that enables members to improve performance. Success against this objective is closely related to the economic performance of barristers over time, which is recorded under objective 5.

We will monitor the following indicators of this outcome:

- Turnover and retention rates at VicBar
- Diversity of VicBar’s membership, drawing on Bar Roll data and member surveys
- Member feedback on the quality and relevance of VicBar’s CPD program
- VicBar’s reputation in the public domain, including by reference to feedback from external stakeholders.

Objective 3 - To maintain and increase the diversity of VicBar to reflect the community which it serves, in a manner consistent with VicBar's standards of professional excellence

This objective is fundamentally intended to ensure that VicBar remains relevant to the community which it serves, and thereby maintains its central role in the Victorian and Australian legal landscape. This objective does no more than remind VicBar that it can do more to encourage suitably qualified and talented people to join and remain in its ranks, and to make practice for all of its members enjoyable and rewarding, whilst maintaining the high standards of professional excellence that are enshrined in objective 2.

To achieve this objective the Bar Council will support VicBar members and the interests of VicBar by:

Putting in place programs and initiatives that support and increase the diversity of VicBar via the attraction, retention and progression of traditionally under-represented groups at VicBar (in a manner consistent with VicBar's standards of professional excellence).

Implementing and observing VicBar's Reconciliation Action Plan.

WHAT SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE | The diversity of our society is appropriately reflected in the membership of VicBar

We are committed to ensuring that VicBar appropriately reflects the diversity of the community which it serves, in a manner that is consistent with VicBar's standards of professional excellence (as expressed in objective 2).

We will monitor the following indicators of this outcome:

- Demographic data of members (for example, as obtained pursuant to the regular 'State of the Bar' surveys)
- Member feedback on culture at the Bar, including the inclusivity, diversity and accessibility of the working environment.

Objective 4 - To provide services to members to support and enhance their practices

To achieve this objective the Bar Council will support VicBar members and the interests of VicBar by:

Enhancing professional opportunities for all our members, including by developing briefing opportunities for barristers and supporting professional, collegiate and inclusive networks among barristers.

Listen to our members to design and deliver valuable services which best enable and support them to do their work in a high-pressured and increasingly digital environment.

Representing the interests of members, including by recognising and responding to the challenges facing VicBar and its diverse members.

Broadening revenue streams, by identifying potential opportunities for revenue growth to supplement, and lessen reliance on, member subscriptions.

Working with Barristers' Chambers Limited to ensure physical and technical infrastructure supports members' needs, including by ensuring that upgrades to built environments support effective practice, involve limited disruption of barristers' work and continue to meet barristers' diverse needs.

WHAT SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE | We are responsive to member feedback and provide services that members use and value

We are committed to ensuring that our members have access to relevant, valuable services which support and enhance their practices. We will know we have been successful in delivering on this objective if barristers use the services that we provide and are satisfied with their quality.

We will monitor the following indicators of this outcome:

- Uptake of services by members
- Member feedback on relevance and quality of services provided by VicBar
- Responsiveness of VicBar to member feedback, in improving existing services and delivering new services
- Member feedback on culture at VicBar, including the inclusivity, collegiality, diversity and accessibility of the working environment.

Objective 5 - To ensure that members can build and maintain sustainable and successful practices both now and into the future

To achieve this objective the Bar Council will support VicBar members and the interests of VicBar by:

Raising awareness of VicBar members' distinctive competencies and value as independent specialist advocates, among clients, governments and the community, focusing on advocacy skills, independence of advice, specialist legal expertise and cost-effective provision of legal services.

Actively engaging with clients to position VicBar members as leading experts in the provision of legal services, including alternative dispute resolution services, including through engaging with clients to understand clients' perceptions of barristers and the factors that influence decisions to brief barristers.

Enabling members to contribute to VicBar's marketing by building marketing and business development competency through training programs and supporting members to demonstrate the value of engaging with VicBar.

Positioning VicBar to meet emerging challenges and preparing the profession for the future, including by researching trends and aligning professional opportunities and member services to align with current and emerging trends.

Building a closer collaborative relationship between VicBar and the clerks, to further the achievement of shared objectives.

WHAT SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE | Our members are able to develop and maintain sustainable and successful practices

The success of VicBar in turn depends on the ability of its members to develop and maintain sustainable and successful practices. The market for legal services is increasingly competitive. VicBar aims to address the competitive pressures facing individual barristers and VicBar by proactively developing the market for barristers' services and empowering members to contribute to these efforts. This objective is future-focused; we are concerned both with advocacy in Court (in which barristers are specialists), as well as new and emerging markets where barristers' skills may be more effectively used. We will know we have been successful if economic performance of VicBar improves relative to the broader market for legal services, through greater value and/or volume of legal briefs, and if members are satisfied that they are able to develop and maintain sustainable and successful practices.

We will monitor the following indicators of this outcome:

- Share of market for legal services attributable to barristers, drawing on member feedback and data from barristers' clerks
- Growth in new and emerging markets for barristers' services, including advice and mediation, drawing on feedback from members and clients
- Changes to client perceptions of barristers and purchasing decisions, including how early barristers are briefed on legal issues
- Change in financial performance of individual barristers over time, drawing on Bar Roll data and member feedback
- Member feedback about satisfaction with their practices (in terms of quality, type and quantity of work in their chosen area of practice)
- Income and years' call statistics for VicBar, measured over time (for example, in the regular 'State of the Bar' surveys, as informed by 'exit interview' data collected from barristers who choose to leave VicBar)

Objective 6 - To provide leadership and a strong, authoritative voice

To achieve this objective the Bar Council will support VicBar members and the interests of VicBar by:

Developing and maintaining strategic relationships to maintain and strengthen VicBar's independence by recognising and responding to external challenges that could pose a threat to the institution's core strengths.

Working collaboratively to safeguard the rule of law, as well as improving access to and the efficient administration of justice.

Identifying strategic priorities for the provision of expert input and leadership, including on law reform proposals.

Improving and strengthening co-regulation by working closely with the Victorian Legal Services Board and Commissioner to ensure that regulation of barristers best supports independence, high standards of professional conduct and effective administration of justice.

Supporting members to provide high quality pro bono advice and representation, including by working with Justice Connect to administer the Pro Bono Scheme and working with courts to improve pro bono referrals.

WHAT SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE | We draw on members' expertise and views to influence policy, legislation and the justice system

VicBar is committed to advancing the rule of law and access to justice. We do this by speaking out on important legal issues in the public arena and contributing to law reform proposals. We also set standards to regulate the conduct of barristers and encourage our members to contribute to fair and equal justice for all through pro bono work. We will know we have been successful against this objective when our submissions draw effectively on expertise of members, are targeted in nature, and ultimately are reflected in policy and legislation. A key element of success is the extent to which we work collaboratively and strategically with partner organisations in the sector to promote a more effective and accessible justice system.

We will monitor the following indicators of this outcome:

- Feedback from Government about VicBar's influence on policy and law reform
- Member feedback about how effectively they are consulted on VicBar submissions and public statements
- Feedback from external organisations about how effectively VicBar collaborates
- Use of structured processes and tools (e.g. Public Statements policy) to identify appropriate legal issues to speak publicly about
- Amount of pro bono work undertaken by members and number of barristers who are part of pro bono schemes.

Core enablers of our strategy

To deliver on our vision, purpose and the four objectives that underpin the strategic plan, VicBar will invest in its organisational capabilities over the next four years. We will prioritise developing and maintaining fit-for-purpose governance that promotes continuity and effective decision making and a proactive approach to data collection and performance measurement.

Fit-for-purpose governance that promotes continuity and effective decision making

VicBar will promote governance structures and processes that support effective decision making and sustain continuity across the life of the plan regardless of leadership changes in the Bar Council.

Proactive data collection and performance measurement

VicBar will focus on more proactive, purposeful and efficient data collection to measure our performance against the plan over the next four years.