

REACH OUT

How to pass
the baton to
new members



THE PRICE OF LIBERTY



IS ETERNAL VIGILANCE



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RAY JAMES OAM
PRESIDENT, RSL NSW

HONOURING THE PAST; SHAPING THE FUTURE

To ensure the future of RSL NSW, our organisation must welcome younger members who can carry the baton.

RSL NSW is facing its greatest challenge: ensuring we, as a state-wide organisation, have the ability to continue our vital task into the future. As a not-for-profit, we need more members to reach out to all veterans and families, and to tell them who we are, what we stand for and what we do to support them.

With more members, we have a stronger voice for our lobbying on behalf of the veteran community. And when I speak with sub-Branches, the most common thing I hear is “We need more members to volunteer and hold office. How can we get more members?”.

The need for action is urgent, and this urgency informs the third goal in our Strategic Plan 2021-26: *Grow membership to support each other and have fun, and help all veterans and their families in need.*

Consider that less than 10% of RSL NSW’s 26,160 members are under the age of 55 and fewer than 1000 are under 39. Around 89% of current members are in the Boomer

or Builder generations, and 32% are over the age of the average life expectancy for Australian men.

Without a shift in our focus to ensure younger veterans feel welcomed and valued within our organisation, in 15 years the RSL in NSW will no longer be viable as a member-based organisation. Veterans will lose a powerful support mechanism and a community in which they feel valued and understood.

This guide offers practical advice to help sub-Branches offer young veterans the support and respect they have earned. It highlights the steps three sub-Branches – out of many who have changed their approaches – are taking to bring younger veterans into our community to carry the organisation forward for another 100 years and more.

Please join me on this important journey.



THE CASE FOR CHANGE

Declining membership has reduced RSL NSW's influence, left fewer members to support veterans and their families across the state, and damaged our ability to fundraise.

The organisation exists to support veterans and their families by connecting them with people who share their experiences, creating opportunities for mateship and recreation, as well as commemorating service and advocating for their needs as the state's leading voice of veterans. We also assist veterans and their families by connecting them to services to improve their wellbeing.

The majority of these vital services are delivered via sub-Branches. Without new members we won't be able to continue delivering these throughout the state, or advocating for veterans with the strong voice of a large and influential membership.

We have a vision – to ensure that by 2026 every veteran knows what we stand for and what we do, and wants to be a member. To turn our vision into reality, we need to evolve. Research from 2021 showed that less than 10% of our 26,160 members are under the age of

55. One in three veterans under 50 doesn't know there's a difference between RSL Clubs, Diggers Clubs and Memorial Clubs, and the not-for-profit veteran support organisation RSL NSW. Only 17% of veterans under 50 believe sub-Branches are welcoming to them. Less than half want to be part of a sub-Branch.

These perceptions significantly impact our relevance to younger veterans. They have contributed to a steep decline in membership and decreased our lobbying power, resulted in fewer members being present in communities to provide support, and damaged our ability to fundraise.

There is an opportunity to dramatically increase membership and to create far greater clarity around our purpose and what we stand for.

Our vision and the initiatives we have put in place to turn it into a reality are compelling – younger veterans have seized on it and are more are willing to join? But we must work

consistently together to foster and promote the vision, with agreed values across the organisation and united efforts.

One in three veterans under 50 doesn't know the difference between RSL Clubs and RSL sub-Branches.



✓ Younger veterans told us they want to be around others in the veteran community.



▲ Veterans under 50 want to preserve and honour tradition.

“
Our vision is to ensure that by 2026 every veteran knows what we stand for and what we do, and wants to be a member.

In our research, younger veterans also told us they:



Don't join organisations

as willingly as those in older generations, instead preferring to first see evidence of their value and purpose



Use social media

to generate influence and prefer to interact with other people online rather than in-person, though they also value face-to-face relationships



Are action-oriented, want practical information, want to preserve and honour, and avoid change for the sake of it



Are interested in innovation, DIY projects and working with their hands



Want to have an impact, create change and make things better



Are interested in being with their community and can feel out of place around people who are not veterans



Others are filling the gap

In the gap created by the perceptions and attitudes outlined in the previous section, and by other influences including those revealed in recent testimonies to the Defence and Veteran Suicide Royal Commission, thousands of small and fast-moving Ex-Service Organisations (ESOs) and charities have appeared.

Some of these organisations provide the online camaraderie and support desired by younger veterans. These ESOs, using virtual membership to strengthen their voice, are seen by policymakers as a clear link to modern-day veterans.

Many of these services are not membership-based, they simply deliver a service or

connect veterans with services – including with RSL NSW services such as claims advocacy. Exiting or retiring ADF personnel, therefore, do not join these organisations.

The community, membership and mateship offered by the RSL then, is unique and powerful as long as it is presented in the right way. This differentiation from newer ESOs is a powerful tool the RSL needs to consider, understand and express clearly.

A similarly powerful tool is the scale and reach the RSL has developed in Australia. The scope of the RSL brand – with more than 335 sub-Branches in NSW alone – lends itself naturally to leadership in all veteran-related areas. But this is only true if that leadership is backed up by a united front.

The answer lies in sub-Branches

And so we come to the vital nature of sub-Branches. While ANZAC House is responsible for the back-of-house, sub-Branches are at the centre of providing commemoration, welfare, mateship and advocacy.

The population density and socio-economic nature of the areas in which sub-Branches operate – rather than the proportion of veterans living in the local area who may need assistance and support – greatly influence sub-Branches' financial security.

Some regional sub-Branches have become financially unsustainable while others in heavily populated, wealthy areas have benefited from increases in property values to the point where they no longer need to fundraise at all.

As a result, more than 80% of the wealth of RSL sub-Branches is held by less than 20% of those sub-Branches. This makes little sense for an organisation dedicated to serving all veterans, rather than just the veterans in certain areas.

All of this is happening at a time when it is critical that we maintain our services for veterans and their families right across NSW.

With a proud history and enormous brand recognition, RSL NSW must re-assert itself as a leader for the veteran community across the state. This requires collaboration and trust.

It's no less than what we have always promised. And it's no less than all veterans – and their families – deserve.

HOW NABIAC ALMOST DOUBLED ITS MEMBERSHIP



We're a tiny sub-Branch - we had just 16 members. But over a four-week period we added 10 new members as a result of a new sports program. The program is part of the RSL NSW Sports and Recreation Program Pilot, an initiative of the RSL NSW Strategic Plan 2021-26, and I've been helping establish the pilot with a series of activities, challenges and competitions within our district and the surrounding districts.

We have group gym classes with an exercise physiologist. We have Zumba and Pilates. We have walks, and are organising fishing and paddle boarding. It's not just for the veterans but also for their families, their children and grandchildren. These events are free, all provided by RSL NSW.

When we began promoting the sports program on Facebook, the interest was massive. Everybody wanted to be a part of it. We started with a golf day and some gym classes, and it just took off. It motivated

younger veterans to get involved and join the sub-Branch. Even if Nabiac wasn't the closest to their homes, we were the sub-Branch that had reached out to them.

One Afghanistan veteran who's about 30 loved the idea and spread the word around his mates - it snowballed and we reached veterans in the community we hadn't known before.

The big idea for the future is to build it into a state-wide sporting competition that takes place before the annual RSL NSW State Congress.

For the moment, it has been a great success not just because of the dramatic increase in membership and the engagement of younger veterans, but also because it gave several veterans a reason to break out of their isolated lives to take part. It gives their partners an entirely new network, too.



ARTHUR CHAPMAN
PRESIDENT, NABIAC
SUB-BRANCH



RSL NSW is currently piloting a Sport and Recreation Program, with the Nabiac RSL sub-Branch and others. Find out more about the pilot, and see ideas for your sub-Branch to reach new members through sports and activities.



THE ROLE OF SUB-BRANCHES IN CHANGE

For the League to achieve the necessary change, sub-Branches must play an integral role. After all, sub-Branches are the lifeblood of the organisation.

The change program outlined in the RSL NSW Strategic Plan 2021-26 will be driven at state level, providing support to sub-Branches.

This support is vital. After all, if sub-Branches are not engaged in the process, the desired outcome will not be achieved. The extensive consultation period that preceded the release of the plan assured the Board that the majority of members want to realise the plan's vision, and make changes so the League is even stronger and more relevant for future generations than it was in the past.

In a recent survey of RSL NSW members, fewer than 8% of respondents did not agree that RSL NSW should implement the initiatives of the Strategic Plan to ensure that by 2026 every veteran in NSW understands what the RSL stands for and what it does, and wants to be involved as a member.

RSL NSW has been tasked by members with getting on with implementation, and with supporting sub-Branches to do so as well.



How sub-Branches are factored into the Strategic Plan

There are six core goals of the RSL NSW Strategic Plan. Each has detailed initiatives mapped to achieve it, is budgeted for and has success measures pre-defined.

Those goals are:

- 1** Stand for veterans and their families
- 2** Commemorate and pay respect
- 3** Grow membership to support each other and have fun, and help all veterans and their families in need
- 4** Through collaboration and support, connect veterans and their families to services
- 5** Implement an optimised and sustainable operating and business model
- 6** Tell our story so everyone knows what we do and why we do it

Initiatives under Goal 1, for example, include trained Wellbeing Support Officers being available in every RSL NSW sub-Branch across the state, and every sub-Branch having the capacity to provide connection to camaraderie, support and transition services.

Each other goal has similarly specific measurables and deliverables at sub-Branch level, as well as at state and, often, national level.

HOW MOSMAN GAINED 25 NEW MEMBERS AND A NEW FUTURE

I'd been a little apprehensive about being involved with the sub-Branch. I thought it was just the club. But in 2017 I started to come along to 90-minute, monthly meetings for several months. There were no outcomes at these meetings, just formalities.

In 2020 a new President was elected, retired Commander Peter Watson. He said he wanted younger veterans to be involved. I nominated as Vice President and he was a mentor for me. After two years Peter stepped down and I became President. He is now my Vice President.

We have engaged younger veterans and ADF members by participating in commemoration services and events that they attend. This year, that's included a service commemorating 80 years since the Japanese Midget Submarine Attack on Sydney Harbour, and another marking 80 years since the fall of Singapore.

At these events, we wear our RSL pins, and we speak with the serving members and young veterans we see, finding common experiences and continuing the conversation after the event to get them to a sub-Branch meeting or event.

Those meetings and events are enjoyable, interesting and accessible for all generations.



"Instead of a meeting every second month, book a table at a local cafe during the day and invite members to come along. Make children welcome and suggest members bring other veterans they know."

We recently had a dinner where a marine archaeologist spoke about the Japanese midget submarine that was found in 2006 off the Northern Beaches, and sometimes we catch up during the day in cafes so people can chat. Our meetings are action-oriented – what are our goals and what will we achieve next?

This has all prompted the younger veterans to join. Within six weeks, we went from 50 members to 75. We now have support from volunteers and a deeply collaborative culture.

If I could address other sub-Branches, I'd ask them what cadet units and schools they are affiliated with. What non-RSL commemoration and community events do they attend and participate in? How many people do they approach and speak with at those events? How do they keep that dialogue with young veterans going after the events?

Start small and go from there. Create a social media account. Share the content that's on the RSL NSW website to make it easy for new members to find out more about the League and join. Get out among the community to let them know you're honoured to provide support to all veterans and their families.



**ALAN TONER
PRESIDENT, MOSMAN
SUB-BRANCH**



Scan the QR code to find out how your sub-Branch can access a Member Recruitment Toolkit with resources to help you reach out to veterans in your local community.



HOW TO CREATE CHANGE

To create change, we first need to deeply understand the people we plan to reach and support.

Who are young veterans? What do they want and need? What is important to them? What do they value and what do they want from the RSL?

In 2021, RSL NSW commissioned research around perceptions of the RSL brand and to better understand all ADF members, serving and non-serving. What came out of that project was a clear picture of modern veterans and their needs.

This research helped confirm the fact that RSL NSW must clearly delineate itself from RSL Clubs - only 51% of veterans under the age of 50 know that RSL NSW is a not-for-profit, member-based charity, separate to RSL Clubs.

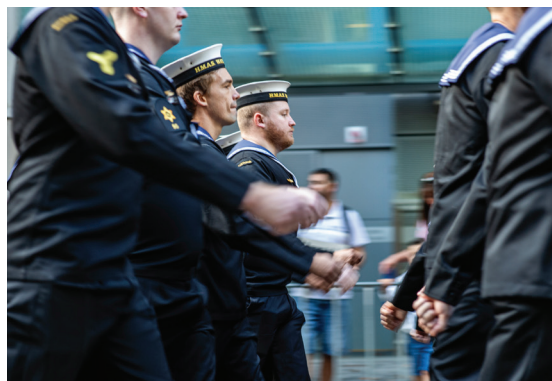
This finding was accompanied by comments that emphasise the importance of clarifying the distinction. One respondent said: "I don't care about having a beer and gambling when I'm trying to see an advocate".

Others, conflating the two organisations, expressed anger and betrayal at the idea that RSL NSW would promote poker machines, gambling and alcohol.

The research told us we must refer to RSL NSW as a 'not-for-profit' at every given chance. It said we must explain as often as possible that what we do is different from what RSL clubs do. And it made it clear that sub-Branches must allow modern veterans to take leading roles, as the Mosman sub-Branch did (see page 10).

The research provided bad news around younger veterans' perceptions of RSL's relevance - covered in previous chapters.

But it also revealed that the services and support RSL NSW provides are necessary and valuable.



SERVICES AND SUPPORT NEEDED

81% of those under 50 would like to hear more about services and support available to them.

Services provided by RSL NSW's charity partner RSL LifeCare are in high demand from those under 50:

66%

need or will need mental health support

73%

need or will need DVA claims help

These services can help establish a trusted relationship with RSL NSW.

Veterans of all ages told us that the two most important things for RSL NSW to focus on are:



Transition support to lead a successful life after ADF



Supporting veteran families

35% of current members under 50 also want to play key roles within their sub-Branches.

"To be relevant to younger veterans, RSL NSW – like the Australian War Memorial – will need to create room for the new generation of soldiers and their stories."

Get to know young veterans

The research included in-depth interviews with younger veterans, and their partners and families. They told us:

- They still hope to help and serve, and have a positive impact.
- They hate asking for help. We need to let them know it's okay to get assistance or to receive compensation.
- They are action-oriented, and want practical, how-to information without politics.
- They are traditional, and want to preserve and honour. They are also open-minded and interested in innovation.
- They want to be with people who understand them, and say their local RSL sub-Branch should be a place they fit in.

- They might live some of their lives online, but they still value face-to-face. They are 'people people'.
- They are sceptical, and therefore need to see evidence of the impact of RSL NSW on the lives of veterans and their families.
- For some, the ADF is all they know. The ADF and its unique culture has consumed a large portion of their lives. For some, it still does.
- They could absolutely benefit from RSL services. From DVA claims assistance and employment or education help, to finding their community and sharing what they have to offer.

As they like to serve and to add value to society, modern veterans are happy to volunteer. They're motivated by meeting new people, making friends, learning skills, teaching

their skills to others, being among those who have had similar experiences, and teaching the public about matters related to veterans.

They have the time and the willingness to come on board and help out. They just need the motivation.

Unsurprisingly, modern veterans crave the emotional support that comes through a connection with others.

In fact, many urgently require some kind of support as they struggle with issues around mental health, physical health and self-image, employment, housing, addictions, DVA claims and more.

The figures below are from our 2021 veteran research, based on 700 respondents.



71% use, need or are likely to need DVA claims assistance.



59% use, need or are likely to need mental health assistance.



47% of veterans under 50 are interested in education scholarships.



26% use, need or are likely to need employment assistance.



17% use, need or are likely to need housing assistance, increasing to 31% among single veterans.

“They have no room for movers and shakers, for younger members to come in with new ideas. They don’t want anything outside the norm they haven’t done before. Younger voices aren’t heard.”

“Some sub-Branches have turned away people who haven’t gone overseas. To me a veteran is anyone who’s served one day.”

The most important figure for RSL NSW sub-Branches to recognise is 81%. That’s the percentage of veterans under 50 who would like to hear more about services and support available to them.

Missing: A warm welcome

We’re letting the majority of young veterans and their families in our communities down. Just 17% of veterans under 50 agree that RSL NSW sub-Branches are welcoming to younger veterans.

Stories we heard during our interviews and research highlighted ways younger veterans see some sub-Branches as letting them down or excluding them, leaving a bad first impression. In several instances, younger veterans told us sub-Branches had:

- Not considered their suggestions for events or speakers
- Showed no interest in receiving war memorabilia



“To attract members under 50, we must abandon prehistoric attitudes and intergenerational animosity, and acknowledge that our generation must now hand over the reins, and accept that younger generations have different vision and different needs. Change is inevitable. Extraordinary change is possible. Be prepared to impart wisdom but not demand that the past prevail.”

- Not replied to messages or returned calls
- Displayed a culture that said ‘we had it harder back in the day’
- Been dismissive and cautious of younger prospective members

On an individual basis these events may seem small – but behind each is a veteran who was slighted enough to remember and speak about the interaction, and who may be seeking assistance or offering to provide assistance to others. Such treatment indicated to them that they were not relevant or welcome.

How sub-Branches can turn perceptions around

The research says there are several ways to better engage younger veterans and their families.

This includes, simply enough, being welcoming and treating younger veterans

with respect. It means actively seeking them out and inviting them to join – of course this can be complex.

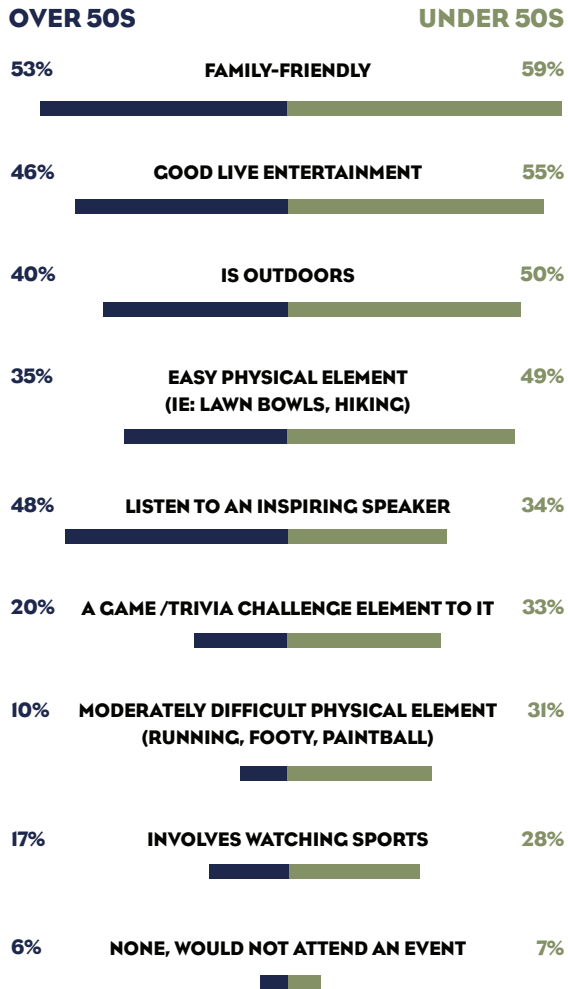
It may involve seeking a new level of flexibility and open-mindedness. It will involve being open to hearing new ideas and allowing the sub-Branch to run with some of those ideas.

Being present at local events that younger veterans attend – markets, transition seminars and employment fairs, sports outings, paintball challenges, bowls days – is vital, as is organising and publicising events that younger veterans want to attend.

To the right is a breakdown of the elements veterans told us they want from events.

Success – building a solid future – begins with one event that attracts the attention and interest of younger veterans, who begin to develop a new perception of what the RSL, and their local sub-Branch, could mean to them.

THE EVENTS YOUNG VETERANS WANT



HOW CORRIMAL WELCOMES NEW MEMBERS

Our focus has been on getting the basics right, because you can't build a skyscraper from the 42nd floor. You have to get the foundations right.

How we turn that into action in the sub-Branch is, first and foremost, to be very welcoming. We don't judge people. We don't put any preconditions on membership.

We provide to all veterans a safe place to come in, sit down, and have a chat and a cup of coffee. We don't turn people away.

Previously there was a vetting process and the question would be asked, 'What can you do for the sub-Branch?'. That's no longer the case.

Now, the question we ask is 'What can the sub-Branch do for you?'. Sub-Branches simply have to be willing to adapt and to listen.

Last week, we had three blokes turn up and they all signed up. If you're a veteran, that's it - you can join. We don't judge.

Our membership is now steadily increasing, which is a very good sign that what we're doing is right.



MORRIE GALLINA
PRESIDENT, CORRIMAL
SUB-BRANCH

Need help organising an event to attract new members?



Download our event guide - including templates for social media posts, email invitations, poster templates and a handy event planning checklist.



IT'S TIME: CHAMPION CHANGE

Now is the time to challenge the status quo – the time for momentous change. And that starts with action in sub-Branches, by members.

In partnership with RSL sub-Branches across the state, the team in ANZAC House is focused on ensuring all veterans and their families understand what the not-for-profit veterans' organisation RSL is and stands for, and want to be part of it.

Every member has a part to play – here's yours >>



RSL
NSW



See the change and be the change

Get inspiration and resources to lead change in your sub-Branch. Sign up for monthly emails and we'll send your sub-Branch a Member Recruitment Toolkit including promotional material.



rslnsw.org.au



1300 679 775



Spread the word about joining

Help ensure the League is around to support veterans and their families for years to come. If you know a current serving member or veteran of the ADF, invite them to join RSL NSW.

Membership is free and it takes less than five minutes to apply online.

