



FOOD IS FREE INC. BOARD ANNUAL REPORT 2021

Together We Can Create Change

Prepared by Lou Ridsdale, Founder/Director

& Kate Fowler, Chair

Food Is Free Inc.

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PO BOX 1R, REDAN, VIC, 3350 ABN: 57 982 646 581

2021

2021 was undeniably a very tricky year. The bulk of it was spent in lockdowns for Regional Victoria, impacting our volunteers and workshops/events, which were all pretty much sidelined for the year.

It's no surprise then that financially, it hit us. It resulted in us halving our annual income, usually generated via project & very limited operational grants, and workshops. But the glimmer of hope amongst that gloomy financial picture was that we doubled our donations (without even having a solid fundraising plan in place yet!).

We dearly missed delivering our food security workshops, as food security education is our core purpose. Meaning that for most of the year, many of our community attendees missed out on the enjoyment of the community connections they bring, plus of course, the learnings. We know just how impactful our workshops can be. We know this from the feedback we have received from past workshops, as well as the evidence we saw by just how many community members attended the steady flow of 2019 workshops. Not being able to host them, was sincerely hard for us.

Whilst the COVID-19 pandemic meant we were thrown into an endless state of various lockdowns, restrictions, and of course having to rest our volunteers for their safety, and that of our community, we did manage to seize the opportunity of "downtime" to deep dive into strategic planning.

We are also very pleased to report that we also built a brand-new team of members to assist with governance. Formerly called the Committee, and now called the Board, the concentrated effort plus recruitment time really paid off in spades. We can confidently forge into the future with a well skilled team to deliver this new strategic vision.

Once settled in during early months of 2021, the Board have gone into overdrive and are delivering some truly amazing work. They are honing their time, passion, skill set, and expertise into effective governance. Each have been given a domain to handle (e.g., merch, policy, risk, sustainability, diversity etc. This coupled with a solid financial future pathway channelled via our freshly written and finely honed 5-year+ strategic plan.

We feel this was our greatest achievement for 2021.

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Stepping back, also enabled us to find time to concentrate more on our weaknesses. The most glaringly obvious one was being able to acknowledge that in the past we clearly have lacked financial stability and therefore sustainability (a mere case of that being the case at the time, but certainly not our 'forever plan'). With rapid growth in so many areas, including increased visitors, we now thankfully have a more insightful financial plan having carved time to address this.

Exciting new merchandise lines are being created as we write this report, along with a brand-new website (fully funded via a grant) to sell them designed by Stoke Design Co. We will also sell merch at monthly Green Space market stalls and at our events in the future. We are also establishing a Friends Of Food Is Free Inc. program, to draw in more money and brand awareness.

The website will not only host a shop to sell the merch, but additionally have an inbuilt portal for volunteers training + potential vols sign ups (reducing the workload of our Vols Manager), plus an online education portal to bring in further revenue plus teach a wider audience all about the joys of self-sufficiency and gardening.

Not only will the new website bring a better user experience, but it will also bring us the money needed to secure stability, plus a pathway to start employing staff members (starting with Director/Founder Lou's role). The website will look better for PR and awareness purposes, plus grant perspective as well.

A great portion of our time in 2021 was spent adjusting to restrictions plus lockdowns and communicating this to our volunteers and visitors. Whilst our own COVID safe plan to return to COVID Normal settings, is also being thrashed out with our very own Board member assigned as our COVID Officer.

GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE & REPORTING

Food Is Free Inc. formed committee on 3 April 2016 and was recognised as an Incorporated Association on 4 April 2016 and is incorporated under the Associations Incorporations Reform Act of 2012. Food Is Free Inc. was registered by the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits committee officially as a charity on 4th April 2018.

The organisational financial year ends on 30 Sept annually. Annual AGM is held on second Thursday of October. This coincides with Food Is Free Laneway's birthday on 18 October. An audited financial report is prepared by an external accounting firm, and presented to both

Board for approval, and once approved submitted to the ACNC along with our Annual Information Statement (AIS).

Historically, Board members receive a monthly Directors Report, Financial Reports (P&L plus bank account amounts update, and when projects being undertaken - a budget report). In 2021 we introduced a Board Members reporting function, whereby each Board Member is now required to submit a monthly report for both project updates, but also transparency and better understanding of each members' input.

Whilst we are unable to meet in person due to COVID-19 and restrictions/lockdowns, coupled with the fact we mostly operate outside of business hours for most Board members (due to day jobs/the role being voluntary), we have recently adopted new methods for swifter communications via Lateral Plains (mostly pro bono deal brokered by Lou).

Very soon all Board members will have an assigned FIF email address. We have been communicating via Slack for the past 18 months, but in time we will have a whole suite of online comms/meeting tools such as Teams, Google docs, SharePoint, etc., established for easier workflow/document storage, and improved communications, which have impaired us in the past.

This new system will not only greatly assist our workflow, but it will also be a great vehicle for our newly created 'Board Bubbles', which sees various Board members collaborating on projects (both short term and ongoing) to make the workload less for one person whilst enjoying the comradery of project work. Some Board members' domains dovetail each other's, hence, the need for collaborations. We will also investigate online project management tools such as Asana, Trello or Monday.com for greater project cohesion and timeframe/deadline setting.

POLICIES & PROCEDURES

Food Is Free Inc. are always revising and adding new policies and procedures to ensure good governance. These are also audited annually. We have an assigned Policy Officer for the first time in the history of Food Is Free Inc. Board, who is making her way through all existing policies, plus noting required future ones. A suite of procedures will be written in due course.

These are housed in the Food Is Free Inc. Committee Dropbox for now (soon to be in our newly introduced SharePoint).

A procedures manual is also currently being worked on for our volunteers.

Additionally, we are currently engaged in the yearlong Good Governance program hosted by Ballarat Regional Multicultural Council, which has assigned us a mentor (Nancy) to guide us on a better path of governance.

VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers are our absolute lifeblood. We are so indebted to their incredible work, and given the nature of our sites being outdoors, in all kinds of weather. In extreme weather conditions we always advise our volunteers to not perform their duties. Volunteer welfare is our number one aim.

Volunteers perform a variety of functions (Laneway is more focussed on tidying and maintenance of the site, whereas Green Space is food production/gardening and worm farm/compost orientated tasks). Laneway shifts are weekly, whereas Green Space are a mix of weekly/monthly. We also have a maintenance crew volunteers list which we suggest a job and have people volunteer when and if they can assist.

We are presently in the demarcation process of our volunteer team being in divisions (Seeds, Growhouse, Events/Markets, Laneway, Maintenance, Green Space, Waterers, and recruiting a Team Leader appointed to each group. This will take the workload pressure off Volunteer Manager and Director.

All Volunteers are given choice of role to fit with their lifestyle/commitment availability. Education of new skills is always encouraged, so the volunteer does not need to come with previous skills.

Volunteers go through an orientation first and then attend a training session for their specific role, and from there forwards attend their shifts solo (or as a family/duo/group if applies). Laneway vols are required to fill in attendance details in the vols diary in Laneway lockers. Green Space waterers post when they attend on a secret Facebook group page.

All Volunteers report to Virginia Wilson, our Volunteers Manager, who oversees recruitment, training, welfare, rostering and all other general volunteer details. She sometimes does this with Director/Founder Lou Ridsdale's guidance/assistance where needed, but generally works independently. We also have a Wellbeing Volunteer in place for any volunteer to approach when necessary, and also that person reaches out to any volunteer we know might be experiencing a hard time, offering support.

Our volunteer's work is conducted at either of our two sites (Food Is Free Laneway or Food Is Free Green Space), externally at their own home for roles such as: admin, graphics, fundraising, marketing, Board duties, or at events/community development programs we run based offsite.

Volunteers sign a Liability Release form after receiving a Food Is Free Inc. info document and undertaking their orientation session. Volunteers do not require a police check (except for Food Is Free Inc. Board Treasurer role), and any events such as Little Sprouts where volunteers are working directly with children requiring a valid Working With Children Check.

FINANCIALS

Food Is Free Inc isn't registered nor required to be registered for GST as we are presently a NFP with turnover under \$150,000 per year.*

*Size of charities :

Small - Less than \$250,000 annual revenue

Medium - between \$250,000 - \$1 million

Large – over \$1 million

To date Food Is Free Inc. has relied on grants and public donations for main income. As previously mentioned, we are now launching Friends Of Food Is Free Inc., Merch & other sales, Corporate/Business Sponsorship, Philanthropic opportunities and beyond (See Strategic Plan). For general annual operational costs, refer to Strategic Plan.

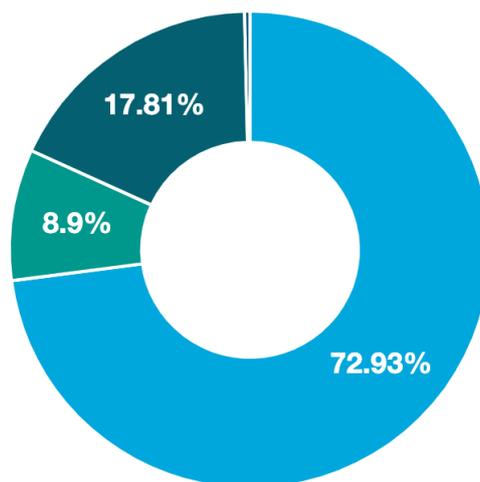
The biggest news in our financial arena for 2021 is that on 30 Sept we applied for DGR (via Findex), after a very lengthy process. Pending if we successfully secure it, we know it will open many more portals for donations from public plus businesses, allowing them donations over \$2 to be tax deductible. Equally, we will have more scope of grants to apply for given most require DGR status.

Financial overview

Financial information from the latest AIS.

Income ?

Total income \$58,492.00



- Total Gross Income From Government Grants
- Total Gross Income From Other Revenues
- Total Gross Income From Donations And Bequests
- Total Gross Income From Goods or Services
- Total Gross Income From Income Investments

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KEY STAKEHOLDERS

- City Of Ballarat (esp. Engaged Communities team and Health & Social Planning)
- Gabby Howlett from Findex (accounting)
- Luke Dunne from Heinz & Partners (pro bono lawyer)
- Luke Prato (Ballarat Insurance Brokers)
- Western Croquet Club
- Ballarat Action Climate Co-Operative
- City Of Ballarat Municipal Brass Band
- Ballarat Regional Multicultural Council (Rebecca Marsh/Ann Foley)
- Ballarat Community Health (Melissa Farrington/Healthy Lifestyle Team)
- DELWP (Grant Hull)
- Ballarat Water Cartage (Lisa Fitzpatrick)
- Diggers Club (Donna Morabito)
- Leigh Erickson, Stoke Design Co. (web designer)
- The Hidden Orchard (Ellen Burns)
- Ballarat Permaculture Guild (Steve Burns)
- Ballarat schools
- Ballarat Green Growers Group (Ballarat Community Garden, Lucas Community Garden, Nth Ballarat Community Garden, Ballarat Permaculture Guild, Food Is Free Inc.)

INSURANCE

All Food Is Free Inc. Board Members and Volunteers are covered under our annual Public Liability insurance, renewed annually in May through Ballarat Insurance Brokers. The multi-tiered insurance includes:

- **Management Liability Insurance:** Professional Risks to \$1,000,000
- **Business Insurance:** Limit of Liability (Public & Products) \$20,000, Property in Physical & Legal control limit \$250,000 and Property Damage Excess \$500
- **Personal Accident &/Or Sickness Insurance** (refer to policy)