

# Impact Case Study

## Beyond box-ticking: Creating Shared Value in Social Procurement



### Introduction and background

Dr Kevin Argus leads the Industry Engagement Project in the Graduate School of Business and Law. As part of this project, RMIT's Master of Business Administration (MBA) and Executive MBA (EMBA) programs include Work Integrated Learning marketing courses, where students learn in real situations via industry partnerships.

In 2020, 2015 RMIT Alumnus, James Natsis, CEO of Apricot Consulting, approached Dr Argus to explore the integrated learning potential of participating in his company's Shared Value Partnership (SVP) with design engineers Aurecon, construction business Transurban, and Ability Works, a social enterprise organisation specialising in disability and disadvantaged employment.

Dr Argus joined the Apricot Consulting SVP in 2020 as a full, active member. Dr Argus then engaged his EMBA Marketing students in a collaborative partnership project, inspired by the Victorian Government's Procurement Policy (VGPP).

Supported by research fellows, Dr Natalya Turkina and Associate Professor Joonas Keranen, the *Beyond box-ticking: Creating Shared Value in Social Procurement* project aimed to learn effective strategies from this SVP that would help Aurecon, Transurban and Ability Works to create sustainable opportunities to include Ability Works within their supply chains.

Developing these strategies would, in turn, help Ability Works to create opportunities for its clients to gain meaningful, sustainable, full-time employment.

The broader aim was to provide a best practice SVP framework to help construction industry organisations to deliver sustainable employment that creates meaningful social impact with the VGPP.

### The research

#### Data analysis and recommendations

For the *Beyond box-ticking* project, three groups of students gathered market intelligence and conducted strategic marketing planning. The groups then pitched their recommendations to the partnership stakeholders.

These recommendations consequently informed Ability Works' marketing plan, which incorporated short, medium and longer-term strategies suggested by the students.

As a result of the new strategies, Ability Works engaged in public relations activities which created significant media engagement and raised industry awareness about their workforce options.

They also expanded their core business beyond manufacturing to include a disability consultancy service, aligned with learnings from partner company, Aurecon.

#### Recommendations supporting an Ability Works/Aurecon collaboration

During lockdowns in 2020-21, Aurecon engaged diverse teams of junior engineering staff across their organisation in a human-centred design project. They engaged with Ability Works to identify new, unique opportunities for Ability Works to grow their business.

Aurecon staff reported that they'd learned what meaningful, sustainable social impact is and found value in contributing towards social impact for disability employees. They also extended their professional networks throughout the organisation.

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**What's next...**

## Funding support and/or institutional support

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The WIL marketing course at RMIT's Graduate School of Business and Law provided the initiative to engage in the collaborative research project through its approach of combining teaching with research and practice impact.

The Ability Works project was supported by members of the Apricot Consulting SVP, both financially and through in-kind support such as leadership training, networking and marketing communication services.

## Project outcomes

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As a result of Ability Works' new marketing plan and its work in partnership with Aurecon, Aurecon submitted a successful bid on a Department of Transport tender to design tram stops, employing Ability Works disability employee consultancy services.

This success enabled disability workers to contribute meaningfully to the design process.

The Department of Transport advised Aurecon that their inclusion of disability employees was unique and persuasive in winning the tender, as most tenders engage peak bodies, rather than directly engage with impacted persons.

Ability Works have since formally established and marketed their new disability and marginalised employee consultancy service.

### Roundtables

Three Shared Value Round Tables have been held. Dr Argus and Dr Turkina hosted the third on Social Impact at a Joint University of Melbourne/RMIT Moral Fairground Conference for RMIT's Business and Human Rights Centre in December 2021.

### Publications

A paper was presented at the ANZMAC 2021 conference:

- "Creating Shared Value Partnerships in B2B Markets", Keranen, Joonas; Turkina, Natalya; Argus, Kevin; Howe, John; Staples, Warren

### Media

- How students lead unis into the practical side of ethical thinking (Australian Financial Review, 29/9/2021)

### Awards and nominations

- The project won 2020 Social Traders, Partnership of the Year Award. The Award was featured in Transurban's AGM slide presentation by their CEO
- RMIT selected the project as its Industry nomination for AFR Awards
- Transurban funded a video case study, which is used in class and to leverage further developing of our industry engagement portfolio <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0I929lvkWoM>

## Overview of the impact

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The project has a significant and demonstrable impact on Ability Works and its mission to support people with disabilities to find meaningful, sustainable work services.

Ability Works CEO Sue Boyce said:

*"Of particular value for Ability Works employees is the Inclusive Design business unit launched with the assistance of Aurecon during Covid."*

*"This service offers greater insights for designers creating infrastructure, facilities, products, services and customer experiences. It also improves usability and accessibility and helps avoid costly design errors."*

*"For Ability Works, being able to offer its employees this type of work is right at the heart of its social mission; providing them with self-esteem and self-confidence when they are being asked for their insights into the design of Melbourne infrastructure."*

## Next steps

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This Beyond box-ticking project is being analysed by Dr Argus and research fellows Dr Turkina and Associate Professor Keranen to create papers for submission to two publications.

They are currently analysing qualitative data collected for a pilot research project conducted with partners Ability Works Australia, Aurecon, Transurban, and Apricot Consulting.

The research team is also developing an ARC Linkage Grant application, together with an international consortium, to fund a significant project for Social Impact, for projects impacted by the Government Social Procurement Frameworks in Australia. Partner organisations include Ability Works, Transurban, Aurecon, Trades Women Australia, Apricot Consulting, ICN and an advisory board, including Social Traders and Shared Value Project.

Partner academics include Professor John Howe and Dr Warren Staples (University of Melbourne), Dr Joanne Meehan (University of Liverpool, UK) and Professor Paavo Ritala (LUT University Finland).

Both projects have significant potential to generate novel, high-impact social, academic and business outcomes.