SVP Melbourne

The idea to set up a Social Venture Partners (SVP) chapter in Australia came from Margi Olson, a business consultant who divides her time between Boston, U.S. and Melbourne, Australia. Margi was formerly Dean of Business at the McCallum Graduate School at Bentley University in Boston, who had joined SVP's Boston chapter. During a period in her consulting career when she worked with non-profits in Melbourne, it became clear how much could be achieved in Australia's non-profit sector if SVP was established there.

By early 2013 Margi had gathered a critical mass of individuals committed to launching SVP in Melbourne — one of them was Catherina Toh, a lawyer with her own legal and regulatory compliance consulting practice working principally for the financial services industry, who became the chapter's founding chair. The venture philanthropy approach, which is at the heart of SVP practice, appealed to Catherina whose knowledge of private equity investments and fund management enabled her to make sense of an approach to philanthropy that 'values due diligence and an active contribution in kind, rather than just giving money.' Before she came across the SVP model, Catherina says her giving had been 'ad hoc rather than strategic', but SVP offered the 'opportunity to get involved with non-profits in a much more meaningful way, way beyond writing a cheque and not knowing what happened to the money.'

Catherina was joined by nine other founding members, drawn from the private and non-profit sectors. Robert Broadbent was winding back from a full-time career that had spanned science, education and health policy when he agreed to act as SVP Melbourne's executive director during the critical establishment phase. SVP set a target of recruiting 30 partners by the end of its first year of operation (growing to 80 in three years), with each partner pledging an annual donation of AU$5,000 (US$4,400), which is more or less on par with the U.S. chapter's practice.

The founders thought strategically about the kind of legal identity that would best fit the long-term goals of the chapter. They wanted the flexibility, once established, to set aside loan and equity capital for investing in social enterprises and giving grants to seed riskier, start-up non-profits. For these reasons the board are applying for a dual legal status — a public ancillary fund for tax deductible charitable donations, and to incorporate an operating company, without charitable tax deduction status, for investment. This requirement for investment and grant flexibility lies behind the decision not to operate SVP as a sub-fund within a community foundation, for as Catherina puts it, 'it's easy to get your money into a community foundation [in Australia] and get a tax deduction but it's very difficult to get it out given the strict rules about who you can give the funds to and how much you must disperse each year.' The partners intend to 'start small with just one investment in 2014', says Catherina, 'and ensure that we get as many of the partners involved as possible in the investment committee and our first shortlist of non-profits.'

One of SVP Melbourne's partners is ten20 Foundation, represented by CEO Seri Rankin. ten20 Foundation is a grantmaking trust with a 125-year history of serving Australia's most vulnerable young people[21]. Seri knows the venture philanthropy model well, having spent nine years with Social Venture Australia,

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21 ten20 Foundation was created in 2008 from GordonCare, a long-established operating foundation, when it refocused its mission from service delivery to prevention.

Australia's first institutional venture philanthropy fund. ten20 has been a strong advocate of SVP from the start, seeing a complementary fit in their missions. Seri views SVP as 'a great way of mobilising resources from a range of people with the ability to give AU$5,000, volunteer their professional skills, and who want to work with others for the benefit of their community.' Part of ten20's new mission focus is to fund the capacity of groups to collaborate in addressing complex social issues — sometimes called 'collective impact'. SVP Melbourne will focus initially on non-profits working with children and families in underserved sectors and communities, a decision influenced by its strategic partnership with ten20.