

# Hands On Learning Australia (HOLA)

Established in 1999, Hands On Learning Australia is a harm prevention charity that helps schools deliver best practice in-school programs for students most at risk of dropping out. Fourteen years ago HOLA began in one school; its methodology now runs in 24 Victorian schools and one Queensland school. The program is boosting student confidence, school attendance and retention. For more information go to: <http://handsonlearning.org.au>



Hands on Learning in action

## Governance

Hands On Learning Australia (HOLA) is an independent not-for-profit harm prevention charitable organisation. The governance structure of HOLA consists of two-tiers. There is a six member Board and a HOLA operations team. This includes the CEO and core staff of

about five full-time equivalents who work with school Hands On Learning method (HOL) teams.

Initially, the board membership evolved out of relations with Social Ventures Australia (SVA) who had worked closely with HOLA in its early days. An early function of the Board was to ensure that HOLA was able to receive tax deductible donations and transparently pass these

on to schools wishing to use HOL to support their disadvantaged students. HOLA is listed on the Harm Prevention Register, has Item 1 Deductible Gift Recipient Tax Status, and Tax Concession Charity status.

Having a Board also offered another way for supporters of HOLA to become closely engaged in the work. For HOLA and the schools it sought to support, formalising HOLA as a not-for-profit meant it could be the single point of contact, enabling philanthropics to reach many schools. It also meant HOLA became

the custodian of the methodology allowing it to maintain quality, continually review and refine the method in order to optimise its impact.

Over time, the membership of the Board has changed. One of the members, for example, is a former HOLA student. Another is a former senior education bureaucrat. These member perspectives help translate the HOLA strategy to key stakeholders and vice versa. Overall, Board members bring strategic, legal, accountability and passion perspectives to the work of HOLA. In addition, Her Excellency Quentin Bryce AC, Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia is their patron.

HOLA was developed in 1999. HOLA was founded in 2008 and is about to move into a full review of the Board and operations team: "A coming of age type of activity for HOLA," Russell Kerr, CEO of HOLA, remarks.

## Innovation

As a teacher at Frankston High School, Russell Kerr had been thinking about how to address the issues of student engagement. The not-for-profit organisation, 'Hands on Learning Australia', has evolved over a number of years. Its methodology acts to change the experience of learning at school for students. The students come out of class for one day per week, but stay in school, to undertake 'real world' creative construction projects with two specialist staff. The projects are identified by the school principal or the person who oversees the school grounds and have to be of genuine value to the school and community.

We have some really passionate supporters who have made a long-term commitment to HOLA. This has been critical to our success. (Russell Kerr, CEO HOLA)

## Major shift from last year to this year

*Moving HOLA into a growth phase – scaling up*

Philanthropists were the catalyst to scaling-up the HOL method into more schools. The

Innovations don't come fully formed, they need to be developed. You can waste a lot of money if you don't invest in having the time and freedom to refine and test ideas early on. (Russell Kerr, CEO HOLA)

premise was, if HOL was working at Frankston High School, why couldn't it work for other students in other schools too. HOLA had assumed that government would support this expansion if they could demonstrate success in a range of settings. Consequently, in this scale-up phase there had been a strong focus on securing government support, state and federal, and on revising the funding model of HOLA.

**What helped this scaling-up?**




1. A revised strategic plan that now gives HOLA another means to communicate to key stakeholders.
2. Revision of the funding model. HOLA now has a seed funding model, coupled with committed long-term supporters who offer money, mentoring and brokerage. This revision has helped to bring more funders into the equation. To this end, The Ian Potter Foundation and The R. E. Ross Trust have most recently assisted.
3. Independent published evaluation identifying the economic, social, emotional and learning benefits for students doing HOL.

**What hinders HOLA expansion?**

1. When potential supporters do not understand that 'core funding support' in the HOL context means direct school support and therefore student beneficiary support. Often this language can be misunderstood to mean purely funding staff salaries, offices, and other overheads.
2. Getting schools to commit front-end funding in their global budget. HOL needs to be an integral part of what schools do.
3. When the benefits to potential partnerships are not clearly articulated up front by all partners. This can hinder effective decision making.

**Model**

As HOLA recognised that they needed more "tools in the toolkit to ramp HOL up and grow it" so has the model of engagement with philanthropy evolved. In reality, the models below overlap, but overall three 'waves' of HOLA engagement with philanthropy can be identified.

Models over time	Guiding principles and practices HOLA uses to engage effectively with philanthropy ...
<p><b>First wave</b></p>  <p>(Individual donor to HOLA)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☑ <i>Develop a presence:</i> make it known that what you are doing provides a way for people to volunteer or offer financial support for the benefit of students.</li> <li>☑ <i>Tap into your local networks:</i> Develop a register of all the local businesses in the area(s) you wish to seek students in.</li> <li>☑ <i>Build relationships:</i> Tell the story of what you do and why you do it at every opportunity.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Second wave</b></p>  <p>HOLA approaches foundations for support (in-kind and financial), which HOLA then uses to support schools)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☑ <i>Be disciplined about the documentation for an application:</i> At first HOLA had SVA doing a lot of the documentation and forming of connections. But then HOLA needed to sharpen their own thinking and begin doing this for themselves.</li> <li>☑ <i>Start with groups who are in a position or interested in developing a relationship:</i> with support from others who had greater knowledge of the philanthropic sector at the time, HOLA identified a network of potentially interested supporters.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Third wave</b></p>  <p>(Philanthropic foundations support introductions to other philanthropic supporters)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☑ <i>Look at how others could carry your message:</i> HOLA now has experiences where philanthropics (individuals and larger foundations or trusts) come to them interested in supporting the work they do or with schools they would like to support in 'tied or untied fund ways'.</li> <li>☑ <i>Sharpen your story and who you are telling it to:</i> With a stronger evidence base to draw on, HOLA now has a dedicated fundraiser and communications person on the team.</li> </ul>

*Governments are not risk takers and this can lead to systems recycling failed ways. But new educational models are essential for educational change. As a not-for-profit, we have been taking the risk on their behalf. (Russell Kerr, CEO HOLA)*

*In any innovation you're looking at how a problem can be solved. (Russell Kerr, CEO HOLA)*

### Factors for effective engagement

*(see all 10 factors on p. 22)*

The most important factor for HOLA is to build trusting relationships with philanthropics and school principals. The development of trust is facilitated via the credibility that comes from HOLA having "seasoned and passionate teachers" as part of the operations team and a clear understanding of the educational context.

*We get schools, and we know schools have a markedly different culture to not-for-profits and philanthropy. (Russell Kerr, CEO HOLA)*

### Most challenging factor for HOLA

The most challenging factor for HOLA is having schools commit appropriate resources. The HOLA business model requires that a school puts in some money to implement the methodology in their school. This co-funding approach is a first step towards showing a mutual commitment to tackling the student issues that the HOL methodology seeks to address.

### Impact

#### What are the main outcomes?

*The bit we care about is that the young people feel part of learning. How you find measures of that is a different game. (Russell Kerr, CEO HOLA)*

HOLA seeks to have a positive impact on student intrapersonal, interpersonal, self management (student behavior) and functional literacy and numeracy.

Through the methodology, HOLA wants students to have a much better sense of themselves as people and as learners.

Practice related outcomes include, changing the way in which schools lead learning. HOLA develops community as well as school-based projects. In addition, an unanticipated practice outcome has been the use of the HOL methodology in other not-for-profit's work. For example, the Southern Ethnic Advisory and

Advocacy Council uses the HOL method as a vehicle to deliver their own support to newly arrived refugees in schools. "It gives them a plausible positive connection within schools, which can lead to the identification of other forms of support for these students and their families" (Russell Kerr)

### How is information gathered?

*From existing research:* The Victorian Government's On Track<sup>16</sup> data was initially used by HOLA, in the absence of their own data, to develop vignettes about the post-school pathways of Year 10-12 students.

*From schools:* Baseline and end-of-year data from HOL schools: Student focus plans, reflections, detailed student interpersonal, intrapersonal, literacy and numeracy, retention data.

*From commissioned evaluation<sup>17</sup>:* To tell the story of HOL in numbers.

*Schools don't have complete sets of data either so we work together to build a better record. (Richard O'Donovan, Business Manager HOLA)*

### Why numbers? Who is interested in numbers?

*We've suspected for years that telling the story of HOL in numbers was an independent evaluation job. The team we commissioned to do the evaluation said they were shocked that the numbers came out as positive as they did. Mostly, they find things cost more than the value of what it is they are evaluating, not less. (Richard O'Donovan, Business Manager HOLA)*

### How do you share the information gathered and with whom?

HOLA has established and facilitates regular Monday morning meetings that are largely dedicated to professional development and sharing information and experiences across the schools running the HOL method. These meetings often involve invitations to current

<sup>16</sup> On Track is a Victorian Government initiative designed to ensure that Year 10 to 12 government and non government school students are on a pathway to further education, training or employment after leaving school <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/research/Pages/ontrack.aspx>

<sup>17</sup> [http://handsonlearning.org.au/DAE\\_investing\\_in\\_preventing\\_ESL\\_via\\_HOL\\_September\\_2012.pdf](http://handsonlearning.org.au/DAE_investing_in_preventing_ESL_via_HOL_September_2012.pdf)

and potential funders, as well as principals and artisan-teachers.

In the school context, cluster meetings allow staff from each school to share their knowledge with education support staff, specialist artisan-teachers and within existing internal meeting structures. HOLA team members also present to schools and use these opportunities to collect stories from teachers. HOLA artisan-teachers constantly communicate with classroom teachers about the progress of HOLA students. These stories are then shared through HOLA newsletters and other media avenues.

Students involved in HOLA are encouraged to make movies, providing an innovation way of sharing the central HOLA messages with their peers.

Quality assurance visits to schools are also a critical component of information sharing and gathering and comprehensive reports are provided to principals annually.