BUILDING RESILIENCE IN SMALL RURAL, REGIONAL & REMOTE COMMUNITIES

National Regional Community Leadership Program

The key to economic success in rural communities is through investment in community leadership.

The Need

The prediction is for more frequent and intense climate events – drought, fire, flood as a ‘pattern of existence’ for rural and regional Australia. People and communities are stressed and suffering. The incidences of severe mental health issues is alarming. Short term solutions alleviate an immediate problem but does not build the capacity of those impacted by crisis/emergency for long-term solutions or adaptation to change: We need to create a more pro-active, resilient self-determining communities with the capacity and network to adapt to the vagaries of climate.

The National Regional Community Leadership Program (NRCLP) represents a grassroots leadership program that supports local leaders within a defined cluster of communities to better understand and build their local and regional community and economy.

Critical to the success of this program is to ensure we set ourselves up for success. The towns selected must meet a defined criteria such as; being able to demonstrate leadership potential; have a vision for the community; have an ability to commit the required time and energy to the program; to lead the community in the future and; to engage as an active learner.

“It isn’t enough for a town to have good leadership. Communities also must have people – Community Builders – who vigorously encourage and support a wide range of activities which benefit the community. These builders aren’t self-serving. They’re interested in improving and perpetuating their communities. Find a community with both leaders and builders and you’ll find a community that works.”

Prof Robert Manley
Background

Rural and regional towns have a unique symbiotic relationship with farms in proximity. They play a critical role in supporting the social and economic fabric of their local communities. Farmers rely on their local town for off farm income through employment, farm employees and services from the local doctor, teachers, dentists, accountants and government support staff. They rely on small businesses like the local pharmacy, grocery, butcher, bakery, bank and agribusiness. Take these towns out of the equation and the local ecosystem is impacted forever. It is estimated that 70% of small inland towns, and communities are not thriving.

While the current drought is having a devastating effect on farmers and their families, so too is it impacting rural communities. The prediction is for more frequent and intense climate events – drought, fire, flood as a ‘pattern of existence’ for rural and regional communities.

We need to build long term resilience of rural communities and capacity for adaptation to change, including crisis through a national regional community leadership program developing thousands of new community leaders.

A newly formed consortium that includes the Regional Australia Institute, the Regional Leadership organisation, Rural Aid, the Bank of I.D.E.A.S. and Charles Sturt University is seeking to implement a leadership program that builds ‘soft’ infrastructure to complement ‘hard’ infrastructure initiatives to secure greater impact on long term community development and resilience.

The consortium has members who have worked on small town renewal in over 700 towns across Australia. They have delivered highly contextualised community leadership programs for over 20 years and boast a collective alumnus of 4,000. These organisations are well positioned to “hit the ground running” with fully tested and developed strategies to engage the necessary networks with the scope, experience and resources to deliver exceptional quality and value for money outcomes.

Together we advance regional and rural communities by developing leadership qualities and skills in our participants to:

• Grow their Capabilities
• Foster their Connections
• Empowering People
• Inspire Confidence and Optimism

Critical to the success of what we do is the consortiums ability to work with local people who live, work, invest, create and collaborate in their communities.

There is no national community ‘grass roots’ leadership program providing critical and contemporary leadership development.

The NRCLP will provide tangible benefits for communities in crisis in particular, those currently impacted by prolonged drought.

It will build resilience in community members who are committed to the long-term development and sustainability of their community/region through their leadership. This program is about promoting the ‘capacity’ of local communities to develop, implement and sustain their own solutions to problems and foster opportunities in a way that helps them shape and exercise control over their physical, social, economic and cultural environments in the short and long term.

It will develop a pool of new leaders to have/share a voice, with the confidence to be part of the solution (mid/post emergency and crisis) and capacity to plan for and enable the long-term future of their community when crises abates.
The Task
To build the leadership capacity of local ‘grass roots’ leaders in small rural, regional and remote towns across Australia with a particular emphasis initially on those towns directly affected by drought. We can build new, expanded and more effective networks.

The Ask
Organisations within the consortium have a number of tier one corporate partners. From a funding perspective we seek their support but, in order to develop and implement a national ‘grass roots’ leadership program, we need a partnership with government.

We seek funding for a three-year National Regional Community Leadership Program (NRCLP) to support the design, delivery, evaluation and reporting of leadership capacity building for people who live in or near small rural and remote communities, particularly those currently affected by drought.

We need more rural and regional community leadership programs that operate in a region, for a region, as well as support for those who are already developing the next generation of community leaders; leaders that are able to engage in strategic thinking and planning, advocacy, community project management and delivery and self-determination; A locally lead, experiential community leadership program builds this capacity.

Government activity could be more effective if, in developing relevant programs and initiatives, the role of social capital was considered more systematically and predominately. We will partner government through facilitating the growth of social capital in practice, to improve the quality of life and economic prosperity of local communities.

Summary
We need a longer-term solution for a sustainable future for small rural, regional and remote communities. We need to bring a more diverse and greater number of people in determining the future of their community.

NRCLP is a contemporary leadership program for new, emerging and existing community leaders from small rural, regional and remote towns, with an initial emphasis on those currently impacted by prolonged drought.

The program is designed and implemented for these communities, their industries and their environment to ensure a more optimistic and sustainable future with a common understanding and mature insight into the opportunities provided, through planning, experiential learning and an effective network.

If you want a year of prosperity, grow grass.
If you want ten years of prosperity, grow trees.
If you want 100 years of prosperity, grow people
Scott’s Bluff Leadership
National Regional Community Leadership Program Consortium

Bank of I.D.E.A.S.
Since its creation in 1989, the Bank of I.D.E.A.S. has worked with over 2000 communities throughout Australia and overseas seeking to facilitate fresh and creative ways that stimulate community and local economic renewal. Bank of I.D.E.A.S. has undertaken assignments in 59 countries. Bank of I.D.E.A.S. staff are motivated by the desire to create caring, healthy, inclusive, sustainable and enterprising communities and local economies. Subsequently, BOI specialises in initiatives to strengthen community building, local economic development and youth empowerment.

Regional Leadership
Regional Leadership is member-based organisation established to support regional communities to strengthen leadership in and for rural, remote and regional locations. Regional Leadership encourages new starters, established programs, community groups, organisations and individuals to become members of our community. First established in 2012 as the Victorian Regional Community Leadership Programs Secretariat (VRCLP) our purpose was to act as the peak body representing the programs across Rural and Regional Victoria.

The Regional Australia Institute (RAI)
The RAI is a think tank devoted to issues concerning regional Australia. We gather and analyse the best information we can find on regions and make this readily accessible to people around the country. We work with regional leaders around the nation to understand their challenges and help them identify opportunities for future development that they can implement. We also talk to governments at all levels and provide independent, evidence-based advice about the options they have to make regions even greater.

Charles Sturt University
Charles Sturt University was established as a university in 1989 to provide access to skills and education in regional Australia. Before that (for the last 125 years in fact) the research stations, ag and teaching colleges that joined forces to become the university were providing opportunities for local communities. Our commitment to the communities in our regions continues to this day through the Community-University Partnerships (CUP) grant program. The university offers $100,000 in grants as an investment in the development of our regions. Members of our local communities are encouraged to apply for the funding to support their local community groups and activities.

Rural Aid
Rural Aid is one of Australia’s leading Rural charities. It supports farmers and rural communities in times of natural disaster such as flood, fire and drought. In addition, Rural Aid focusses on supporting the sustainability of regional and farming communities. Its disaster relief program includes the nationally recognised Buy a Bale campaign. Other programs include providing volunteer support to rural towns, musical instruments to regional schools and mental health counselling.