



FRRR
Foundation for Rural
Regional Renewal

Tackling Tough Times Together (TTTT) Program

A report on program outcomes, impacts and insights

June 2024



Acknowledgement of Country

The Foundation for Rural & Regional Renewal (FRRR) acknowledges the Dja Dja Wurrung clans as the Traditional Custodians of Jaara Country (Bendigo) where we are headquartered and extend this acknowledgement to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nations where we fund organisations and activities. We are grateful for the opportunity to walk alongside First Nations Peoples in this work and for the cultural knowledge they share so generously.

We pay our respect to Elders past and present and extend our thanks for their continuation and sharing of the cultural and educational practices of Australia's First Peoples.

Image: Matthew Gianoulis

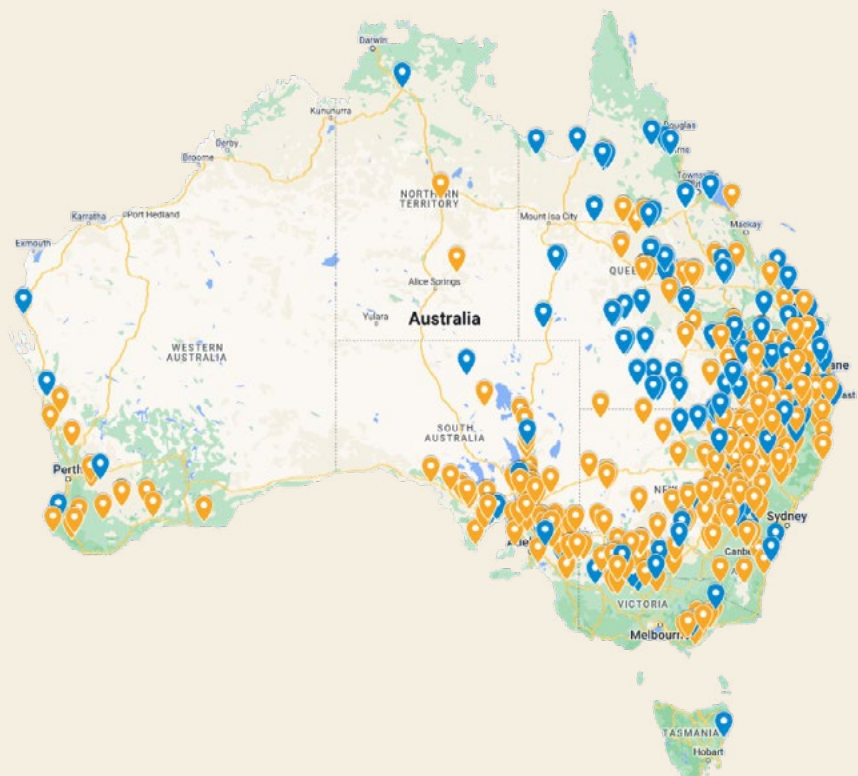
Designs: Aunty Joyce Crombie (Anpanuwa)

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Project: Dress the Central West, Red Ridge Interior Queensland

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Australian Government

BUILDING AUSTRALIA

*This program was
co-funded by the
Australian Government.*

Executive Summary

Drought is an enduring and challenging feature of the Australian landscape, with profound impacts on remote, rural and regional communities. Throughout FRRR's history, supporting local not-for-profit organisations, who play a critical role during drought, has been vital in strengthening and sustaining those communities.

In 2014, FRRR and the Tim Fairfax Family Foundation (TFFF) identified the need for community groups in drought-affected areas of Queensland to have access to funding to help them come together and support one-another through what was shaping up as a prolonged, multi-year drought event. Other philanthropic donors came on board, including The Yulgilbar Foundation and the Tackling Tough Times Together (TTTT) program was launched in June 2014. The initial focus was on supporting social cohesion and creating opportunities for connection, as well as leadership development and skill building.

In 2018, after 10 rounds of the program and in the face of extended drought that was reaching into other states, the Australian Government committed \$15 million to the program over five years. The program's objectives expanded to include a focus on addressing volunteer fatigue, building capacity and capability in community groups, supporting opportunities for participation in education and reducing disadvantage for young people; and encouraging economic recovery or renewal.

A further 13 rounds of funding were awarded, including one after Government funding ceased. In total, \$18.6M was awarded via 681 grants, reaching all states and territories.

There were clear benefits from this program – both during the drought and in the longer-term – mitigating the extreme impacts of drought to local people and communities, either directly through investment in human and social capital, or indirectly through built infrastructure investment, strengthening the enabling conditions for short and long-term community vitality.



The key findings of this program review are:

- **Investing in social capital while communities are 'in-drought' is critical.** The feedback from more than 600 grant recipients provides a very strong evidence base relating to the need for long-term investment in human and social capital to offset the impacts and challenges that drought presents in communities, right across the drought cycle. Notwithstanding the positive investment in drought preparedness, the need to invest in strengthening communities is amplified while in drought, particularly in regions where drought is long-term and the impact is magnified by singular industry reliance on agriculture. A complementary support mechanism that recognises the unique community-level conditions while in drought and works in recognition of the existing investment is critical.
- **Locally-based not-for-profit (NFP) organisations play a critical role during drought.** Investment in strengthening the capacity of individuals and locally-based NFPs creates confidence, promotes creativity and cultivates positivity that results in whole of community quality of life and creates a sense of hope for the future. Projects funded through this program demonstrated that skill training and leadership development, in particular, increased the capacity of individuals, community groups and not-for-profit organisations to implement strategies that improved their long-term quality of community life. It also enabled local NFPs, who are trusted and known to the community, to deliver an increased range of relevant and locally delivered services that support things like mental health and wellbeing, emergency relief and connection to government services. Investing in local, trusted and known organisations that are connected to the community and region, amplifies the effectiveness and reach of other streams of government support during drought.
- **Support for community-driven economic stimulation and diversification is critical, and pays dividends well beyond the drought, both economically and socially.** By creating stronger economies, these communities are socially more participative and more highly engaged, in addition to the increased financial security derived from funded projects across drought-impacted communities.
- **Investment in social and professional networks is critical to long-term social cohesion and wellbeing both in-drought and beyond.** TTTT has played an important role strengthening local networks, a key factor both during drought and in building future drought resilience of agriculture-dependent communities.
- **Investment in infrastructure provides the means for community groups to deliver future initiatives.** Funding recipients highlighted that practical upgrades and infrastructure were strategically critical to the vitality and sustainability of towns, particularly in very small communities with reduced ability to fundraise. Safe, welcoming spaces for people to meet enable the critical connections that underpin social cohesion and support.
- **Investing in events and workshops yields community-wide wellness and social connection outcomes, mitigating known downstream impacts of drought such as social isolation and decreased mental health.** For communities significantly impacted by drought, hosting events and workshops, providing information, sharing knowledge, and reinforcing skills to assist with managing the ongoing effects of drought not only strengthened capacity and enhanced community identity but helped build connection and improve community morale.
- **Philanthropic funding is a powerful activator and lever, allowing for rapid response to emerging issues and to prove models of support.** The TTTT program was initially backed by philanthropic capital to address gaps in funding support for drought-affected communities, responding to the need identified through FRRR's close connection to grassroots rural communities. Having proven the model, other partners joined the program, broadening its reach, increasing support available to those communities experiencing hardship.

Through this collaborative approach, all donors contributed to improving the health and wellbeing of remote, rural and regional communities affected by drought, eliciting a sense of hope for those impacted. In this case, local people and communities leveraged their initial grant, amplifying the impact of the investment overall by 1.19 times, to a combined value of \$40,843,127.

The TTTT program remains a unique mechanism in the funding landscape across remote, rural and regional Australia, in its ability to support regional communities across time and to a depth and ease of accessibility when other funding is not readily available.

Throughout the ongoing cycle of drought, FRRR continues to build our understanding of the needs across rural communities. FRRR also continues to advocate for broad investment to ameliorate the impacts experienced by rural communities during drought events. A balanced approach to investment in social, cultural, political and human capital is required, alongside, and in concert with, support for the built, financial and natural capital of communities to be better prepared for the future.

Undertaking research, using data and feedback to inform policy and listening to the voices of those with lived experiences will help build our shared understanding and support our future direction.

Alongside our valued donor partners, FRRR remains deeply committed to working with local groups, who play such a pivotal role in building vibrant and sustainable communities across the vast breadth of remote, rural and regional Australia.



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Fast Facts

Tackling Tough Times Together

2014

→ Ran from 2014 until 2022

→ 2022

> 569,295

people benefitted.



\$18.6M awarded via **681** grants in **329** postcodes,
towards projects valued at **\$40.8M** a leverage of **\$1.19**

Grants ranged
from **\$783** to
\$150,000.

1,790
applications
were received,
requesting
\$61.9M.

84%
(\$15.8M)
to outer regional,
remote or very remote
communities.

Most funding and grants to QLD (**\$7M** via **293** grants)

Top three outcomes:

1.
Community identity
and wellbeing

2.
Environmental health
and sustainability

3.
Individual and
community resilience

About FRRR

Established in 2000, the Foundation for Rural & Regional Renewal (FRRR) is the only national foundation focussed on ensuring the social and economic strength of remote, rural and regional communities.

FRRR's vision is for a vibrant, resilient, empowered and sustainable remote, rural and regional Australia. Our ambition is to support the capacity and capability of remote, rural and regional communities, so they can be on the front foot of disruption, navigate transition and seek sustainable futures. We believe that targeted, well-informed investment in people and organisations that are in and of their place will stimulate ideas that lead to actions, both big and small. Investing in local people and organisations that are connected, who know and understand the local context and who can mobilise and activate resources can transform a community's view of itself and drive its future vitality. That's why FRRR programs focus on building resilience and strengthening communities.

Leveraging our special tax status, FRRR's model connects good will and investment with locally prioritised needs, to create communities that are vibrant, resilient, empowered and sustainable. We are guided by our principles which include fostering community-led development, working collaboratively, embracing systems and complexity, and recognising diversity of communities. As of 30 June 2023, FRRR had granted over \$177 million to more than 14,000 projects.

Strategy alignment

Over the duration of the TTTT program, FRRR's strategic direction adapted and evolved, building upon our 20-plus years of learnings, which guides the ways we respond to the changing landscape in remote, rural and regional communities.

FRRR's strategic intent highlights the importance of partnering with communities before, during and after disasters, and investing in solutions for increased climate resilience. This includes providing holistic ways to support in-drought communities and is pivotal to maintaining and fortifying the social, cultural, environmental and economic fabric in these regions. This includes a commitment to:

- Bolster capacity, capability and organisational resilience of local, place-based not-for-profit organisations who have the knowledge, trust and networks to foster community preparedness for, and recovery from, natural disasters;
- Celebrate and resource volunteer-led efforts;
- Advocate for and deliver increased community disaster preparedness and resilience funding, and champion and showcase the impact of community-led disaster resilience; and
- Target place-based support to develop community-led climate solutions.

FRRR's strategy is embedded in the Tackling Tough Times Together (TTTT) program design, with the program's key objectives reflecting FRRR's values and vision. FRRR remains committed to providing support that focusses on sustained community-led momentum along with impactful outcomes.

Defining in-drought support

The TTTT program also incorporates key elements from the Australian Government's Drought Response, Resilience and Preparedness Plan¹

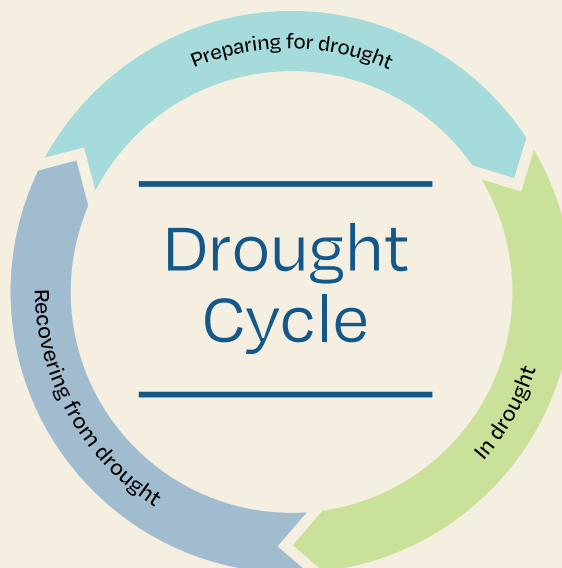
The program was aligned with its first and second pillar, and making progress towards its third:

1. Immediate action for those in drought – focussed on measures to support farmers and communities facing prolonged drought conditions to keep them going until the drought breaks.
2. Support for the wider communities affected by drought – rural and regional communities depend on our farmers and are at the heart of Australia.
3. Long-term resilience and preparedness – building resilience and ability to withstand drought periods in the long-term.

Drought is not simply low rainfall; it is a prolonged, abnormally dry period when the amount of available water is insufficient to meet normal use.² These events, depending on their location, create challenging economic conditions and social experiences for those living in rural communities.

Many communities will be at different stages of the drought cycle at any one time. Australia experiences drought in three stages:

1. **Before** – preparing for drier times ahead;
2. **During** – responding to drought – implementing plans and making early decisions to manage impacts; and
3. **After** – recovering from drought using lessons learnt to build back better.³



The Bureau of Meteorology (BoM) *State of the Climate Report 2020* indicated associated changes in weather and climate extremes, such as extreme heat, heavy rainfall and coastal inundation, fire weather and drought have a large impact on the health and wellbeing of communities and ecosystems. Droughts affect the lives and livelihoods of all Australians. Anecdotally, FRRR hears and sees the first hand impact of this for people living in remote, rural and regional locations.

“Of all the climate challenges to afflict Australia, drought is one of the most feared, and costly.”⁴

Bureau of Meteorology

Introduction to the Tackling Tough Times Together program

FRRR has always supported communities to manage the impacts of, and increasingly, enhance preparedness for drought. Building on FRRR's experience of supporting disaster-affected communities, the Tackling Tough Times Together (TTTT) program was specifically designed to address issues that often surface in remote, rural and regional Australia in times of drought. The program's objectives evolved over the years to reflect the changing needs of communities in different stages of drought or early recovery.

The TTTT program provided a total of \$18,585,571 for in-drought communities from 2014 until 2022, and remained responsive to the varying and intersecting needs of communities that were managing the direct impacts throughout that time.

During these years, drought declarations changed depending on evidence-based determinants, and on a state-by-state basis. The TTTT program relied on several sources of data to determine the drought impact on communities across Australia. This included:

- Rainfall deficiencies from the BoM;
- The Drought Communities Program dataset that listed LGAs in drought from January 2020;
- NSW, SA and QLD state drought maps; and
- Anecdotal evidence from communities.

The program launched with philanthropic support, primarily from the Tim Fairfax Family Foundation (TFFF) and The Yulgilbar Foundation, and initially supported drought-affected communities in select areas of NSW and QLD. It was focussed on helping them access the resources they needed to support one another through the drought. At that time, the objectives of the program aimed to:

- Reduce social isolation by facilitating strong social cohesion and connection and support; and

- To engage the community in leadership development and skills training.

Initially, \$10,000 small grants and \$50,000 large grant rounds were offered. The small grant amount changed to \$15,000, following feedback from applicants, especially those in more remote areas, that the grants were often being eaten up with travel and freight costs, and the simple fact that things cost more in those areas. Up until Round 10, there were Expressions of Interest for larger grants up to \$50,000.

In 2018, after four successful years of the TTTT program but with more of the country being affected by drought, the Australian Government approached FRRR to deliver \$15M via TTTT in recognition of the Foundation being highly trusted, agile and able to mobilise support for communities where it was needed most.

The support awarded in 2018-19 (\$6M), 2019-20 (\$4.5M) and 2020-21 (\$4.5M), enabled the program to expand to drought-affected areas nationally.

This additional funding meant that funds were available year-round for a broad range of grassroots, community-led initiatives that directly and clearly benefitted local communities.

The objectives of the program were also expanded and refined to:

- Reduce social isolation by facilitating strong social cohesion and connection;
- Support and engage the community in leadership development and skills training;
- Support opportunities for social and educational participation and address disadvantage caused by the drought, for children and young people;

- Reduce volunteer fatigue and build the capacity, capability and sustainability of local not-for-profit organisations to provide support to their communities, particularly where they are playing an increased role during the drought; and
- Support local economic recovery or renewal through projects that stimulate economic activity and cash-flow within communities.

In this second phase of the program, there were three tiers of funding available:

1. Up to \$20,000 – projects to be finalised within 18 months of approval;

2. Up to \$60,000 – projects to be finalised within 18 months of approval; and
3. Up to \$150,000 – applications for this tier were by Expression of Interest, and for multi-year projects.

Round 11 opened in June 2018 and was the first of the rolling rounds (i.e. the program was open all the time) with set cut off dates for assessment.

Government funding concluded in 2021 and a final round of funding was awarded in April 2022 to distribute remaining philanthropic funding, as drought abatement continued following wide-spread rains.



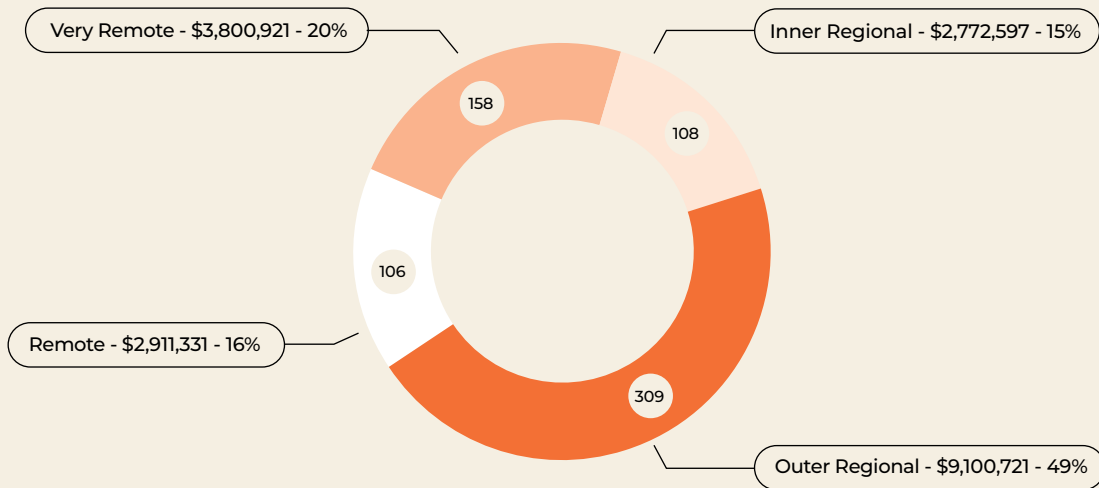
# Grants	\$ Grants	Gov't vs Other Donors	Grants leveraged	Funded orgs	Beneficiaries
681	\$18.6M	\$14.1M vs \$4.5M	\$1.19	578	569,295

Reach across states

As the footprint of drought spread, so too did the reach of the TTTT program. Initially, the focus was in QLD and northern NSW only. However, with the worsening drought and the availability of more funding, the program expanded into other areas with either formal drought declarations in place or clear evidence of communities being drought-affected. This evolution meant that some states received more support than others. Over the life of the TTTT program, 681 grants were awarded, with more than 569,295 people directly benefitting. There was a significant focus on directing funds to those areas that were most in need and overall, 39% of grants were awarded for projects in either remote or very remote locations, with 36% of funding being directed toward these communities.



Projects funded by Remoteness Index



Note, FRRR's classifications of remoteness are aligned with the ABS categories⁵.

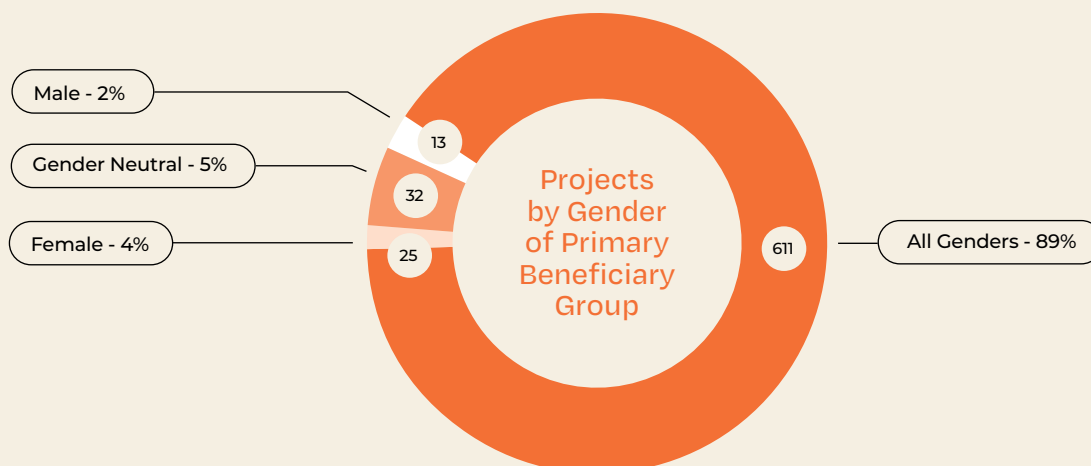
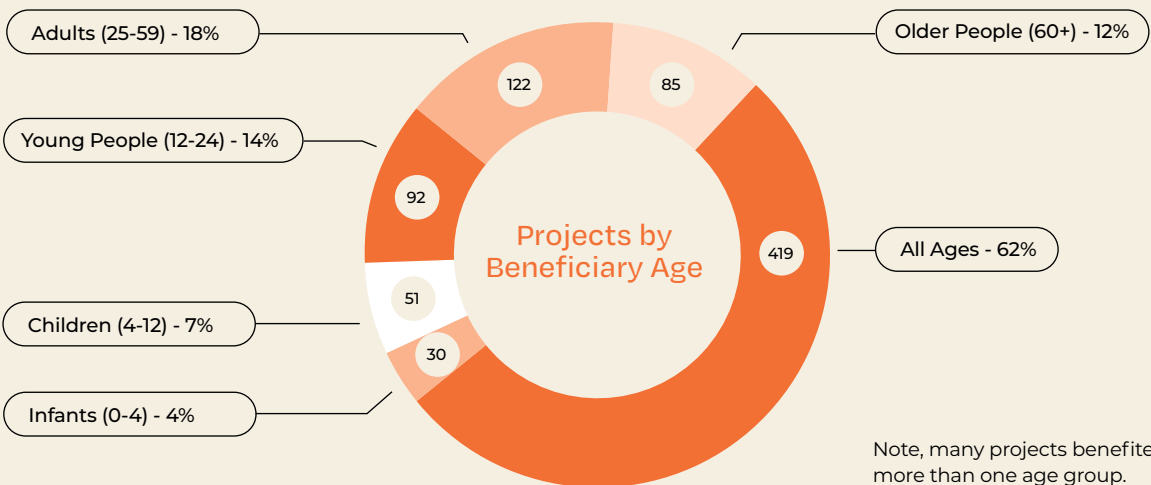


Beneficiaries

The following data is based on the 681 projects that were approved during the duration of the TTTT program. As FRRR's data collection practices evolved over time, not all organisations reported in the same way.

- At least **569,295 people** benefitted from the projects overall.
- **1,263 different organisations** applied for funding via the TTTT program.
- **578 unique organisations received grants** from the TTTT program.
- **122 organisations received two or more** grants from the TTTT program

The organisations that delivered multiple grants were often backbone organisations in their communities, taking people along on a journey, with one grant building on the next. We discuss this further on page 27.



Program phases

Rounds 1-10 (2014-2018)

Between 2014 and 2018, 338 applications requested \$5,452,639 in funding; 141 grants were distributed across drought-affected areas of QLD and NSW, valued at over \$1,776,989 supporting 113 local organisations. The median grant was \$9,990, with an application success rate of 42%.

Drought Response Themes:

Throughout these first rounds when the drought was taking hold and communities were dealing with the acute impacts, applicants saw the opportunity to run events and bring people together to strengthen individual and community wellbeing. The most common funding requests were for community events that also attract tourists to the region; workshops and skills development; projects maintaining mental health and recognising symptoms of distress; and the installation of vital infrastructure to increase or maintain community connection.

Rounds 10.1-22 (2018-2021)

The Australian Government's funding made a significant difference to both the number of projects that could be supported as well as the reach across states. Between rounds 10.1-22, with the expanded objectives and additional funding, 531 projects were supported nationally.

Of these, 415 were funded solely by the Australian Government; 15 co-funded by the Australian Government and other donors; and the remaining 101 funded by philanthropic and other donors, with no government funding. Broadly the funding was split 75% by Government, 25% from other funders.

Drought Response Themes:

During these rounds, many communities were experiencing both the acute and chronic impacts of long-term drought. The TTTT program was able to respond to the ongoing need, and the benefit of funding continuing over time became evident. NSW communities received the most grants with 187 projects supported. Of note, 33% of NSW projects sought to address volunteer fatigue and build capacity of organisations and 29% aimed to reduce social isolation. QLD followed closely with 176 projects being funded, with 46% of these projects supporting volunteer fatigue and seeking to build organisational capacity. This focus on volunteer fatigue and ensuring sustainability for the future reflected the ongoing impacts of extended drought.

Round 23 (2022)

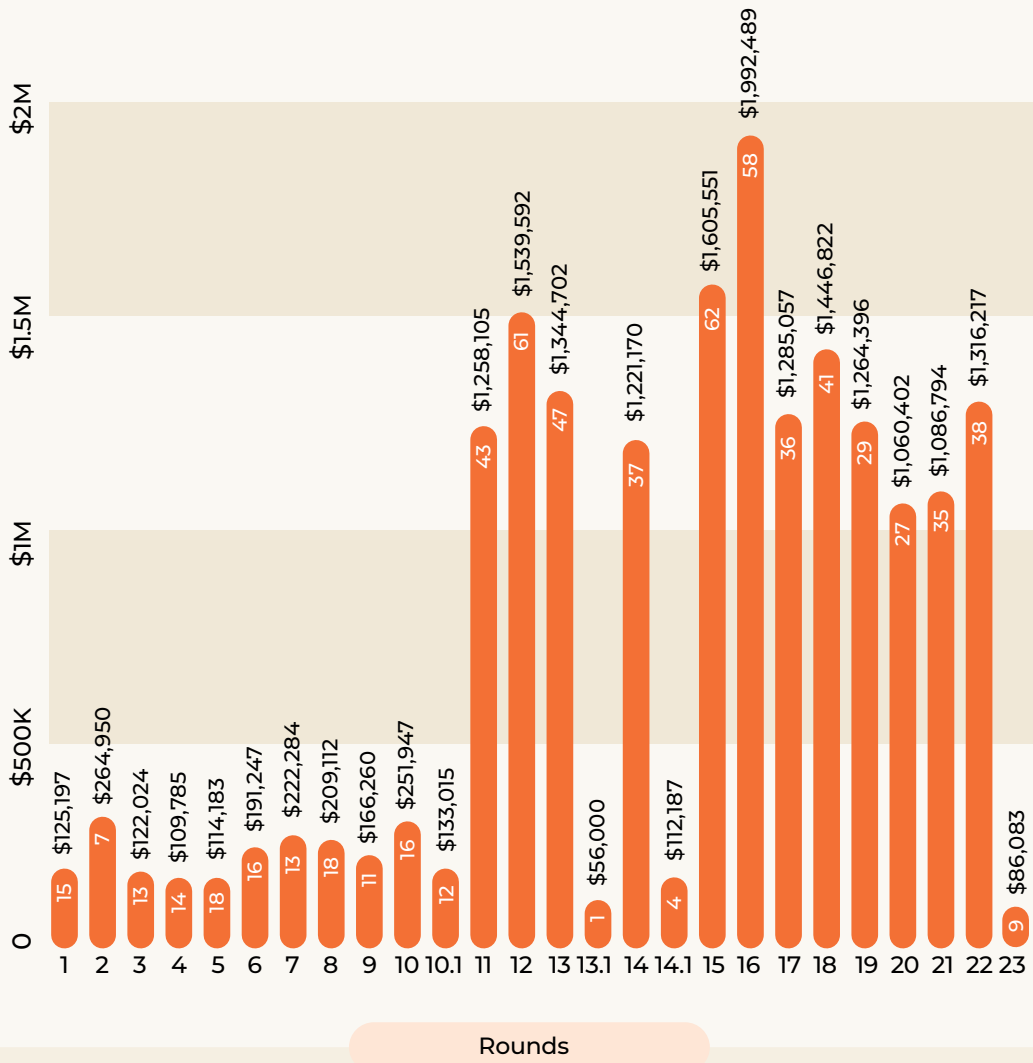
With the gradual abatement of widespread drought impacts nationally, easing of requests to the program, and change in geographical scope following the finalisation of government funding, Round 23 utilised the remaining philanthropic and private donations to support more grants across states where drought was still prevalent. After a four-week application period, there were 17 requests submitted for \$161,745 toward projects worth \$518,230. Nine projects were supported across four states: QLD (5); WA (2); NSW (1); and NT (1) with \$86,083 awarded for projects worth \$343,056.

Drought Response Themes:

During this round drought conditions were starting to abate in many regions, and again TTTT was able to support community-led initiatives. Interestingly, this round reflected a marked increase in projects aiming to reduce social isolation (44%) while 33% of projects focussed on reducing volunteer fatigue.

Grants by Round

Funding Awarded

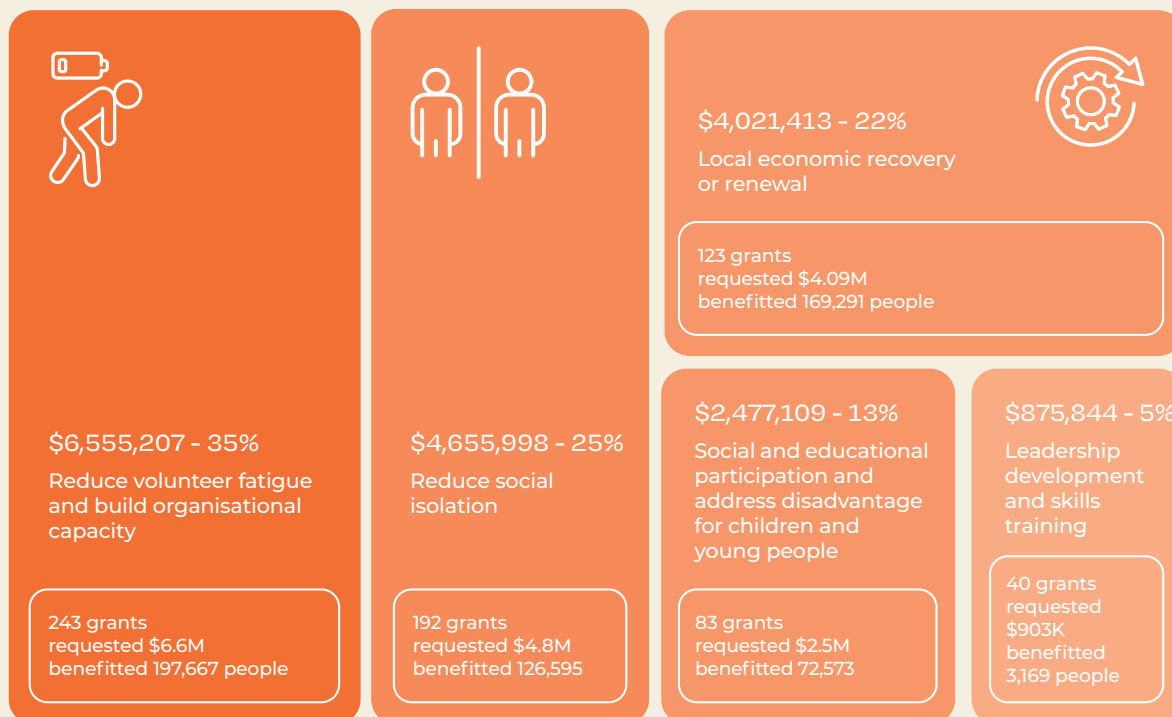


Rounds



Supporting interconnected objectives

The TTTT program provided support to communities in drought to deliver projects that aligned with the five different but closely interconnected program objective areas and levers to reduce vulnerability.



Funding tiers

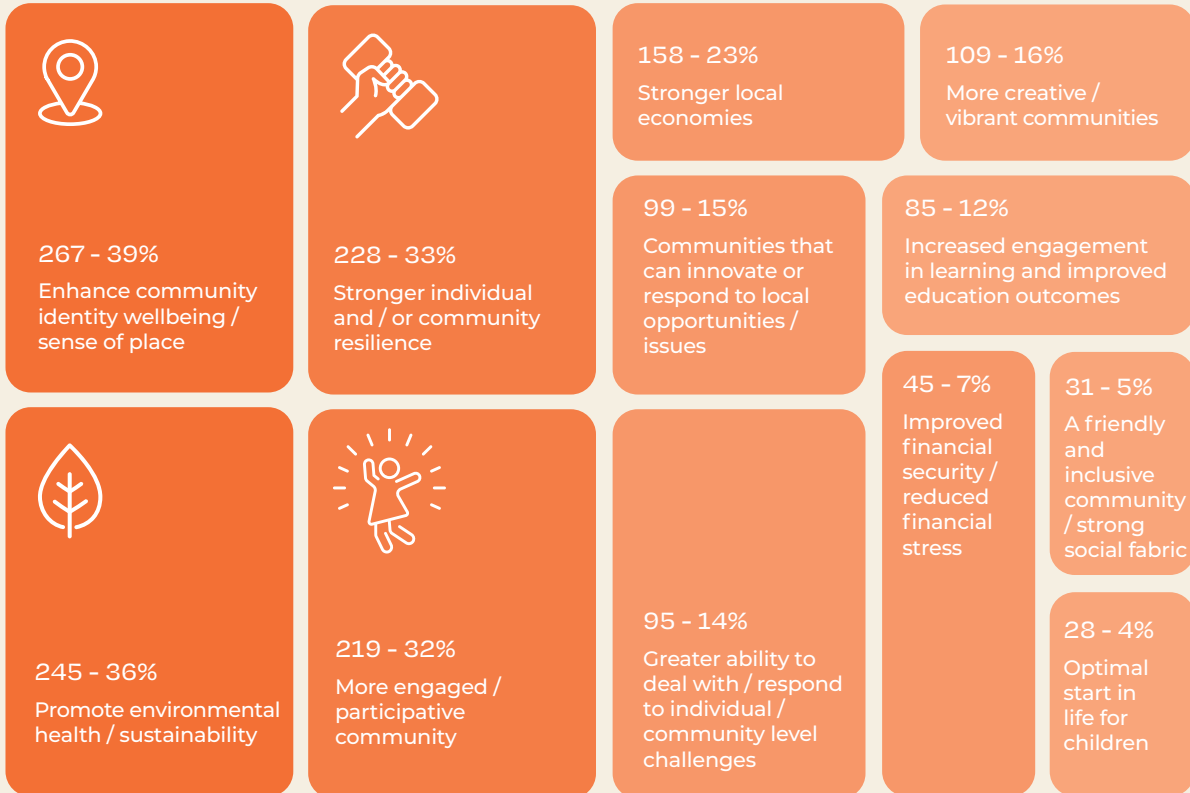
Grants up to \$20,000 proved to be an appropriate size for the types of organisations applying to the program and projects being delivered.

However, most funding was distributed through grants between \$20,001 and \$60,000. Grants of up to \$60,000 provided greater scope to meet additional need as identified by applicants, such as enabling organisations to cover the additional costs incurred by distance or providing funding for communities that had decreased capacity to fundraise due to population size or the economic impacts of long-term drought. These grants also had the most beneficiaries.

Tier	Projects	Requested	Awarded	Project Value	Beneficiaries
\$10,000	69	\$603,192	\$557,272	\$860,165	1,430
\$15,000	49	\$525,252	\$513,885	\$1,099,076	4,728
\$20,000	307	\$3,995,057	\$3,908,014	\$8,061,481	205,899
\$50,000	18	\$776,049	\$670,668	\$1,256,750	13,839
\$60,000	219	\$10,577,912	\$10,503,240	\$21,137,932	281,554
\$150,000	19	\$2,432,492	\$2,432,492	\$8,427,723	61,845
Total	681	\$18,909,955	\$18,585,571	\$40,843,127	569,295

Outcomes achieved

When projects are acquitted, grantees report against outcomes, with projects mapping against these areas as below, often achieving multiple outcomes.



Learnings and recommendations

Notwithstanding the importance of preparation and recovery, it's clear that in-drought support is **crucial for supporting long-term health and social wellbeing of people and communities. Grassroots organisations and not-for-profits need to be empowered** to address local priorities through **flexible funding and accessible processes**.

Supporting and strengthening the important role of not-for-profit organisations benefits the broader community both during the height of the drought and, more importantly, in the long run, helping ensure a future where remote, rural and regional communities are resilient, vibrant and sustainable.

There is demonstrated ingenuity and innovation that occurs when rural community stakeholders are supported to implement their ideas, which provides benefits to those experiencing the hardship of drought. Funding enables connection and helps mobilise ideas, resources and community strengths, making a difference to a community during times of uncertainty and adversity.

One of the key findings from analysing the outcomes of the projects delivered was the **value of investment** in drought-affected communities over a **longer than usual timeframe**. This allowed for **cumulative impacts** to emerge over time, as groups developed confidence in what they could achieve and saw the benefits from coming together. Allowing at least 18 months to deliver projects also recognised the impact that drought has on people's time to volunteer to bring projects to life. Continued support after drought-breaking rains was valued in transition, as groups entered the recovery phase. Critically, the TTTT program enabled rural drought-affected communities to deliver projects that provided both **immediate and long-term benefits**.

Another finding was the important **role of locally based not-for-profit organisations**

throughout the drought cycle, but particularly during drought. Despite the difficulties, local organisations persistently work to maintain and strengthen the places where they live. These groups are resilient and continue to find ways to seed and strengthen, adapt and evolve, and innovate and renew their community. They creatively bring their community together in ways that resonate locally and build that social cohesion, whether through community events and festivals, making things more accessible for people living with disability, or by repairing and upgrading facilities to create a safe place for locals to gather. Funding support is also a recognition of the value of an organisation's work and its ability to contribute to their community's future.



Grantee feedback demonstrates that volunteers contribute significantly to Australia's social and economic wellbeing, especially in the wake of other disaster events and COVID impacts, on top of drought.

Organisations supported by the TTTT program were able to use grant funds to drive community projects and to strengthen their organisational capacity. Along with this, grant outcomes demonstrate positive change occurred by improving social capital as well as establishing or strengthening networks. While the parameters of the TTTT program adapted to the changing needs of in-drought communities over time, it maintained the foundational principles of supporting grassroots, community-identified and community-led initiatives that address immediate and long-term needs. Organisations also appreciated the flexibility of the program to make variations in response to changing circumstances.

This program demonstrated that with the right support, challenging times like drought also create opportunities for innovation and change. TTTT funding enabled drought-impacted communities to innovate and respond to local opportunities and issues as they arose, both in the short and long-term, in ways that were new and constructive beyond the drought.

Projects delivered in communities have a ripple effect, providing multiple benefits to the community, for example improving infrastructure and community assets can help address social isolation through providing welcoming meeting spaces and creating better, safer conditions for volunteers.

Overall, the objective that had the highest percentage of grants (36%) was to **'reduce volunteer fatigue and build the capacity, capability and sustainability of local not-for-profit organisations** to provide support to their communities, particularly where they are playing an increased role during the drought'.

From a cost-benefit perspective, **organisations leveraged funding** to scale up or scaffold projects, with TTTT grants often providing seed funding, enabling community organisations to attract other resources, in-kind contributions and/or financial support. Locally based organisations are often very skilled and creative in garnering in-kind support for projects, enabling an amplification of the initial investment many times over. Despite the ongoing drought affecting funding, **groups were able to leverage the TTTT grant, in total, 1.19 times with the total value of the projects (grant plus other funding) being \$40,843,127.**

The **critical role of philanthropy, government funders and intermediaries** / relationship brokers such as FRRR was also clear. Grantees reported that without funding from FRRR through the TTTT program, many projects would not have gone ahead. Grants provided opportunities for community groups to innovate and initiate ways to provide direct support to those in need, empowering people to create change and eliciting a sense of hope.

Support during difficult times provides a boost to morale and increases motivation and can create a strong foundation to leverage in future – whether to enhance preparedness efforts, undertake recovery activity or to take advantage of broader opportunities.



Recommendations on program design to meet the needs of communities during drought

- Resources need to be readily available and easily accessible during drought to support communities to deal with the changes occurring locally.
- Programs should overtly recognise and support the important role that locally based not-for-profit organisations play in strengthening community wellbeing and connection and ultimately sustainability through:
 - Providing support that increases social and community-wide wellbeing, and strengthens local networks. If they can't stay together, sustain population and diversify, there won't be an economy to grow;
 - Social and community resilience being furthered through mental health first-aid training and education, building the capacity of locals to support one another and recognise the risk in their family, neighbours and broader community across the drought cycle;
 - Information sharing and knowledge building relating to future climate trends;
 - Ongoing support for community-based infrastructure that enables community participation;
 - Capacity building for people and organisations that promotes leadership and innovation; and
 - Supporting projects that promote community level economic stimulation and diversification.
- Retain flexibility in regard to the project purpose and the simplicity of the application process to ensure funding is accessible to grassroots organisations, not just charities or organisations with paid staff.
- Flexible funding and longer timelines allows communities to innovate and respond to local opportunities, creating the right conditions to identify, drive and deliver projects:
 - Tiered grants enable communities to scale projects according to need and capacity. These different funding amounts allow community organisations and groups to initiate fit for purpose solutions, balancing their response to local needs with their capability and capacity.
 - Small grants provide opportunities for community groups to deliver impactful but smaller scale initiatives, while larger grants allow communities to drive larger projects that meet bigger needs. Providing choice empowers communities to find the best fit for their project depending on their capacity.
 - Continue to recognise the increased costs involved in delivering projects in remote communities through larger value grants.
 - Recognise that the same model doesn't fit all. For example, workshops in remote communities require different accommodations to those delivered in larger rural and regional towns, so take into account the isolation, distance covered by participants to attend and scheduling.

- Offering funding for a broad range of initiatives ensures there is a multidimensional approach to strengthening communities and building capacity. Projects that address the needs of a wide number of stakeholders across community, as well as projects that focus on providing opportunities to different cohorts within the community provide layers of support at the local level. This includes, but is not limited to, targeted projects providing opportunities to young people, women, First Nations community members and older community members. Meaningful outcomes were achieved from both general community projects as well as targeted projects, with initiatives aligned to all the objective areas, building social connection and community wellbeing.
- Maintain longer funding cycles – including a minimum of 18 months to acquit projects – and ongoing funding options over multiple years, especially to help communities get back to ‘normal’. A very limited range of financial support exists for communities that remain impacted by drought and none specifically for this purpose beyond the end of TTTT program:
 - For community groups and not-for-profit organisations, the stability of multi-year funding can make project delivery more effective and lead to greater efficiencies particularly when addressing complex issues and aiming to create a lasting impact;
 - Multi-year funding for larger scale projects helped groups like Birdsville Social Club provide certainty to the community and enable participants to build their learnings and support networks over the duration of the project and support the internal operating costs to deliver projects.
- Recognise the limited fundraising capacity of community organisations. During drought many groups find it increasingly difficult to fundraise within their communities. For those with reduced capacity, grant programs like TTTT provide vital support and programs should not require co-contributions.





District Council of Orreroo Carleton - BlackRock Woolpress
Rotunda
Image: Bec Smart

Recommendations on who and what should be funded

Locally based not-for-profit organisations have a unique ability to design projects that are highly effective in strengthening and improving the ability of agriculture-dependent communities to adapt, reorganise or transform in response to changing temperature, increasing variability and scarcity of rainfall and changing seasons, for improved economic, environmental and social wellbeing.

Who to fund?

1. Locally based not-for-profit organisations

They are best placed to know what they need. Projects that are community identified and community-led demonstrate a high level of commitment and engagement that helps drive momentum and deliver strong outcomes. Maintaining the focus on community-led and community-initiated projects results in greater momentum, community buy-in and commitment.

Individual landholder and family support alone is not enough to offset the impacts of droughts in regional communities.

2. Ensure there is a diversity in organisations and cohorts

Reach a wide cross section of the community where drought has its greatest actual impact. Support targeted projects for particular cohorts in the community, such as those focusing on youth or women, alongside broad-based projects that engage and benefit general community members;

How to identify projects?

1. Encourage co-design and collaboration

This amplifies local voices and provides communities with the opportunity to work together towards shared goals. It demonstrates community buy-in and can support social cohesion. Resourcing projects that focus on these approaches builds capacity at a local level, strengthens grassroots relationships, enables efficiencies and delivers sustainable outcomes.

2. Allow sufficient time for project development

Communities and organisations need to have time to consult, plan and develop relationships and partnerships. Grantees spoke about the importance of these stages to the success of their project and that this can take time.

What to fund?

1. Projects that have grassroots impact

The most important support and activities to build drought resilience are ones where grassroots community members and organisations benefit, particularly in remote, rural and regional locations. This is where the greatest impact of drought is most keenly felt, and as such, all programs should be highly focussed on this.

2. Investing in people is critical

Supporting leadership skills and overall capacity is as important as physical infrastructure – but sometimes the physical needs to come first, as leadership training can be perceived as intangible. Change is created when funding volunteers and locally based not-for profit organisations who provide vital support across the social fabric of communities. Recognise that health and wellbeing includes mental health, social cohesion and safety, which are issues that can be exacerbated by drought.

3. Invest in social capital

Put an emphasis on the importance of social connectedness, community networks and deep social bonds. Fund volunteers and locally based not-for-profit organisations who provide vital support across the social fabric of communities. For example:

- Building organisational capacity, developing awareness skills, and knowledge, or providing access to services or activities;
- Investment in infrastructure and equipment;
- Building community level resilience, and developing organisational resilience and capacity; and
- Addressing volunteer fatigue, succession planning and improved recruitment and retention strategies.

4. Flexible funding

This shows respect for communities' unique circumstances and an understanding that one size does not fit all. A balance of program scope is important to support both environmental, economic and social outcomes.

5. Operating costs

Extend the objectives to pay for staffing normally done by volunteers and operational costs normally covered by local fundraising, to enable backbone organisations to keep functioning.

6. Prioritise people and processes

A mix of funding supports locally conceived projects and initiatives, builds volunteer capacity and strengthens networks, builds organisational capacity and fosters sustainable local partnerships.

7. Initiatives that improve liveability

Fund projects that seek to improve social capital, build community capacity and provide resources for social infrastructure is imperative to improve liveability of communities and enable sustainable and resilient regions.

8. Invest in preparedness

Support projects that build the practical skills, knowledge and community-wide awareness required to be better prepared for drought in the future.

9. Invest in the future

Activate community-led innovation initiatives e.g. collective impact, regional economic diversification or female led innovation initiatives to mitigate the downstream social disadvantage risks of drought to children and families in particular.

Insights and impacts

Benefit of targeted investment in regions

Availability of funding with known continuity over a longer than usual period provided opportunities for communities to identify needs at a local level, respond accordingly and navigate the constant change and chronic disruptions that arose during the drought. For those organisations that made more than one application, it was evident from their feedback that knowing that the program was available over an extended period encouraged community organisations to plan, collaborate and design projects that would improve outcomes and address the impact of drought. As the effects of drought can be experienced over a long period, better resourcing provides improved volunteer experiences and strengthens the ability of community organisations and not-for-profits to deliver services to those in need.

Targeted investment over time widens engagement, builds confidence to deliver projects of greater scope, increases collaboration opportunities, enables greater financial leverage through diversified partners, increases amplification of project profile, and ultimately elicits greater social outcomes, making a long-term difference to communities.

Red Ridge (Interior Queensland) Limited received six grants totalling \$160,500 and delivered projects across central western QLD that helped build community resilience and promote social wellbeing. Participants in these projects told us that the isolation and disillusion that they'd been experiencing due to the drought conditions shifted to feelings of connection, hope and greater resilience.

In some cases, multiple grants were awarded to different organisations for discrete projects in the same community or region, particularly in areas of high drought sensitivity. While these organisations often partnered and collaborated with other community groups, this staggered

investment over time enabled projects to address multi-faceted issues and needs, taking diverse approaches to improving the quality of life for those living locally and often engaging different groups of people in the specific locality, as well as the wider region.

The positive impact of this clustering approach is evident in Tenterfield and surrounds, where 12 grants were awarded over the course of the program, with projects supported from Round 1 through to Round 18. In total, \$263,030 was invested in community initiatives that helped build community resilience by investing in infrastructure and community assets, addressed community health and social wellbeing or acted on environmental challenges. The impact of these projects spread across the broader community, addressing volunteer fatigue through improved resources and equipment. Projects also contributed to economic recovery and renewal by generating activity and cash flow by attracting travellers and tourists.

Similarly, in QLD, Longreach groups received 16 grants from Round 6 through to Round 23, channelling \$284,325 towards initiatives that primarily contributed to creating a culturally vibrant community through events, festivals and art workshops. More than half the projects sought to address volunteer fatigue and reduce social isolation, providing opportunities for connection and collaboration and promoting community health and social wellbeing.

Another cluster of projects in the mid-north of SA, south east of Port Augusta and north of Jamestown saw an investment of around \$480,000, which had a significant impact in that region. For example, at Melrose, TTTT helped fund a sustainable water storage facility at the Melrose Showgrounds; in Wilmington, the Progress Society built a multipurpose gym facility; in Booleroo, the local Lions Club replaced a catering van; in Pekina, they improved the facilities at the Community centre to facilitate more community interaction; and in Orroroo The Blackrock Woolpress Rotunda and 5431

Collective (read more on page 58) became tourist drawcards. Meanwhile, in Morchard, the hall acoustics were improved, with air-conditioning and a phone service booster aerial also installed. Not too far away, in Carrieton they preserved and restored the community hall and in Peterborough, they redeveloped the garden, creating a sense of pride.

In each instance, this seed funding was possible thanks to the generous financial support of philanthropic, government and corporate donors, highlighting the important role these partners play in strengthening remote, rural and regional communities.

In Lake Grace in WA, with a small population of just over 500 people, three projects focussed on improving conditions for both volunteers and the broader community by strengthening health and wellbeing. Projects included improving infrastructure and installing outdoor exercise equipment to be used by locals and people travelling through and providing comfortable furniture and equipment to encourage greater participation at a community art space.

Targeted investment in drought-affected communities over a longer than usual timeframe allows for cumulative impacts to emerge, as groups develop confidence in what they can achieve and see the benefits from coming together. With vulnerability and disadvantage already being felt in communities, TTTT funding became more important than ever to help communities seed and strengthen, adapt and evolve or innovate and renew. This was especially important as they were grappling with multiple setbacks, including drought, bushfire, flood, existing disadvantages exacerbated by COVID restrictions and reduced capacity to fundraise.



The power of philanthropy as a leverage point

Tackling Tough Times Together was a collaboratively funded program that launched in June 2014, following extensive discussions with the Tim Fairfax Family Foundation and engagement with communities experiencing drought. Personal experience of the family made them passionate about the need for this kind of support and once they were onboard, The Yulgilbar Foundation also joined the program with a focus on NSW.

In subsequent years, many other businesses, trusts, foundations and individual donors joined, and then the Australian Government came on board in October 2018, with a commitment of \$15 million to be awarded over five years.

The vision and capacity to work with a long-term agenda while addressing immediate need is a key strength of philanthropic giving. The TTTT program had worked quietly for four years, building an evidence-based approach, reach, networks and trust across QLD and NSW communities grappling with drought. This quiet, targeted support made those communities feel seen and heard and gave hope during the darkest of times. When drought conditions became a national emergency, the TTTT program was a ready and proven model for the Australian Government and other philanthropic and corporate donors to leverage with immediate effect. The first tranche of Government funds hit the ground in drought-affected communities within two months of being received by FRRR, demonstrating the power of patient philanthropic capital paving the way for others.

FRRR is grateful to the following donors for their contribution, especially the Tim Fairfax Family Foundation, whose initial and ongoing support was critical in sustaining the program over the eight years of its operation. Below we've listed those who contributed more than \$5,000 toward the program. However, a further 295 donors also made contributions and many made multiple donations.

- › Alexandra Gartmann
- › ANZ
- › ATC Foundation
- › Aussie Farmers Foundation
- › Australia Post
- › Australian Government
- › Dorothy Longfield
- › Dr George Jacobs
- › Henroth Group
- › JH Fairfax & Son Pastoral
- › Tim Fairfax AC
- › Gina Fairfax AC
- › Paul Ramsay Foundation
- › Pratt Foundation
- › Private Donors
- › Qantas Airways Limited
- › REX Airlines
- › Ronald Geoffrey Arnott Foundation (Perpetual)
- › Santos
- › Sidney Myer Fund
- › Stockland CARE Foundation
- › The Deloitte Foundation
- › The Snow Foundation
- › The Yulgilbar Foundation
- › Tim Fairfax Family Foundation (TFFF)
- › Westpac Group

Multiple grants to recipients

Ensuring communities are resourced to actively support one another over time through stronger networks and improved infrastructure enhances collective wellbeing and helps agriculture-dependent communities to be more sustainable long-term.

The TTTT program was underpinned by a strong understanding that progress toward greater resilience and sustainability depends on the local context, with each community experiencing unique challenges and opportunities. Communities need long-running programs, flexibility and time so that the conditions can evolve to support long-term change. This commitment and sustained, targeted and responsive investment over the eight years allowed community groups and organisations to access support at the right time for them, for the right purpose, resourcing and empowering community stakeholders throughout drought periods. Impact over time occurred through clustered investment into regions, through multiple grants to organisations playing backbone and connector roles in their regions and the targeted investment made in drought-affected communities.

“Each of the activities we held over the duration of this grant brought the community together, off their properties, and gave them opportunities to connect with others and learn new skills. The social connections enabled and created through this program have helped to reduce social isolation throughout the tough times during and following the drought experienced in our region.”

Condobolin and District Landcare
Management Committee, Round 16

In smaller rural and remote communities, it's often the same organisations that deliver crucial services, projects and programs for multiple purposes. During times of drought in particular, those organisations are well-placed to identify local need and respond accordingly, although they are themselves often also grappling with the impacts of drought, including being under-resourced. Through TTTT, around 10 percent of grantees (61 organisations) received two or more grants over the eight years of the program. Of those, 10 organisations received four or more grants.

This highlights the value of organisations building confidence from successful projects and being able to draw on funding for subsequent elements once the ground-work was laid. In other instances, it also confirms the importance of 'backbone' organisations, who hold deep connection and insights and can join the dots and build collaborations across groups and across communities, acting as conduits and connectors. Further, many play a more technical role, applying for and acting as 'financial manager', often auspicing grant funds on behalf of other very small groups that would not ordinarily access government funding, often in remote or very remote and under resourced locations. These backbone organisations therefore play a critical role in enhancing efficiency and coordination for organisations managing projects with limited institutional or organisational capacity.

Organisations that received multiple grants took different approaches in the way they provided in-drought support to communities. For example, CWA NSW received seven grants totalling \$210,498 over the course of the program. As the lead organisation, they auspiced community-based branches that were delivering projects at a local level. This provided those local groups with the administrative support to deliver projects, while channelling the funds into grassroots initiatives.

Funding multiple projects sometimes allowed organisations to build on what they'd achieved earlier, either taking it to the next level or providing further enhancements, which was common with infrastructure projects. Organisations like the Roughlie Community Centre started with a request to fund a shed which served as a meeting place on land that had been donated by adjoining farmers for that purpose. Over the years, they added toilets, and in time, a purpose-built meeting facility, as they outgrew the shed.

Corack Public Hall Inc in Victoria received funding to replace the outdated brick toilet block with a modern, all ability access unisex toilet. Seven rounds later, they were awarded funds to upgrade the original kitchen in the hall. Both projects increased use of the amenities and provided improved conditions and accessibility for volunteers and community members.

“The kitchen looks so bright and hygienic now. We held a small function later in the year and as a result, we had an expression of interest in a booking for later in the year. We are proud of our hall, many in the area are not aware of our facility so this was a good showcase of what we have been able to put together with the help of FRRR.”

Corack Public Hall Inc, Round 22

FRRR saw benefit from backing the same community group to try new ways to support their community and to sustain momentum. For example, Booringa Action Group Inc in QLD delivered three projects with different focusses, from building community resilience by investing in infrastructure at the local visitor centre as well as delivering a festival to bring the community together to celebrate their history and connection to the land.

Another example is Red Ridge (Interior Queensland), who received six grants totalling \$160,500 across Rounds 4, 8, 10, 11, 16 and 23. Projects funded a range of events, some

focussed on women and most benefitted the broader community across the Central West, including Longreach, Winton, Blackall and Quilpie. Projects built individual leadership capacity, fostered the arts, encouraged participation in social and community activities and helped address social isolation.

Receiving funding gives community groups confidence both that they can apply for and secure a grant and equally as important, that they can implement the project and successfully acquire it. As confidence grows, more people become skilled in the process and they can apply for larger funds or undertake more ambitious projects or respond to changing needs as the drought persists.

We also saw multiple grants go to the same organisation but focussed on a different cohort. For example, Windorah Development Board received funding for three grants, two of which were focussed on building social wellbeing and connection through delivery of activities to different groups in the community. The Coppers Creek Ladies Day was one of the first TTTT projects supported in Round 1 and this provided a rare opportunity for women within the shire to get together to listen to mental health and wellbeing guest speakers. They also delivered a community event that screened outdoor movies for local school children, with TTTT funds being used to purchase the inflatable movie screen.

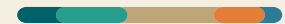
A deep dive into the objectives of Rounds 10.1 to 22

In the following section of this report, we focus on impacts of the grants funded using the generous investment from the Australian Government and respond to the five objectives and funding criteria that were set once the program expanded. However, we note that many of the observations apply more broadly to the impacts of the whole program.



Australian Government

BUILDING AUSTRALIA



This program was co-funded by the Australian Government.

As the table below shows, reducing volunteer fatigue and building capacity, capability and sustainability of local NFPs was the most popular objective in all states, with the next most funded area reducing social isolation.

TTTT Objectives: Rounds 10.1 -22 – All Funders	Projects	Funding requested	Grants
Reduce volunteer fatigue and build capacity	216	\$6,250,115	\$6,226,131
Reduce social isolation	133	\$3,921,866	\$3,885,901
Local economic recovery or renewal	96	\$3,729,522	\$3,686,594
Social and educational participation and address disadvantage for children and young people	66	\$2,266,687	\$2,252,217
Leadership development and skills training	20	\$671,657	\$671,657
Grand Total	531	\$16,839,847	\$16,722,499

Reducing volunteer fatigue and building the capacity, capability and sustainability of local not-for-profit organisations to provide support to their communities, particularly where they are playing an increased role during the drought

During droughts, grassroots organisation and not-for-profit groups are a fundamental part of the community, delivering pivotal support, programs and projects across regions. Volunteers are an integral part of these groups and play an important role delivering services and contributing to opportunities for engagement and connectedness. Often volunteers will hold multiple roles and are likely to be experiencing their own challenging circumstances due to drought conditions.

Through Rounds 10.1 to 22, more than 40% of projects focussed on reducing volunteer fatigue and building the capacity, capability and sustainability of local not-for-profit organisations to provide support to their communities. With at least 196,468 people benefitting from these projects, projects had broad reach both geographically and demographically. Overall, 62 projects focussed on this objective were delivered in NSW, 83 in QLD, 34 in SA, 27 in VIC, nine in WA and one in TAS.

Volunteers and Capacity Building projects, by State



Tackling Tough Times Together

These projects delivered a positive impact for communities in both the short and long-term.

A significant proportion of projects sought to reduce volunteer fatigue by improving facilities at amenities, with many grantees identifying that this investment made a significant difference to volunteer health and wellbeing. Some projects also sought to address some of the underpinning causes of volunteer fatigue and provide better resourcing, reliable equipment, access to training and skill development, which in turn assisted with volunteer recruitment and retention strategies. Some projects identified that micro-volunteering opportunities were more appealing to younger people who had limited time but wanted to contribute to a larger project.

Through funded projects, many organisations established stronger partnerships with other volunteer organisations and indicated they would continue to collaborate on initiatives that improve outcomes for both volunteers and local not-for-profits in drought-impacted communities.

Feedback from grantees highlights the motivating benefits of improving conditions for volunteers, including demonstrating appreciation for the role volunteers play and validating their contribution.

“We are a small rural community that is always struggling to keep our heads above water (like many others) with limited yet dedicated volunteers that punch well above their weight. Without the assistance of grant and ward funding many of the projects we have achieved in the past several years would have been much harder to achieve if at all with limited fundraising opportunities available to us. The assistance from FRRR with this project has been very beneficial to the volunteers with significant technology-based workloads, having this type of support for struggling rural communities is greatly appreciated by all of us.”

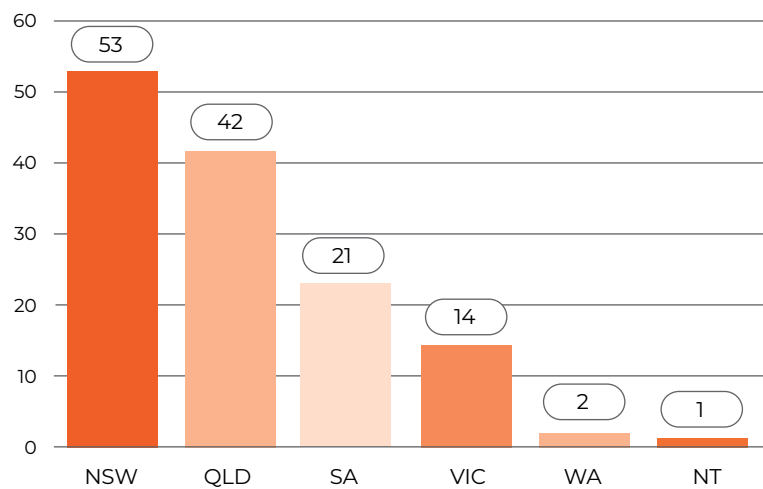
The Terowie Citizens Association Inc, Round 12

Reducing social isolation by facilitating strong social cohesion and connection

The isolating nature of drought means social connectedness is often disrupted as people stay home, either to look after stock or because they are minimising their spending. However, this can affect the health and wellbeing of those affected. Locally driven, low-cost initiatives that engage the community through targeted programs, services and social events become increasingly important to creating a stronger sense of belonging and purpose.

Between rounds 10.1 and 22, there were 133 projects focussed primarily on reducing social isolation by facilitating strong local cohesion and connection. At least 122,440 people benefitted from these projects. In total 53 projects were delivered in NSW; 42 in QLD; 21 in SA; 14 in Victoria; two in WA and one in the NT.

Social Cohesion projects, by State



Grantees delivered festivals, cultural events, arts activities, forums and informal gatherings such as morning teas, some with an explicit purpose of enhancing connections, while others seemingly focussed on other topics but created the right conditions for people to engage. These complementary approaches helped ensure that as the drought wore on and people's mental health worsened, there was support available in different ways.

As a Lake Grace group explained, *"The social impact of the drought has affected people's (physical) health and mental health. There have been some changes in lifestyle, anxiety and depression about economic losses caused by the drought. Increased threat of fires without enough water to stop the spread and reduced incomes have made people have to move from the community ... This has increased the workload of the remaining community volunteers, having an increased impact on mental health and stress."*

With support from grants, social networks have grown and strengthened through coordinated activities and through peer support. Many projects offered opportunities to learn new skills, improve ecological, economic and social wellbeing of rural communities, resulting in greater connection and cohesion between community members with similar interests, enabling relationships to develop and strengthen. Other projects were delivered collaboratively by multiple groups, further enhancing the social fabric of the local community.



Grantees also provided feedback that during times of drought, projects such as those incorporating creative art activities that provided innovative and practical ways to enhance engagement, connectedness and collaboration at a grassroots level had excellent participation rates, particularly across diverse demographic groups. For example, Pinnaroo Community Incorporated delivered a project that contributed to a total of 69 activities during 2022 and early 2023, facilitated by 16 visiting artists and Hub Coordinators, engaging more than 612 participants.

“This FRRR funding has also greatly impacted the research study (undertaken by Flinders University) by providing the necessary funding to produce high quality arts and cultural experiences for the community. Preliminary results from the study show positive trends in the health of the Pinnaroo community.”

Pinnaroo Community Inc, Round 21

Projects that focussed on mental health were often delivered in conjunction with local not-for-profit services allowing participants to connect with mental health practitioners and services. Grantees reported that participants benefitted from developing greater awareness of available supports and how to access them, either through self-referral or to provide information to family and friends.

Grantees highlighted that some community members were initially unsure about participating in programs. However, when delivery was consistent and regular, people began to join in once they were more confident and comfortable. This demonstrates the benefit of ongoing, long-term opportunities for people to connect when they're ready.

“Social isolation was a critical issue during the current prolonged drought. By facilitating inclusive, fun and relaxed events we provided opportunities for people to interact, connect and support each other.”

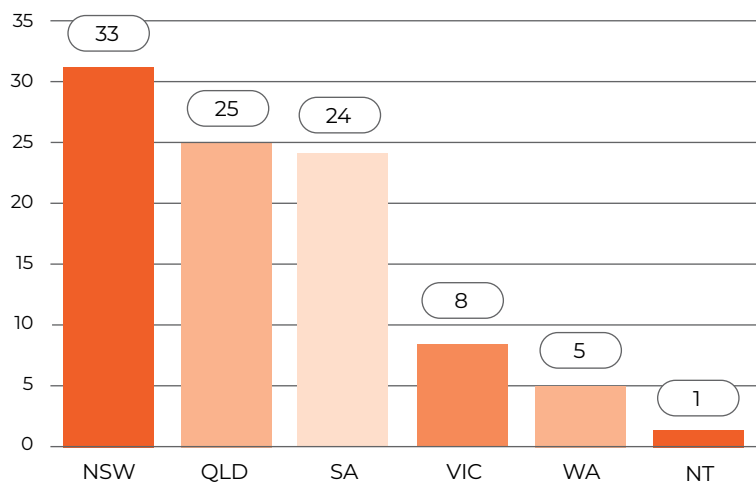
Coonamble and Castlereagh District Landcare, Round 11



Supporting local economic recovery or renewal through projects that stimulate economic activity and cash-flow within communities

Between rounds 10.1 and 22, there were 96 projects focussed on supporting local economic recovery or renewal through projects that stimulate economic activity and cash-flow within communities, with more than 155,917 people benefitting from these projects. Overall, 33 projects were delivered in NSW; 25 in QLD; 24 in SA; eight in Victoria; five in WA and one in NT.

Economic projects, by State



Feedback from grantees demonstrates that increased economic activity at a local level helped to build sustainability and community confidence. Many projects also focussed on stimulating economic activity through the delivery of culturally vibrant initiatives such as art trails, festivals, theatre workshops, family friendly events, fundraisers and community barbeques. These activities frequently injected tourism dollars into the local economy, with grantees identifying that those travelling for events would also often stay in the region, delivering a flow on effect to other businesses and services.

Drought conditions re-enforced the need to look beyond traditional rural businesses and think of new ways to support community culture and the local economy. Communities saw the opportunity to stimulate activity through art and cultural projects, such as silo art trails. With silo murals the drawcard, these projects attracted regular and frequent visitors to the regions, providing connection to other local activities and tourist sites. In addition, these projects often provided communities with an opportunity to profile and celebrate unique and distinct characteristics about their town and cultural history, strengthening community identity, sense of belonging and connection.

Linking towns through Silo Art trails also strengthens regional development and communities feel part of something much bigger, which is important when communities feel geographically and socially isolated. Enhancing the local tourism experience encourages visitors to stay longer, providing opportunities that stimulate long-term economic growth and resilience within the community. The TTTT program supported multiple projects that created these regional landmarks, providing an uplifting and widely accessible experience for tourists and contributing to a significant increase in people visiting regions.

“The Art Trail project In Monto, QLD, which the silo art was a part of, has not only had a massive economic impact to the Monto community and the North Burnett, but it has sparked the heart and spirit of the community. It has revitalised a sleeping town where the residents now take pride in their community, in what they do and the impact that they have for future generations.

From an economic benefit point, Monto Magic manages the RV Stopover site in the heart of the community. Visitor receipts have been gathered at that site since 2017. Prior to the Art Trail project the average ‘visitor spend’ calculated through the receipts was \$30,000 per year. Over the years and just before COVID, after the Art Trail project was completed with the Silos being the final piece, the receipts tallied over \$30,000 per week. The Reginald Murray Williams Australian Bush Learning Centre reported an increase in visitation by 66% during the Silo Art trail and for the follow 12 months, of which the visitors stated their purpose for visiting the region was to see the Silos at Three Moon. The funds that we received from FRRR for the Silo Art changed our community beyond what even we imagined as the project leads.”

Monto Magic, Round 16



“While there is a level of resilience instilled in our community, the current drought event has delivered a large blow to us all. A boost in collective morale is needed, and the Silo Art project we believe will help, and is already helping us to lift spirits across the Franklin Harbour region. Our project has been inclusive and community based from the start, is bringing people together and is giving our farming and business community a positive distraction from the drought. The committee is most proud to have left a legacy that will see an increase in visitation to the town which will see flow on effects to local businesses. The artwork is a huge talking point around the community and it’s a project that has let the whole town to be a part of it (directly or indirectly).”

Franklin Harbour Community Development Group Inc,
Round 12

Tourism activity was capitalised through innovative projects that embraced IT development to support economic activity, such as one project that created a self-guided tourist attraction using interpretative signage.

There were many public art events that promoted arts and culture, supported tourism, and increased the liveability of the town. Projects such as refurbishing The Rex Theatre in Monto (see page 54) demonstrated that regional arts activities support the strengthening of community connectedness, social inclusion, community identity and civic pride as well as providing opportunities for regional development and economic recovery.



To improve the economic viability of drought-impacted communities, many community groups worked collaboratively with other organisations and businesses to drive projects. Projects supported often also leveraged other funding and partnerships to deliver activities and events that focussed on building the social and economic strength of drought-impacted communities.

A large proportion of these projects were for infrastructure upgrades and much needed equipment, enabling delivery of projects and programs across drought-affected communities. These projects created the right conditions for innovation and connection, contributing to economic

activity by encouraging local spending, with projects often using resources sourced within the community and supporting local businesses, which saw the funds retained within the region.

Grantee feedback identified that investment in infrastructure will also continue to provide the means for community groups to deliver future initiatives. Funding recipients highlighted that practical upgrades and infrastructure were strategically critical to the vitality and sustainability of towns, particularly in very small communities with reduced ability to fundraise.

“Our venue is proving to be very popular as it provides our community with a beautiful, safe and clean space to hold events. We have many community events scheduled in the coming months including our local school’s annual fundraiser, a youth dance and a farmer’s golf day. It has made an enormous difference to our community by providing a lovely space for those residing here to gather. It has benefitted the community by allowing those within it to come together and work collaboratively on such a positive project. The Committee and the broader community have garnered a great sense of pride in our newly improved Club and we are proud to offer this venue to those in our region to enjoy for generations to come.”

The Spring Ridge Country Club Ltd, Round 14

“The Committee and Members of the Red Cliffs Historical Steam Railway extend their great appreciation to the Foundation for the support during a time that has been more difficult than any other in recent memories. The funding provided resources for the Railway to recover from extreme and long-term drought depression and recover following the restricted operations during the COVID epidemic. While the available dollars of course were invaluable, what is less quantifiable is the confidence and optimism in the organisation as a direct result of the funding stream and support. “Harnessing goodwill to ensure the long-term viability of remote and rural Australia.” We thank you!”

Red Cliffs Historical Steam Railway Incorporated, Round 21

“FRRR has funded a wide range of projects for Thallon since 2013. These projects have made a huge difference to Thallon’s long-term sustainability as the community has battled drought, business closure and population decline. The projects have helped attract visitors to the town, as well as improving infrastructure and liveability for locals. Without FRRR’s ongoing support I don’t know where we would be.”

Thallon Progress Association Inc, Round 20

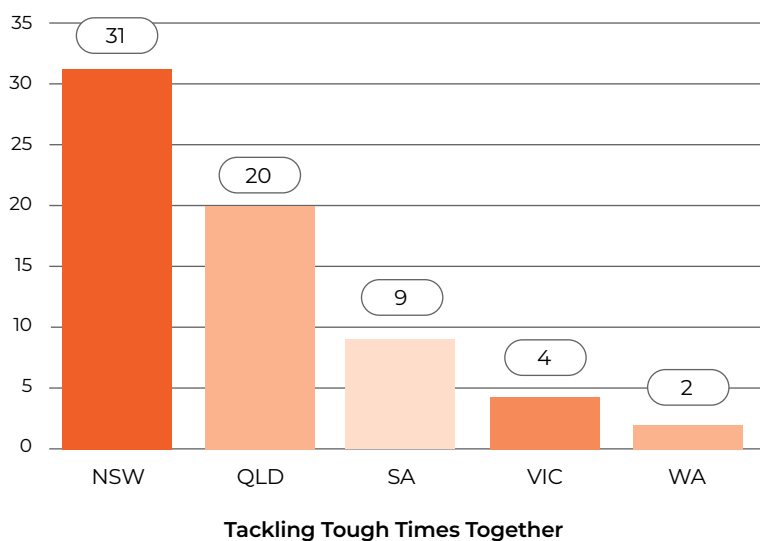


Supporting opportunities for social and educational participation and address disadvantage for children and young people caused by the drought

Children often disproportionately feel the effects of ongoing drought, as parents are forced to curtail spending on things like music classes, participating in excursions or holidays simply to be able to keep their businesses running and food on the table. Yet these experiences and seemingly 'nice to do' activities play a critical role in children's development – especially for those who head to boarding school in the future.

Across rounds 10.1 to 22, 66 projects focussed primarily on supporting opportunities for social and educational participation and addressing disadvantage caused by the drought for children and young people. More than 71,346 people benefitted from these projects, with 31 projects delivered in NSW, 20 in QLD, nine in SA, four in Victoria and two in WA.

Education opportunities, by State



These grants funded projects ranging from therapeutic programs or interventions to providing ongoing access to experiences such as musical education, drama, mobile kindergarten and playgroups or other value-adding experiences or resources. Often funding also paid for equipment such as digital whiteboards, which local P&C fundraising would typically have covered but which was not possible due to the impacts on discretionary spending. In some cases, they extended to funding online programs or to providing access to equipment and transportation.

Together, these activities and resources had positive impacts on children's development including increased self-esteem, resilience, personal and cultural identity, as well as addressing issues such as school retention and attendance.



“The drought required school-age children to help out on the farm, taking them away from their studies; living on the farm during tough times create mental health issues in our youth which take years to overcome. The community needs a space to nurture our youth, all ages and abilities, to develop strong family and social connections and have a support network to plan and provide activities where they can meet new people and recover from the tough experiences.”

Lake Grace Artists' Group, Round 20

In addition, several grantees delivered workshops for young people, focussing on strategies and tools to improve mental health and wellbeing. Other programs looked to develop functional life focussing on building work readiness skills.

In rural communities, young people are a pivotal part of the future. The opportunity to invest in initiatives that provide pathways to strengthen resilience and wellbeing, improve day-to-day life and provide exposure to age-appropriate strategies have made a significant difference to young people, families, educational settings, organisations and local businesses, as well as the broader community.

“Winton and Blackall gathered their communities, learnt old time dance skills between young and old and presented performances that brought to life stories, enjoyment and fun.”

Red Ridge Interior - Round 8

“The acquisition of a school bus breaks down the financial and cultural barriers many of our children face because of the relative isolation of Trundle. It allowed for our students to be exposed to activities that they wouldn't usually be able to experience. During the height of the drought, excursions were what the students looked forward to attending, as this allowed them to relax and enjoy life as a school kid, leaving their worries at home for the day.”

Trundle Central School P&C Association, Round 14

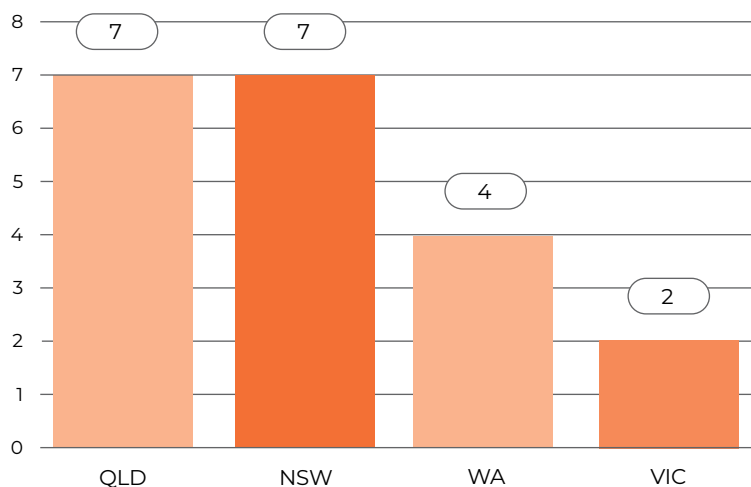


Supporting and engaging the community in leadership development and skills training

The TTTT program supported drought-affected communities to build resilience by developing capability across the community. Projects that focussed on skills training, information sharing and leadership development allowed local communities to identify and respond to opportunities and challenges as they arose. Grants supported groups and organisations to not only build organisational capacity but to broaden their reach and deliver learning and development initiatives that would benefit a broad cross section of the community, particularly young people, women and First Nations groups. These projects provided opportunities for peer support and strengthened partnerships by collectively developing knowledge, skills and experience.

Over Rounds 10.1 to 22, there were 20 projects focussed primarily on leadership development and skills training. While this is a relatively small proportion of projects than other objective areas, the impact was significant with more than 3,127 people directly benefitting. Grantees provided feedback that projects strengthened capacity through network growth, volunteer engagement and improved planning mechanisms. Seven projects were delivered in QLD, seven in NSW, four in WA and two in Victoria.

Leadership Development projects, by State



For some organisations, drought conditions worsened over the life of their project, so coordinated training events provided opportunities to respond to the changing needs of the community, increasing connections at a grassroots level and building knowledge and skills as issues emerged.

There was a strong focus on ensuring future sustainability of the organisations and projects. Skills training and leadership development enabled organisations and communities to focus on volunteer retention and recruit new members, building sustainability and longevity. Feedback also highlighted that investing in upskilling local people and developing community leaders provided reassurance that they would be moving forward during times of uncertainty with greater knowledge and experience, increasing confidence across communities.

There was also a focus on workshops and projects that improved outcomes for women, youth and local Indigenous groups. Many leadership and skill building projects sought to enhance individual and community health, by delivering training to address mental health needs in the community. These projects have an important multiplier effect, with participants providing an additional layer of support within rural communities and encouraging positive social wellbeing.



“These events became important opportunities for our local farmers to connect with other people. Many were busy hand feeding, carting water and dealing with the other unanticipated problems from drought e.g. machinery break downs, sourcing feed, renegotiating finance with banks. People really needed an organised forum to come together, to find out new information on drought matters or other emerging issues e.g. carbon farming or renewable energy”.

Glenrac Incorporated, Round 11

Looking Ahead

The TTTT program remains in informal recess, with a minor amount of residual funds in readiness for reactivation when high level drought conditions emerge.

In concert with the finalisation of the TTTT program in its current iteration has been the emergence of the Australian Government’s Future Drought Fund support for regional communities for drought preparedness and resilience building. To date, the investment of approximately \$43 million during 2021 to 2023, delivered in partnership with ARLF and FRRR, has enabled the ongoing support to strengthen social capital in all agriculturally dependent communities across remote, rural and regional Australia through a diversified program delivery approach of mentoring, leadership, grants, collaboration, and capacity building.

While support delivered through the Future Drought Fund Helping Regional Communities Prepare for Drought Initiative is important in planning ahead for future droughts, it does not encompass or replace the need for in-drought support to communities when widespread dryness will inevitably emerge. A complementary support mechanism that recognises the unique community level conditions while in drought and works in recognition of the existing investment is critical.

TTTT projects in action

In this section, we share ten stories that showcase the breadth and impact of projects funded through the TTTT program. In addition to drawing on their applications and final reports, we conducted interviews with these groups. The stories below are a summary of what they told us about their projects, who they supported, why they were needed and the legacy from this investment. You can listen to the interviews on the FRRR podcast.



Organisation: Buloke Women's Network

State: VIC

Grants: \$14,700 (Round 15) & \$15,900 (Round 22)

Donor: Australian Government

Celebrating the women of the Buloke Shire

The Buloke region in Victoria has endured years of spirit-crushing events – from drought to COVID restrictions and flooding rains – and the Buloke Women's Network has been crucial to keeping spirits up through it all.

The need to come together to recover from isolation and respond to the challenges wrought by these events is how the Celebrating the Women of the Buloke Shire project started.

Women came together regularly from across the shire to hear inspiring local speakers at events such as Champagne at Sunset at Lake Tyrell, and a dinner prepared by a local small business at the beautiful Watchem Church. TTTT funding covered catering, venue expenses, advertising and transport.

"I could see the impacts of drought, floods, climate change, rising farm costs and declining prices. And there was nothing to support women in the area," co-founder Ellen White says.

"They wanted to meet other people from other places and connect with them and hear what was happening for them, and if they had the solutions to some of the problems that they had, and just to share their stories."

Co-founder Julie Slater says their initial aim was enabling social opportunities for women, but in retrospect she realises how pivotal these gatherings were in helping the entire district survive.

"One of the things that we found really quickly was that what women were looking for was for social connection. Women wanted to be able to stop and take that breath and really sort of say, yep, I'm busy. I have a lot going on, but at the end of the day, I need to fill my own cup if I'm going to be there and fill the rest of my family's, the rest of my workplace, the rest of my community's cup."





Sea Lake silo art
Image: Buloke Women's Network

Organisation: Aldersyde Agricultural Hall Inc

State: WA

Grant: \$110,000 - Round 18

Donor: Australian Government

Aldersyde Hall renovations

The 100-year-old Aldersyde Agricultural Hall is the heart and soul of an entire district in Western Australia's Wheatbelt Region. Older people recall going to dances and playing football and tennis there.

When a prolonged dry period hit the region, the locals decided they needed a boost to keep their flagging spirits alive.

Suzanne Turner, President of the Aldersyde Agricultural Hall, says the hall renovations funded by FRRR's Tackling Tough Times Together program did much more than provide a new kitchen, prized dishwasher, indoor toilet, water tanks and a lick of paint.

"Along with COVID and drought came staffing issues for everyone. So everyone was exhausted. When your dams aren't full, you're relying on troughs for water – it's a big job."

Suzanne says the hall renovations were an investment in people, giving them a place to support each other through a challenging dry spell.

"Just to go down and have that social interaction and relief from that stress of home and farm was worth its weight in gold," she said.

Looking back now, Suzanne sees many benefits of the renovation to the wider community.

"The water storage gives people a sense of confidence. If anyone runs out of water, which does quite often happen and people are carting water, we've got that facility there. Even if it's to fill up a small tank just for drinking water, it's there.

"We're not a huge group of people and whilst it was very challenging towards the end and leading up to the opening, we all needed a holiday from each other, I think how we've come together and we've continued to work together after the project is a major achievement.

"I think we can now confidently say that that facility's going to be there for another 50 years. It's going to future-proof us."





image : Nina O'Brien

Organisation: The Beltana Progress Association Incorporated

State: SA

Grant: \$12,995 - Round 18

Donor: Australian Government

Historic Hall refurb reinvigorates Beltana

In 2018-19, the spirits of locals in Beltana in South Australia's Flinders Ranges were dwindling as drought took hold and extended families stopped visiting.

But according to Jan Ferguson OAM, Secretary of the Beltana Progress Association, thanks to investment in people and infrastructure, the historic town has become known as a much-loved place for musos to perform on the Festival of Small Halls Folk Circuit.

Originally built in 1879, the Beltana Hall is believed to be the oldest galvanised iron hall still in use in Australia. Townspeople patiently spent six years renovating the Hall, with FRRR funding enabling them to remove 20 tonnes of rubble from the cellar. This became a gallery displaying 250 Flinders Ranges paintings bequeathed to the Association, now a popular tourist attraction.

"A lot of drought funding in the past has gone to the agricultural industry, whereas this time there was actually space for communities to join, and that was really, really valuable," Jan says.

"We did a new strategic plan for the town and the hall was one of the fundamental parts of

that, that we needed a good meeting place. The drought funding enabled us to do the social things that were really important in restoring the hall, but it also kept our tradies going. That's essential because if you don't maintain the vibrancy of your community, then it gets really tough."

She says the funding also brought unexpected benefits.

"Since we did all of this, the road into the town's been sealed by the government. So, the whole profile of the town has changed as we've demonstrated we can do things – and we are doing things."

The Tackling Tough Times Together funding also enabled them to establish a new bore water supply, which in turn led to more tourists as caravaners could stay.

Jan's optimistic that the historic town has a contemporary future, as well as historic significance, and hopes to work closely with the Adnyamathanha people who have lived in the region for more than 60,000 years to keep Beltana alive.





Beltana Hall
Image: Bec Smart

Organisation: Royal Flying Doctor Services of Australia – South Eastern Section

Grant: \$59,924 - Round 22

Donor: Australian Government

State: NSW

Family Fun Days create connection

By 2021, 10 years of relentless drought had brought far west New South Wales to its knees. For those on the front line, social gatherings were few and far between, as people pulled together what little resources they had left just to survive.

Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS) and Contact Inc came together to create RuralCONNECT, bringing relief to small towns with fun family day activities that took them away from the daily realities of drought, for a short while.

CEO of Contact Inc, Sue Kingwill, helped coordinate the Family Fun Days and says they were responding to what the community was asking for.

Sue says it was very much about listening to what the communities said they needed.

“There were certainly some indicators of anxiety emerging around children and families that was being reported to us. People were telling us about their desire for their children to be with other children and for adults to be with others. They simply wanted to have a sense of coming together again and having some happy times rather than all the things that they were experiencing.”

So, they organised Family Fun Days in Wanaaring, Tilpa and Louth, including guest speakers talking about parenting; play based

therapy programs for the kids; and activities for the adults such as yoga, welding, hat making and furniture restoration.

“They also started to talk to us about how do we manage if something goes wrong, saying “I’m not really competent with my First Aid.” So, we realised it would be really good for us to think about First Aid as one of the events as an add-on. And they certainly talked about their stress and their desire to look after themselves and for their children to have those relaxation techniques.”

Local townspeople were employed to do the catering, and accommodation was always booked in town to spread the benefits throughout the towns as much as possible.

Lesley Harvey, a mental health specialist and play therapist with RFDS, worked with Sue to bring the activities to some of the most isolated communities in NSW and hopes the impacts are still being felt.

“We know that it’s always going to be a cycle of these events,” Lesley says. “And if we now have this other information of additional things that we can be doing supporting them through this process, and we’ve started some of these fantastic things, let’s continue it because then we may not see at the end a higher level of stress because we’ve been able to give the parents a break throughout that period and not just at the end when everything’s actually really fallen apart.”





Organisation: The Rex Monto Limited

State: QLD

Grant: \$58,500 - Round 18

Donor: Australian Government

Reviving Monto

The Rex Theatre in Monto has been a vital part of Queensland's North Burnett community since the cavernous art deco cinema was built in the 1930s. But it had fallen into disrepair, closed to the public for nearly two decades.

The Board had long dreamed of bringing the old building back to life. So when FRRR contributed more than \$58,000 through the TTTT program, the town rejoiced that The Rex would shine again as the hub of town gatherings.

Managing Director of The Rex, Carly Baker-Burnham, says reinvigorating the theatre alongside a temporary art and cultural gallery and store that showcased local artists and producers, gave locals a chance to focus on something other than drought, and released previously untapped creativity.

The projects worked in tandem to attract thousands of visitors from around Australia, who all bought artworks, produce and local creations. Another part of the project was honouring the work of renowned local artist Gil Jamieson, with part of the grant going towards renting a space in Monto's main street for a gallery dedicated to displaying and restoring his artwork.

"The seed was born when we applied for the funding, so there was some momentum, but when we were successful for the funding, which we're so grateful for, it enabled it to be a more sustainable project and we could employ someone part-time to run the store along with several volunteers as well. It meant we could do it a little bit more professionally, I suppose.

"We felt really proud of bringing these people together and showcasing what our little country town had," she says. "But it also, it connected us. That's what we didn't realise that was going to be an outcome or the result was this beautiful connection of creative people straddling all of the ages, genders. It was amazing."

Carly says the project brought unexpected benefits, with empty shops on the main streets thriving once again, and Gil Jamieson's son buying the old furniture shop to showcase his father's work long-term.

"In essence, the funding contributed to the core purpose of The Rex, which was the restoration, and to create more vitality and vibrance in our community through arts and culture."





Image: The Rex Monto

Organisation: Central West Farming Systems Inc

State: NSW

Grant: \$51,195 - Round 17

Donor: Paul Ramsay Foundation

Investing in women of the Central West

Harnessing the untapped potential of women in the NSW Central West was the inspiration behind a project that supported them to rejoin the workforce remotely during the 2018-19 drought.

CEO of Central West Farming Systems, Diana Fear, knew that many women were looking for a “side hustle” that could bring in money while the farm was struggling. However, she could also see that many women had lost confidence in their ability and skills.

In response, she put together a program of mentoring and networking events, called “Tapping a Natural Resource – a rural and regional remote workforce”.

“In our towns, shops closed through drought periods and they never reopened. So, we really wanted to try and build our local capacity economically. We wanted to try and bring money back into the community, so the more people that are working, the better,” she said.

“Often a number of years have gone by and part of the big problem is confidence. Suddenly your skills seem a bit outdated and you’re not quite sure what to do.

“The other part of that project was just getting together and networking and talking to each other and sharing experiences and the frustrations of being on small outback farms can be quite difficult with droughts and floods and the myriad of issues that can happen.”

Around 20 women completed the training over three months, which was described as life-changing for all of the participants.

She is pleased that rather than renovating buildings, this project was focussed on people.

“I think all this human capital that we’re really investing in is really important and it does support resilience,” she says. “And I think in the bush, we’re much more, we need each other. And that’s why investing in the local women here that have so many skills and talents, it has such a huge impact.”





Image: Central West Farming Systems

Organisation: 5431 Collective, auspiced by District Council of Orroroo Carrieton

Grant: \$20,000 - Round 22

Donor: Australian Government

State: SA

5431 Collective keeping Orroroo buzzing

An unstoppable duo – Fiona Dignan and Kate Pierce – hatched a dream to revive their beloved town while working out at their local gym.

The 5431 Collective, named after the postcode for the South Australian township of Orroroo, is a hub for farmers and local creatives and has renewed the town.

“We had some amazingly clever people in our area who didn’t have the capital to start up on their own in a physical shop front and also didn’t have enough stock, or what they created wouldn’t be viable as a standalone shop,” Kate says.

“Orroroo is a great little town and we wanted to put another reason for people to stop here. So, we started coercing and chatting to all the clever ladies that create things in and around our area and it just rolled from there.

“We wanted to really complement what Orroroo already had and not take away from existing businesses.”

And they did! The main street is buzzing again and 5431 Collective has become a way for farmers and local creatives who struggled through the drought to get back on their feet and stay connected to the local community.

“A lot of our, what we call them pod holders, so our rural creators are from farms and have been tackling hugely tough times,” Fiona says. “So, to be able to push them up to the next level and provide them a platform to promote what they’re doing and to bring their income and business to the next level has been hugely rewarding.”

The community rallied behind the project, with working bees to restore a historic building for the Business Hub. This lifted their spirits by taking their minds off the social, mental and economic impacts that prolonged drought had wrought on the district.

“We’re in our third year (with) the same business pods, so they’ve been able to sustain what they’re doing,” Kate says. “I think we’re up to nearly supporting 50 rural creators around South Australia. Where we’re heading is it’s more than a shopfront - it’s a place where we do events and workshops and we’re developing community gardens. We want to keep building on what this is and not just be a shop front in Orroroo.”

“I’m most proud of the traction that we’ve gotten, which we wouldn’t have been able to do without the funding,” Fiona says. “And just putting an idea, which was really just a bit of a chat into fruition in such a short time span and then continuing to build. I think that’s what I’m most proud of.”





Organisation: Outback Highway Development Council Inc

State: NT

Grant: \$60,000 - Round 18

Donor: Australian Government

Outback Way Outdoor Gallery

For more than a decade Melanie Forbes dreamed of a series of stunning artworks along the Outback Way – a 2,700 km road from Winton in Queensland through Boulia, up through the Northern Territory, through Alice Springs and down through the Ngaanyatjarra lands and into Laverton.

But it took devastating bushfires and drought to hit the region for the artist to make that dream a reality.

As General Manager of the Outback Highway Development Council and director of the Outdoor Billboard Gallery, Mel oversaw the selection of the paintings. Fourteen double-sided billboards featuring works from local artists now punctuate a 110 kilometre stretch of the Plenty Highway, around 170 km east of Alice Springs, in what Mel hopes is just the beginning.

“We were dealing with the drought in the lead up to the idea percolating around and attaining federal funding, and then it was COVID, so nothing was easy,” Mel said. “We needed extra funding to realise the installation. Thankfully FRRR came to the rescue and provided us with the funds to allow us to engage private contractors to finish the project off, which was wonderful.

“It’s quite revolutionary really for somewhere so remote, and all about celebrating the artists and showcasing the work. Because when you’re driving those roads out there, you can start to wonder if there are any people out there. This certainly reminds people that there’s plenty going on.”

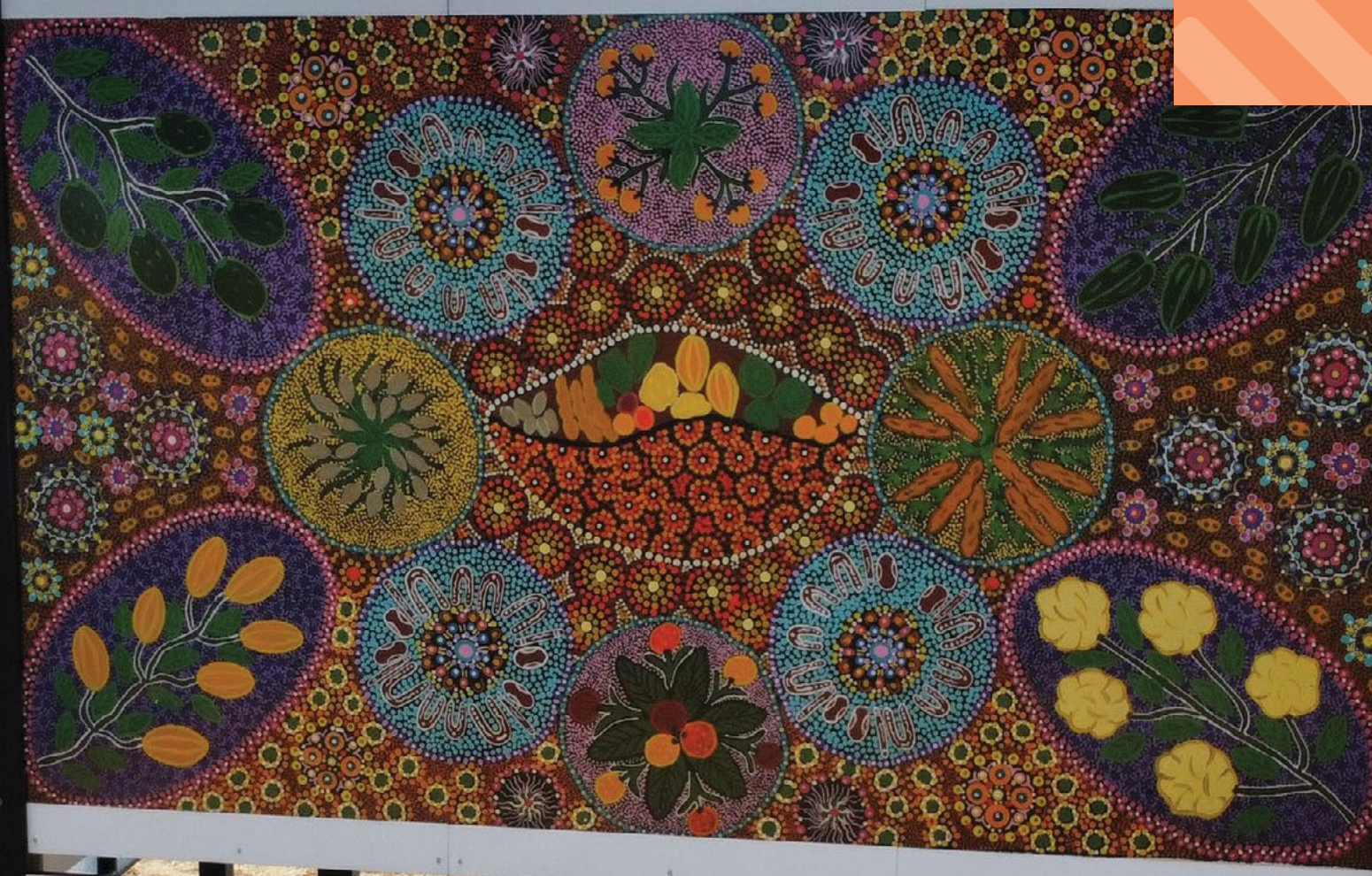
Mel has enjoyed watching the paintings become landmarks in their own right.

“The Wugularr community out on the Plenty Highway – they’ve actually got one of the billboards on their community indicating where they recently refurbished and opened an Art Centre. And it’s really showing them what’s possible.”

“It shows young people that there is a pathway, that it’s not just something that is a nice idea, that there’s many different ways to think about your future,” she says.

“It’s exciting to be able to build something that is going to make an impact and celebrate people. Just to really develop that cultural economy that is out in the regions and in remote areas because you’ve got the economy predominantly across those areas being agricultural or mining based. And this just brings some balance to that.





Women Teaching the Young Generation about Bush Tucker
Maria Ross



Organisation: Better in Blackall Inc

State: QLD

Grant: \$32,600 - Round 13

Donor: Australian Government and Others

Better in Blackall Festival

After seven years of relentless drought, the community around Blackall in central western Queensland was struggling.

As long-time local Gill Russell remembers, “It wasn’t just us, it was very regional, it was statewide. The pastoral and agricultural industry had been brought to its knees.

“Everyone emotionally and physically was very drained. Because unfortunately if it is dry and the agricultural industry is having a hard time, that also comes across into the community, the town, the shops,” Gill explains.

So, what else to do but start a celebration festival showcasing what the region had to offer. Gill is now the President of the Better in Blackall Festival, which brings together locals from near and far for cabaret, concerts and billy kart races.

Starting the festival was an important turning point and Gill says it wouldn’t have got off the ground without FRRR’s support.

“(FRRR) wasn’t just financially supporting us, they were also emotionally supporting us.”

“It’s very difficult to get grants for festivals. Mostly there’s a lot of grants out there for arts and culture, but what you’re trying to do is just to try and help your town and bring something that they haven’t seen before and normally experienced.”

The event is now something the whole community looks forward to. Gill looks back now and says the festival has kept the community together by lightening the load on families and bringing a sense of fun back to the town.

“The drought has had a major effect on our communities regionally and locally out here. A lot of people went out of sheep with the drought and that takes a lot of people. It was a large employer, the wool industry. A lot of people have left our community unfortunately.

“We’ve got a great cohort of young people, but the communities are definitely smaller, which is putting a lot more strain actually on all the community groups because there’s only so many people that go around volunteering and it just seems to be the same people are running a lot of these organisations.”

Better in Blackall is now biennial, with plans well under way for the next four days of fun from August 17 to 20 in 2025.





Image: Better in Blackall

Organisation: Moorambilla Voices

State: NSW

Grant: \$150,000 - Round 11

Donor: Australian Government

Moorambilla Voices bring more than music

When townships were wondering how they could survive during a decade of drought, Moorambilla Voices - a musical ensemble comprising children from primary age through to high school - was exposed to and created world class arts programs, giving hope when there was little left.

Through TTTT funding, three Mentor positions were funded to support Moorambilla Voices over three years.

Annie Berrell acted as Ensemble Manager for 18 years. She says the sense of purpose and joy at a time of such extreme hardship was important not only for the children taking part, but for the parents and carers, extended families and wider community as well.

Founder and artistic director Michelle Leonard says four albums and dozens of concerts have proved the musical worth of the group, but the wider effects of being part of it are even more profound.

"It takes a village to raise a child and it takes a region to raise Moorambilla," Michelle says.

"I think we can attribute a lot of the health of this (community to the program) happening multiple years, particularly with the young women. I have seen some of those young girls now in year 12, and the reason that they have got through those very challenging adolescence years is because of Annie's mentoring, not only in the program, but she sees them in the region as well.

"Instead of feeling that they have missed out because they grew up in a regional or remote area, they actually realise that they've had this enormous advantage and that ability to see things from a variety of perspectives and the interconnectedness of a community stands you in such great stead."

Many of the songs that Moorambilla Voices sing feature Indigenous languages, something Michelle describes as "the beating heart of what we do".

"If we're going to walk together with inclusion and respect, you've got to know what you're respecting and you've got to be able to have those conversations," Michelle says.

Moorambilla Voices is so successful some of its programs are now woven into the New South Wales curriculum and the high school choir performed at the Sydney Opera House last year.





Image: Noni Carroll Photography via Moorambilla Voices

Program Administration

Granting process

FRRR employed largely the same process that it undertakes for all of its grant programs, with a number of additional due diligence steps as set out in the contract between the Australian Government and FRRR. Granting opportunities were promoted broadly through FRRR's channels, such as newsletters and social media, as well as shared via advocates and network contacts and via various media articles. There was a dedicated web page for the program, which set out the criteria and eligibility, and groups were invited to apply online via FRRR's granting system, known externally as Grants Gateway.

Once the application period closed, FRRR staff undertook an initial review of applications to remove any that were ineligible under the published guidelines. The program administration team then assessed applications against the criteria, before shortlisting a number of projects against targets that were set out in the contract. In line with contractual agreements, shortlisted projects were shared with philanthropic, corporate and government donors if required. In the case of both philanthropic and corporate donors, this was to ensure alignment in focus areas and objectives.

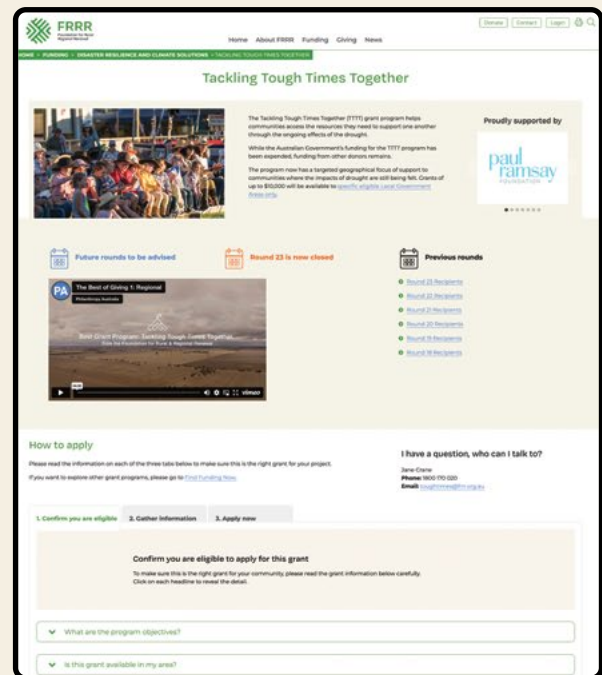
In the case of government support, applications were discussed with the Department to ensure no known conflicts or duplications of funding through other streams, before being reviewed by the Program Advisory Committee (PAC), who made recommendations to the FRRR Board.

Once the Board determined the projects to be funded, FRRR's program staff, with the support of our communications agency, JAW Communications, worked closely with the Department to coordinate the announcement of recipients. This was issued by FRRR, and supported by either a Ministerial release or shell

release customised by electorate staff with the local MPs as spokespersons in the areas where Government funds were invested.

Groups awarded funding then entered into a grant agreement with FRRR, which confirmed the project, what the funding can be used for and the reporting and acquittal requirements.

Throughout the granting process and while groups were implementing their projects, FRRR staff checked in frequently with recipients by phone and email, to ensure the projects were on track and to garner input for the agreed milestone reporting.



All relevant program plan tasks, risk management, communication activities and financial milestones were met in accordance with contractual obligations.

Quarterly and annual reporting milestones, including an annual audit, were met in accordance with contractual requirements.

Challenges and opportunities

Since 2014, drought-affected communities have dealt with several challenges other than drought, which have had adverse outcomes. Community stakeholders that have engaged with the TTTT program have told us that events such as floods, bushfires, storms, cyclones and COVID have taken their toll.

COVID impacted rural communities in countless ways, with multiple grant recipients indicating challenges experienced due to supply chain issues, reduced ability to fundraise, delayed contractor availability, cost of materials and freight skyrocketing, COVID operating restrictions and reluctance for meeting others by some community residents. Similarly flood and other natural disasters hindered many organisations' capacity to carry out their grant projects. This affected grants awarded from 2019 until 2022.

Throughout this unprecedented period, and with so many overlaid community challenges, TTTT grants continued to be important to help communities in drought, and recovering from drought, to seed and strengthen, adapt and evolve, or innovate and renew in ways that would not have been possible without this important investment.

During all this, FRRR remained flexible and responsive across funded projects in the context of the significant disruptions experienced, recognising that keeping money flowing into rural communities and economies during this time was a priority.

Staffing and Governance

Given the length of time this program operated, there were several FRRR staff involved in managing and delivering it over the years. A dedicated Program Manager always had oversight of the program and worked closely with a Program Support Officer. The Program Manager undertook the day-to-day oversight of the program and had primary responsibility for engaging with the grantees and monthly project monitoring.

Several other members of the FRRR team also provided telephone and email support and guidance to applicants and grantees. The CEO always maintained oversight of the program, and since 2020, FRRR's Disaster Resilience and Recovery Lead also reviewed projects that were recommended to the Program Advisory Committee and maintained oversight across all program activity.

Special thanks to our long-serving Program Advisory Committee members, who have provided deeply valued guidance and insight in recommending projects to the FRRR Board for approval.

Engagement with grant applicants and recipients

A fundamental part of the TTTT program was connecting and engaging with grant recipients and community stakeholders. FRRR delivered webinars that helped strengthen understanding, allowed for Q&A sessions and provided information on writing strong grant applications, building capacity of general community members as well as applicants. FRRR team members also linked with grantees throughout the projects providing support by phone and email wherever required, especially when grantees were experiencing challenges.

Team members also undertook road trips to communities where possible to see first-hand the outcomes of projects and gain insight into broader community experiences. Some of these community visits also gave donors and FRRR Board members the chance to meet grantees and hear from them directly about the opportunities and challenges they were experiencing.



Communication activities

The TTTT program has drawn on a multi-channelled approach to communications, targeting a diverse range of online and print media to ensure those in need were made aware of the program. The program continued to have ongoing promotion through the FRRR website, social media channels and media releases in national and locally driven media.

Four TTTT short videos of Queensland projects were completed to be shared on FRRR's social media platforms, in presentations and to help promote the program and form part of the program evaluation. The Australian Government and other donor partners have been acknowledged in the videos:

Charleville Airfield



> [View](#)



Thallon Progress Association



> [View](#)



Red Ridge Interior Queensland



> [View](#)



Kilkivan Veteran and Community Men's Shed



> [View](#)



Evaluation

A formal evaluation of the program was completed in 2015, in conjunction with RM Consulting Group (RMCG), as well as research from FRRR Directors and staff travelling through drought-affected areas of Queensland to meet with local project leaders. This review found that the program was making a difference in drought-affected communities. Some key findings included:

- The program had been particularly effective in helping to reduce social isolation;
- 39% of projects were initiated due to concern about social isolation, compared with 8% concerned with mental health and wellbeing, and 14% with community capacity to cope; and
- 71% of respondents said that their project would have ongoing benefits for more than 12 months after the project.

There were a number of recommendations for improvement and as a result two important changes were made in subsequent rounds:

1. Recognising higher associated costs and timeframes in undertaking projects in the extremely remote areas of QLD and NSW, FRRR **increased the value of the grants** from \$10,000 to \$20,000 and expanded the timeframes for implementing the project from 12 to 18 months.
2. Changed an objective to place **more emphasis on investing in people and building capacity**. The evaluation confirmed that a key issue is volunteer and community leadership fatigue, so the program was modified to support and engage the community in leadership development and skills training.

Awards

The TTTT program was awarded the 2020 Best Grant Program at the Philanthropy Australian Awards in September 2020. The Best Grant Program award was a new category, and it recognised the value of considered, effective and targeted philanthropic grant programs that support positive social, cultural or environmental change. FRRR was the proud recipient of the award that recognised the program as having positive and far-reaching impacts in drought communities as demonstrated in the [video by Philanthropy Australia](#)



➤ [View](#)



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⁵ <https://www.abs.gov.au/census/guide-census-data/geography/census-geography-glossary#remoteness-areas-ra->



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Report written by FRRR and JAW Communications,
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June 2024

Jamestown
Agricultural Society
Image: Bec Smart