

Investing in Not-for-Profit Capacity in Regional NSW

Community Insights Report



FRRR
Foundation for Rural
Regional Renewal

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FOUNDATION

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Introduction

Commencing in early 2021, **Investing in Not-for-Profit Capacity in Regional NSW (INFPC)** was a place-based program designed and delivered by FRRR that ran in three communities affected by the 2019/20 Black Summer bushfires – Bega Valley, Glen Innes, and Taree and Wingham. It was generously funded by Paul Ramsay Foundation.

Recognising the **integral role that not-for-profit (NFP) organisations play** in building and supporting resilient communities, both socially and economically, INFPC’s primary aim was to support the **capacity** of these local grassroots organisations, helping them to **respond and recover** in the face of challenges and disruptions.

The program was underpinned by FRRR’s core belief that local groups are best placed to know what they need to help recover from disasters. NFPs in each community came together in a series of (mostly online) workshops to **identify relevant solutions to address diverse local needs** focused on four strategic pillars: people, systems, strategies and sector efficiencies.

To implement these ideas, organisations across the three communities shared **\$430,152 in grants** to deliver distinct projects and programs to support recovery, build capacity and strengthen community wellbeing. Through these projects, **community capacity increased; collaboration and networking were enhanced; and learnings were shared** with FRRR.

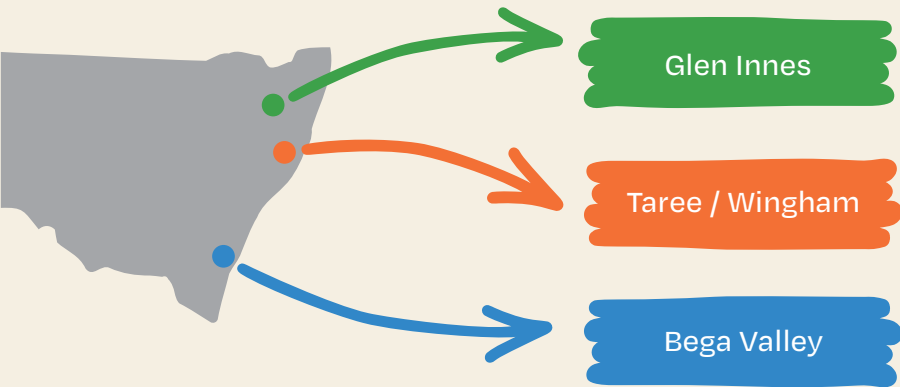
This **Community Insights Report** captures our shared learnings and the future priorities and opportunities identified, for communities, their supporters, and interested donor partners. It reflects **what FRRR heard from community groups** through facilitated conversations, feedback and evaluation data, discussions throughout project delivery with our team, as well as information provided through the grant acquittal process. We’ve included **general observations, as well as those specific to each of the regions**, building an understanding of each community’s strengths, challenges, and future priorities.

While many of the comments and recommendations are unique to each community, there are some consistent themes. For example, there is a clear need for **NFP Boards and Committees to be adequately resourced** to train, upskill and plan, as well as **broaden their networks to be more inclusive, diversify their funding base** and focus on **succession planning** and **attracting more volunteers**. In addition, NFP’s and community groups, staff and volunteers need ongoing access to **training in grant writing, social media, marketing, strategic planning and fundraising**. All these areas are an investment in social capital, which is key to **maintaining momentum and building community capacity**, particularly when there are disruptive events such as those experienced by these communities in recent years.

While the bushfires and COVID-related restrictions had wide-reaching impacts on these communities and organisations, including affecting volunteer engagement and high levels of exhaustion, fatigue and mental health stresses, **the participating**

groups are now in a stronger place as a result of this program. They remain committed to responding to the challenges presented and looking to both support recovery and enable greater preparedness for the future. Their **journeys have been different**, and will continue to be, but all are **ready to lean in and leverage the opportunity** the INFPC program has provided - and **future resourcing is vital to maintain momentum**.

On behalf of each of the communities, FRRR thanks **Paul Ramsay Foundation** for their support of this program and acknowledge the **willingness of the local leaders who engaged in this program** to continue to create vibrant, sustainable communities in which to live, work and thrive.



Program overview

FRRR's investing for Not-for-Profit Capacity in Regional NSW (INFPC) was a two-year, place-based community capacity building program delivered during 2021/22. The goal of the program was to strengthen the resourcing, capacity and capability of place-based and locally governed not-for-profit organisations in three bushfire-affected NSW communities to support relevant, effective and timely recovery and foster a more inclusive community-led recovery process.

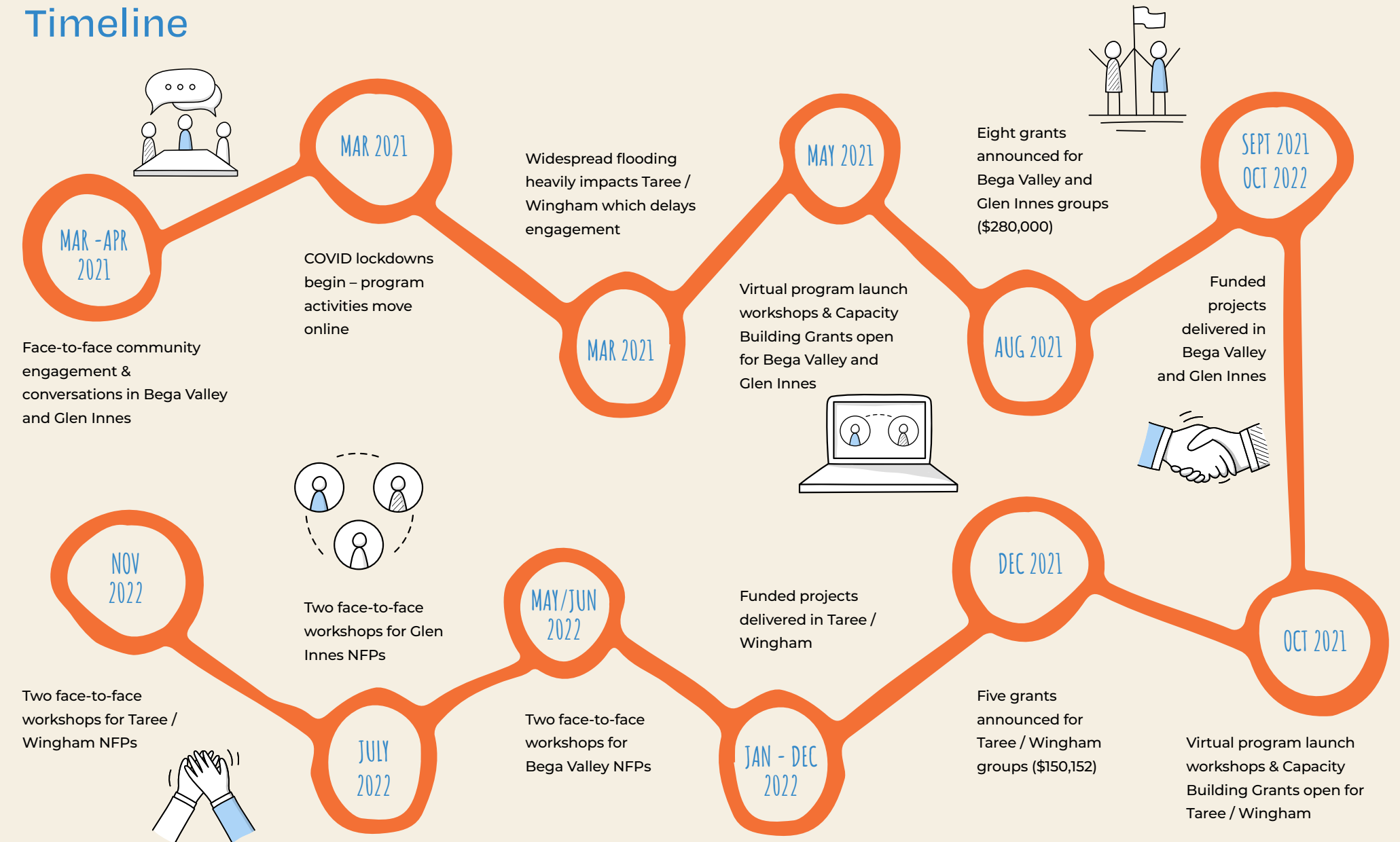
The three communities involved in INFPC were Bega Valley, Glen Innes, and Taree and Wingham. These communities were identified due to their recent disaster experiences from the 2019/20 Black Summer bushfires, together with the existing networks already fostered with FRRR to support immediate connections in each region.

The program sought to support locally governed rural and regional not-for-profit organisations to be strong, resilient members of robust local community sectors, enhancing their ability to fulfil their missions with greater impact. It was intended to deliver this through an engagement and co-design approach to identify grassroots NFP gaps and priorities; provide grants to increase NFP resourcing capacity; offer skill development and networking opportunities; and evaluate the program with a view to inform future approaches.

Partners

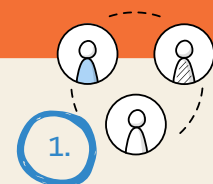
Thanks to the generous support of Paul Ramsay Foundation, there was approximately \$140,000 available to each region through grants, as well as funds for capacity building activities, workshops and networking. An additional \$10,152 from Perpetual Foundation - Julian Flett Endowment contributed to projects in the Taree area.

Timeline



Program components

Building on FRRR's previous experience and the learnings gained from working with other remote, rural and regional communities to help grow the capacity of their local NFP's, the Theory of Change for the INFPC program focused on four key investment streams or strategic pillars:



Investing in People

leadership, succession planning, volunteer recruitment and retention, training and development;



Investing in Internal Infrastructure, Systems and Structures

legal compliance and capability, human resources, finance, policy and procedures, small scale infrastructure;



Investing in Strategy

developing organisational plans and strategies, fundraising and revenue, accessing opportunities that are fit-for-purpose, implementing key capacity building initiatives identified in NFPs strategy; and



Investing in NFP Sector Efficiencies

local solutions, networking, creativity and responsiveness, collaboration with NFP sector, sharing of resources, recognise that efficiencies can be made to address excessive costs due to location.



Community engagement

With the arrival of the COVID pandemic and restrictions on travel and gatherings, community conversations and workshops had to move online for each of the three communities. These sessions introduced the program, promoted the opportunity for one-off grants and helped determine the theme and focus of future local skill development and networking workshops (e.g., skills and training, governance support, developing fundraising strategies or strategic plans).

These early workshops and conversations were designed to engage the community through facilitated sessions, providing the space for local leaders to consider the gaps and priorities for their organisations, particularly in the context of their recent experiences and challenges brought about by bushfires, the pandemic, floods and other events. These initial conversations helped to explore priorities for each community and key themes were collated with data from community surveys used to guide the process and inform the focus of the future capacity building workshops.

Capacity building workshops

Informed by the early conversations and online workshops, two capacity building workshops were planned within each community, responding to the themes that were of most interest and value to their local organisations in growing their impact and capabilities.

Local grants

A key element of the program was to offer grants to support resourcing of local NFPs to strengthen their operations and build their capacity to better serve their communities in future. Local NFPs and community organisations were invited to apply for one-off grant support, to be implemented over a 12-month period.

The funding amount was open-ended, up to a maximum of \$140,000 (or \$150,152 for Taree / Wingham) to allow organisations to request the amount of funds to best meet the needs of their community. Where it made sense, community organisations and NFPs were encouraged to work together to identify how to maximise the available funds to best support their organisations and wider community.

The total funding awarded was:

- Bega Valley: \$140,000 through six grants;
- Glen Innes: \$140,000 through two grants;
- Taree and Wingham: \$150,152 through five grants.

Learning and sharing

An important part of this program was identifying learnings to share across the communities to help inform future directions and priorities. In addition to what we heard through the workshops, grantee reports and many informal conversations, FRRR engaged Matrix on Board as our evaluation partner. This gave us capacity for face-to-face interviews with each of the grant recipient organisations to gain deeper insights into what the INFPC program has meant to them. This Community Insights Report is intended to be a high-level resource, informed by the three communities, that can be an asset for each community. Learnings and next steps have been included for each community in this report, based on evaluation data and community feedback.





Implementation challenges and constraints

The INFPC program was initially intended to be delivered in one year to offer short-term resourcing, networking and skill development. It became clear early that this was not realistic and that the **timing for program activities needed to 'make sense' for each community** and their unique recovery journey following the 2019/20 bushfires.

This reinforced FRRR's past experience that it **takes time for communities and their leaders to move from responding to a disaster to recovery**. Local groups need to work through a process to identify what they need to move forward and continue to build and strengthen to best meet the needs of their community. It also **takes energy to come together as an organisation** and agree on a path and then take steps to make it happen, e.g. submit a grant application, hold an event – especially when many volunteers and staff are also dealing with direct impacts of the natural disasters. It **takes courage** too, to talk about your challenges and make new priorities.

Even when a project had been identified, it was **sometimes a challenge for local groups to deliver their project while navigating all the other issues associated with recovery**. For some, it ran to plan, but in other cases there were delays and things shifted.

Then came the **pandemic**, another significant challenge. Routines were changed, people were isolated. Frequent disruption required more change. Then, for people in **Taree and Wingham**, another **significant flood** happened.

These factors all influenced the implementation of the program, for FRRR but most importantly, for community groups. Ultimately the activities planned for the INFPC program were successfully delivered across each of the three communities. But it was **at a pace that was led by the communities themselves** and which made sense, so it took two years instead of one.

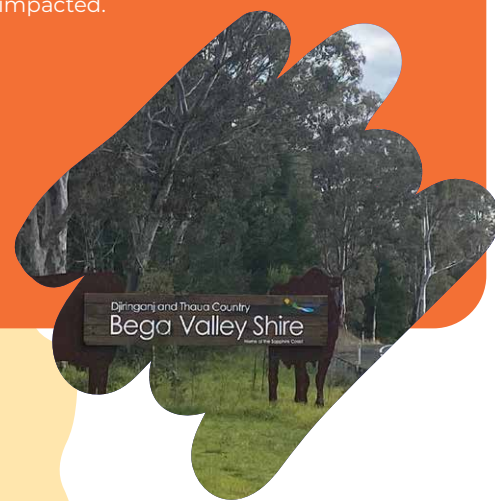
While these constraints and challenges influenced some elements of the program delivery, we **acknowledge the flexibility of Paul Ramsay Foundation** in allowing INFPC to provide responsive and flexible opportunities for communities, ensuring they were supported and empowered throughout engagement.

BEGA VALLEY

The Bega Valley region, known as the Sapphire Coast, is the traditional lands of the Yuin-Monaro Nations and a sprawling rural area dotted with many small townships and villages on the south-east coast of NSW. It is an area of natural beauty boasting beaches, rainforest and mountainous landscapes.

The region is home to more than 35,000 people with the major townships including Bega, Merimbula, Pambula, Eden, Tathra and Bermagui. The Bega Valley is rich in culture, supported by a diverse range of local community organisations and has strong agricultural and tourism industries.

On 31 December 2019 devastating bushfires started and made their way across 60% of the Bega Valley Shire, burning for many weeks, destroying hundreds of homes, sheds and outbuildings, and taking four lives. The town of Cobargo in the north of the Shire was particularly severely impacted.



GLEN INNES

Glen Innes is a town of more than 6,000 people on the Northern Tablelands of NSW, on the traditional lands of the Ngorabul people. Known for its charming character, heritage buildings and Celtic ties, Glen Innes is an important rural service centre for the surrounding towns. Agriculture and tourism are key industries for Glen Innes and surrounds.

It has a diverse and active NFP sector representing the arts, sports, environment, culture, health and wellbeing and many other specific interest groups.

In November 2019 in the midst of a drought, bushfires burned across thousands of hectares, destroying land, properties, homes, and taking three lives. The small nearby town of Wyalaliba was especially heavily impacted by the fires.



Partner communities

TAREE AND WINGHAM

Taree is on the Mid North Coast of NSW on the banks of the Manning River, on the traditional lands of the Biripi people. Taree, and nearby Wingham (15kms down the road), are important service towns for the surrounding agricultural district and have a combined population of more than 31,000.

They offer sporting, entertainment and cultural facilities and activities and are supported by a diverse not-for-profit sector.

In November 2019 bushfires burned large areas of land, destroying properties, homes, and life. Then as the recovery continued from the fires, flood waters inundated the town and agricultural lands in March 2021 bringing a new wave of disaster.

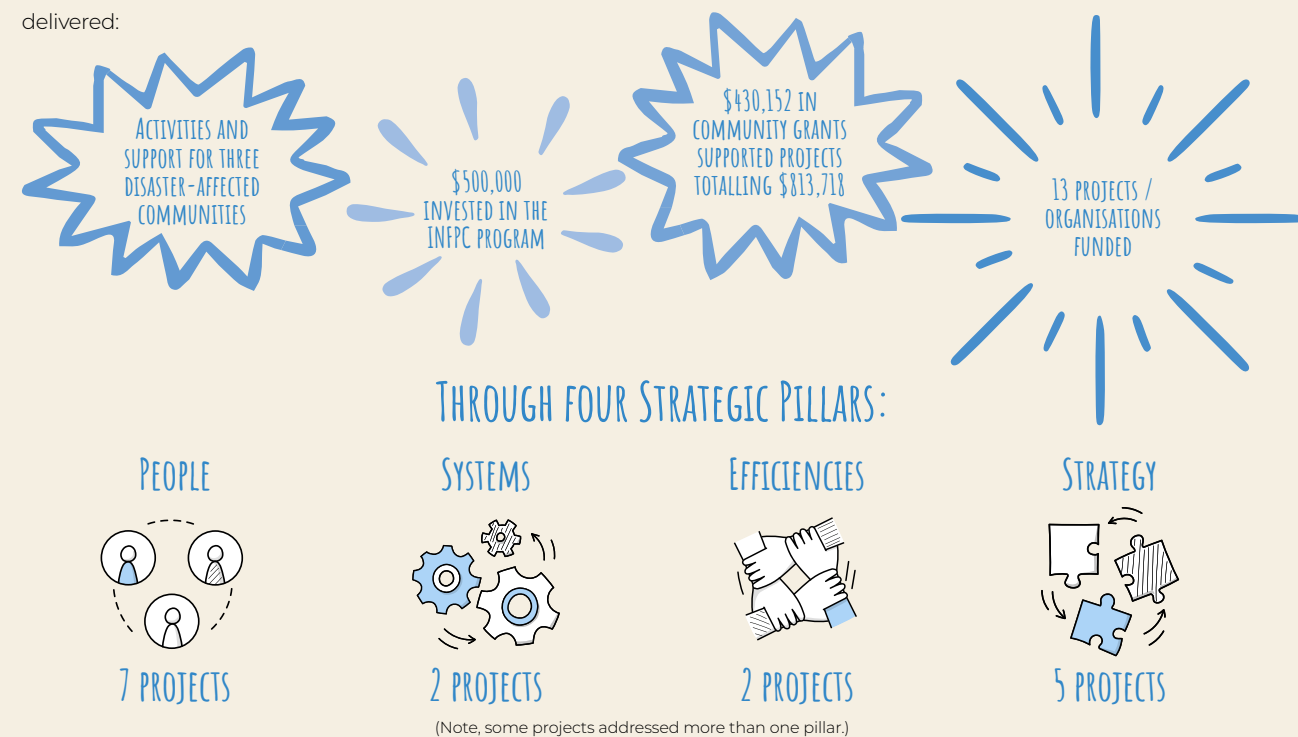




Overall outcomes

The INFPC program provided a window for local groups and leaders in three disaster-affected communities to **consider their challenges, gaps and priorities in the short to medium-term**. It allowed groups to take some time to think inwardly about the needs of their organisation and how **investing in their people, systems, strategy, or improving their efficiencies** might boost the way they support their community. The opportunity of **resourcing through grants enabled turning ideas into some immediate actions**. The opportunity of workshops allowed conversations, networking, new connections and skill development in key areas.

The experiences and outcomes in each of the communities is explored in the following pages, but collectively, the program delivered:



Bega Valley program

Community consultation workshop

There was strong interest in the program across the Bega Valley, with 49 registrations to attend the program launch and online workshop in May 2021, representing a diversity of locally based groups. A robust conversation followed with key themes focusing on:

- › Interest in collective approaches and collaboration to address the priorities for NFPs, and not competition;
- › Exploring resource sharing across organisations to improve effectiveness;
- › Considerations for organisational strategy and sustainability;
- › Developing and sharing grant writing skills;
- › Ways to diversify income for community groups;
- › Leadership, governance and management;
- › Burnout and feeling of overwhelm from both volunteer-led groups and stretched NFP staff;
- › Ongoing need for volunteer recruitment and retention;
- › Need to actively support and maintain positive mental health and wellbeing across community members, organisations and volunteers; and
- › 'Funding fatigue' and resistance to funders and their expectations of community funding applications and the requirements to apply for, manage and acquit often small amounts of funding.

What was clear from the conversation was an overwhelming appetite for whole-of-community, cross-sector collaboration and planning. This was related to a sense of wanting to demonstrate a deep understanding of the Bega Valley community, its people, organisations and assets.



Activities

With COVID restrictions easing, two in-person workshops for representatives from NFP organisations in the Bega Valley were held in May and June 2022. The workshop topics were informed by the community conversations in the early stages of the program and were delivered by local facilitators, Campfire Co-op. The workshop themes were:

1. **Engaging with and managing volunteers:**

This half-day workshop tackled the question ‘How can we sustain and grow a flourishing volunteer community in the Bega Valley?’ The group of 27 shared their experiences with others facing similar challenges, discussed new ideas for engaging with current and new volunteers, and the conditions for creating an engaged volunteer network, with possibilities for shared resources.

organisations align where there are gaps and how best to focus energy in the coming few years. Potential collaborative practices were considered and ideas to continue strategic conversations with stakeholders.

2. **Organisational strategy, planning and sustainability:** This was a full-day workshop exploring the question ‘How can our organisations best respond to community needs across the Bega Valley?’ A group of 25 explored emerging needs in the community and resources available, where and how

Both workshops were well attended by highly engaged participants and all received a follow up newsletter to consolidate the discussion points, themes, insights and ideas that emerged. The sessions demonstrated the local passion for being involved and working together to create meaningful impact to the organisations that bring so much value to their community. New ideas were hatched and people were motivated to take action, such as a promotional video focusing on the benefits of local volunteering and ways to include young people in NFP’s.

Some comments following the workshops included:

“I enjoyed both workshops and felt they were run in a way that enabled new ideas to be openly discussed and connection between agencies established.”

“The one on volunteering was beautiful - it brought together a really diverse range of people. It was a cross pollination moment”.

“I enjoyed learning other’s experiences and the responses to tasks in the working groups. It was good to meet people from throughout the shire in similar circumstances.”

“A fresh approach to strategy planning – in recognition of uncertainty – build in agility. The importance of maintaining strong community connection to share knowledge, skills and resources.”



Grants awarded

Following consideration by a Program Advisory Committee comprising local representatives, \$140,000 in grants was awarded to six organisations across the Bega Valley. Funding supported a range of initiatives from economic and strategic planning, support for groups to build systems and processes, undertake staff training and business skills development. Demonstrating the general community interest in collaboration, the Bega Valley Shire Business Forum delivered a project involving the seven local Chambers of Commerce in the region to build capacity, source future funding and raise awareness for all members.

Organisation	Project and Description	Grant
Bega Valley Shire Business Forum	Bega Valley Business Forum Coordination Strengthen the capacity and networks of the seven member Chambers of Commerce of the Bega Valley Shire Business Forum through engagement of a contractor to address strategy, resourcing and collaboration across the network.	\$60,000
Cobargo Wellness Group	Raise the heART - Expanding the Capacity of the Cobargo Wellness Group Grow the capacity and direction of Cobargo Wellness Group through support for strategic planning, staff development, branding & marketing and feasibility for future projects.	\$10,000
Fling Physical Theatre Inc	Building the Capacity of FLING Physical Theatre through Strategic Development Grow the profile and determine the future directions of FLING Physical Theatre in the Bega Valley through development of a marketing and strategic plan.	\$10,000
Far South Coast Family Support Service Inc	Transforming Trauma Expand the skills and capabilities of staff at Far South Coast Family Support Service to deliver a wider range of programs to their community through accredited trauma intervention training.	\$10,000
Mumbulla Community Foundation	Mumbulla Community Foundation Systems, Strategy and Community Engagement Project Boost the capacity, profile and effectiveness of Mumbulla Community Foundation through strategic planning, investment in systems and community consultation.	\$40,000
South East Arts (NSW) Inc	First Nations Cultural Tourism Development Build the capacity of individuals and organisations working in the First Nations arts and cultural space in the Bega Valley through business skills training and ongoing practical support.	\$10,000



Grants in action

Grant Amount:
\$60,000

Organisation Details:
Bega Valley Shire Business Forum

Project Title:
Bega Valley Business Forum coordination

- Project Locations:**
- Bega NSW
 - Merimbula NSW
 - Eden NSW
 - Bermagui NSW

In recent years, the unprecedented hardship for the Bega Valley Shire due to the Black Summer bushfires and the global pandemic has resulted in major economic loss alongside social and community devastation. With business support and networking more relevant than ever, the Bega Valley Shire Business Forum (BVSBF) has a key goal of advocacy and building collaborative relationships with local, state and federal organisations, business and the community.

BVSBF has a broad reach across 560 member businesses, so when they were successful in receiving a grant through the INFPC program, the potential impact of their planned project activities would be widespread. BVSBF received funds for a contracted coordinator for 10 months to deliver capacity building activities, such as workshops and other resources, and develop a website to promote and assist with communications across the network and with community members.

Along with developing and creating content for a new website for BVSBF, other activities included grant writing and funding applications for 32 individual projects totalling \$641,054, researching and producing the Good Governance Guide that was distributed to all business chambers, developing a report with recommendations on the BVSBF's governance and constitution, and other capacity building meetings with business chambers. With more than 15,700 people benefitting from these initiatives, the community is significantly better equipped to meet the recovery needs of connected organisations going forward.



The Bega Valley
A great place to do business in Eden

“Activities have provided significant gains in the capacity of volunteer led not-for-profit business chambers in the Bega Valley. The assistance provided was well appreciated by the Bega Valley Business Forum and the committee members of the local chambers. There has been a legacy provided that will have a lasting influence of the capacity of local volunteer led business chambers to serve the members.”

Grant Amount:
\$40,000

Organisation Details:
Mumbulla Community Foundation

Project Title:
Mumbulla Community Foundation Systems, Strategy and Community Engagement Project

- Project Location:**
- Bega Valley NSW

Established in 2000, Mumbulla Community Foundation is the Community Foundation of the Bega Valley. This volunteer-run organisation supports community and education endeavours, partnering with key groups both within and outside the Valley.

While the organisation has been successful and distributed around \$1.6M in grants to more than 300 local organisations, the time was right to enhance its capacity and capability to guide their future impact. The \$40,000 grant was used to strengthen the organisation's foundations. They started with their strategy, engaging an external consultant to support them through a process that involved consulting key stakeholders, including Board members, local residents and Councillors, setting up a number of working groups and then coming back together to finalise the strategy and launch it to the community. Part of that work saw the organisation rebrand to Mumbulla Community Foundation, emphasising its role in the Bega Valley community.

The second part of the funding went toward strengthening policies, systems and procedures, including implementing software to enable the organisation to better track its interactions across the community, from donors to volunteers, grantseekers to local networks. Key to achieving this was engaging a part time 'Capability Officer'. They were able to document and streamline administration tasks, undertake supporter engagement, including setting up campaigns, build robust processes around Board minutes and Board management and assist with plans to relaunch and reposition the Foundation, through enhanced communication activities.

Thanks to additional funding secured, this role will be retained until the end of May 2023.



“This has been an outstanding opportunity for Mumbulla Community Foundation. As a DGR-2, it is difficult to find funding to build our organisational capabilities. The support of Paul Ramsay Foundation and FRRR has, literally, been a game changer for us. We cannot thank both organisations enough for their help and support.”

Learnings and next steps

In the Bega Valley, community spirit shines and the willingness to connect and search for ways to collaborate for stronger community groups and local outcomes is very evident. Following the bushfires came a time of reflection for many local leaders and groups about how to be better prepared for future shocks. The overlay of COVID bringing constant cancellations, stalling activities and events, causing financial implications, and isolating people from their social connections was hard on many. Conversely, COVID also forced flexibility and new ways of doing things, particularly engaging with more online formats, which in some instances has resulted in better engagement from members and stakeholders.

These shifts helped organisations to think differently. For example, an arts organisation harnessed arts as a recovery tool for community members. For another, taking on a new perspective on their role in a disaster and the recovery that comes afterwards was a priority.

The health and wellbeing of volunteers, staff and Boards are fragile in periods of disruption, and while there is no magic fix, there are many ways to acknowledge this and find ways to take care of each other and, as a result, become more united in some ways.

The INFPC program was able to facilitate authentic community conversations with purpose to help bring to the surface local

priorities, as the following stakeholder feedback highlights.

"The change has been a little spark of inspiration, taking an interest in our community, I can do something now and here's the support to think about the future again and reassess where we are, and move forwards. An invitation to build capacity invites the conversation about 'what do we need to do?' "

INFPC funding *"took pressure off in areas that would have caused pressure for our organisation, freed us to be able to do the things we do, events which really connect people, from a mental health area, gave energy being with people and connecting with the community, knowing that we are all in this together."*

FRRR was successful in securing funding of \$1,310,246 through the National Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements (NDRRA, now NEMA) Black Summer program to leverage the initial investment by PRF and further extend the activities of the INFPC program in the Bega Valley. This three-year program – Investing in Rural Community Futures Bega Valley: Resilience, Connection and Place Project - is now underway in partnership with the Bega Valley Shire Council and is building on the connections and momentum of the INFPC program, an exciting outcome and opportunity for NFP's and community groups across the Bega Valley.

Glen Innes

Community consultation workshop

Ten participants from organisations representing Glen Innes community groups, including local Council, joined an online workshop in May 2021. They discussed their resourcing and capacity needs with a goal to better respond and thrive in the face of current challenges and seed ideas for solutions to local issues.

While a small group, the messages and local priorities were clear and consistent with the themes raised in additional one-on-one community outreach:

- Governance upskilling, including succession planning, strategic planning and compliance;
- Volunteering, specifically recruitment and retention and strategies to combat low engagement in volunteering roles and availability;
- Marketing and awareness, particularly developing skills in social media and website development and monitoring; and
- Fundraising for projects, activities and operations.



Activities

In July 2022, Glen Innes community groups were invited to attend two capacity building workshops arranged by local organisation GLENRAC. In parallel, GLENRAC was delivering their INFPC-funded project with the aim of improving the capacity of NFP organisations through a series of workshops and wrap around support, so they were the ideal partner on the ground to arrange for these additional sessions. The workshop topics identified through local consultation were:

1. Grant writing tips and tricks

Thirty people attended this workshop, demonstrating strong interest in improving capacity in this area to help them raise funds. Participants reported a significant improvement in their knowledge of, and confidence in, grant writing after attending the session. Overall, they highly valued the opportunity.

2. External communications and marketing, including effective use of social media

Local leaders indicated that many people in the region had limited digital literacy skills and know-how to navigate and harness social media for the benefit of their group. Improved skills in this area would likely translate positively into growing awareness of their activities and in turn attract support and volunteers. Attendees found the workshop very worthwhile leaving with improved knowledge, confidence and offering an average rating of 9/10 across 21 participants.

The 51 people who attended the two workshops were affiliated with 111 community groups across the region, ensuring the learnings from the workshops reached many corners of the community and a diversity of organisations.

“Not only the education aspect, but the actual attendance and networking opportunities have brought together a diverse section of the community serving on a wide range of different interest groups, who now understand much better other roles in the community as well as making it easier and not so confronting for people to take on roles in the numerous community organisations.”



Grants awarded

Organisation	Project and Description	Grant
Arts North West Incorporated	Creative Arts Recovery Expertise (CARE) Building capacity for Arts North West and its arts community to support best practice project delivery in mental health and creative disaster recovery. Boost capacity and awareness in mental health and creative disaster recovery of Arts North West staff and the Glen Innes arts community through targeted training sessions.	\$13,500
GLENRAC Incorporated	Creating Confident & Capable Committees for the Future - Glen Innes Build the capacity of not-for-profit organisations in the Glen Innes region through a series of workshops, one-on-one support, access to information, tools and resources.	\$126,500



Grants in action

Grant Amount:
\$13,500

Organisation Details:
Arts North West Inc

Project Title:
Creative Arts Recovery Expertise (CARE): Building Capacity for Arts North West and its Arts Community to Support Best Practice Project Delivery in Mental Health and Creative Disaster Recovery.

Project Locations:

Glen Innes NSW



Arts North West Inc (ANW) facilitates the development of arts and cultural projects and initiatives across the New England North West region. In recent years, their projects have included a focus on mental health, and in some cases, on a creative approach to disaster recovery.

Looking to strengthen its capacity to support best practice project delivery in mental health and creative disaster recovery, ANW utilised FRRR grant funds to deliver the Creative Arts Recovery Expertise (CARE) project. This involved two professional development training programs for ANW staff, Board members and creative practitioners, which were delivered in conjunction with the Rural Adversity Mental Health Program (RAMPH / Hunter New England Local Health District) and the Creative Recovery Network (CRN)

The first workshop **Mental Health – Workplace Support** involved a full-day session facilitated by RAMPH and focused on developing participants’ skills and knowledge to empathetically and effectively support people experiencing stress and loss, and to identify when to seek further assistance and link with appropriate health services. Participants also learned how to look after their own mental wellbeing to help build greater resilience during tough times.

The second workshop was an immersive three day **Creative Recovery Training** session, delivered by CRN which supported knowledge building and connection into local disaster management people and systems. This program was tailored to Arts North West and framed in partnership with the local First Nations peoples, local stories and cultural context.

These training opportunities provided participants with a better understanding of the disaster context and trauma-informed best practice, building their capacity when working with communities impacted by disaster.

“Delighted we were finally able to secure Scotia Monkovitch of Creative Recovery Network to come and give ANW some intensive training in how arts can intersect post-disaster. Given the world that we now live in, it is becoming vitally important that arts workers are given the tools to be able to work in areas post-disaster and contribute meaningfully to recovery and resilience.”

Grant Amount:
\$126,500

Organisation Details:
GLENRAC Inc

Project Title:
Creating Confident & Capable Committees for the Future – Glen Innes

Project Location:

Glen Innes NSW

GLENRAC Incorporated is a community-based organisation focused on helping landowners and the community manage and maintain the natural resource base of the Glen Innes region, leading to a stronger social and productive environment.

Working with a 14-member local advisory group and through local consultation, GLENRAC identified a need to build the capability and capacity of local NFPs in the Glen Innes Severn LGA in NSW. Strengthening local groups would enhance their ability to undertake actions that would achieve their objectives and benefit the broader community.

Delivered mostly during COVID, the multi-part project was coordinated by a local part-time project officer, funded through FRRR, who engaged one-on-one with community groups.

Reviewing the governance needs of NFP groups was a key starting point. GLENRAC developed an online and hardcopy governance checklist that is available as an ongoing resource, as well as undertook one-on-one discussions.

Topics that emerged included how to make the work of committees more efficient and enjoyable, as well as equipping groups with necessary skills, including how to run effective meetings; how to bring groups to life; first aid (four courses were run); and museum display training. The sessions were designed to build the skills and confidence of long-standing committee members, as well as new or potential members.

GLENRAC also engaged an IT specialist to work one-on-one with 12 local NFP groups to identify their IT needs and develop and implement more effective systems for their

organisation. The IT specialist also facilitated access to free or heavily discounted software and services for these groups.

Another stream of work saw them facilitate a two-day strategic planning session. Groups were selected based on the outcomes from their governance health check, the size and reach of their group and engagement with the project more broadly. Leveraging the INFPC funding, these workshops also secured support from the Bushfire Community Recovery & Resilience Fund.

In total, nearly 500 people representing more than 100 local community groups directly benefitted from this project, with thousands more benefitting indirectly. In addition to enhancing governance skills and improving capacity and capability, the project strengthened leadership teams, created community “champions” and enhanced community connectedness.

“This resulted in a new confidence, knowledge and skills both within individuals, committees and across the community. It also saw committee members feel more confident in taking on leadership roles. This confidence is being reflected in the health of the organisations involved.”



Learnings and next steps

For a small community, Glen Innes is home to a diverse array of community groups offering an impressive range of support services, cultural, environmental, sporting, emergency services, wellbeing and special interest groups. The local leaders are passionate, committed and hold strong connections, particularly with two key organisations, being Glen Innes Severn Council and natural resources advisory group GLENRAC.

The outcomes of the INFPC program in Glen Innes were significantly boosted by the funded project delivered by GLENRAC, which was well-aligned to the overall aims and objectives of the broader INFPC program – to build the capacity of locally governed NFP's and community groups to improve resilience and effectively achieve their objectives. In the words of a GLENRAC representative, the combined activities of GLENRAC's project, their deep knowledge of the community, and the INFPC program “brought the community together, brought people together to better their community groups, created a safe space where they

could upskill, share information, and bring a lot to the table that hasn't been there for the benefit of everyone.” Further they said, “fires, floods, drought have changed our focus from preserving the land to preserving the people. If we don't look after the people, they won't look after the land. We've adjusted to make it work”.

Glen Innes' local leaders know what is important to build their capacity and resilience to cope with future shocks. Resourcing to back them and ensure there are people on the ground to lead and maintain momentum is critical. Through their project to build the capacity of local groups, they reflected that “we now recognise the time required in developing slow and considered relationships with potential participants for them to feel comfortable in sharing ‘their stories’ with external facilitators. In saying this, we believe the hard yards have been done, in an area of community service not previously provided by ourselves or anyone else. In delivering this project we have now created an expectation from community and organisations.”

Taree and Wingham

Community consultation workshop

Program activities for Taree and Wingham were delayed as the community again found itself responding to disaster, this time widespread flooding. By August 2021, community feedback was positive about learning more about the INFPC program. In October 2021 the program was launched via a virtual workshop, together with the opening of the Capacity Building Grants inviting locally governed NFP organisations to apply for funds.

There was strong attendance at the workshop and a highly engaged group that discussed many themes including:

- The community uncertainty and fatigue in responding to successive disasters;
- Challenges in accessing funding and associated red tape;
- Lack of volunteers and general skill shortage in the region;
- Concern for housing, homelessness and food security;
- Interest in collective approaches and collaboration, and sharing of resources across organisations where appropriate;
- Need for strategic planning and governance training within some organisations;
- Interest in harnessing local leaders as mentors, support on topics such as governance training, broader cultural diversity, and involving young people; and
- Challenges in maintaining positive mental health and wellbeing across the community in general under difficult circumstances of the past months and years.



Activities

In November 2022, two workshops were held for local community groups taking a deeper dive into some key priorities:

1. Governance skills – Building your Board's confidence & capacity

This was a chance for organisation representatives to learn more about the roles and responsibilities of Boards, covering topics such as how to maintain a skilled and informed Board or Committee. With 14 local groups represented at the session, and several with more than one representative, there was great diversity of experience and sector representation. The feedback was affirming with comments including "Fantastic to have an opportunity to learn about this in a community where Board experience is minimal, and we are all learning as we go. I would have loved my whole Board to have attended."

2. Engaging and sustaining volunteers – Recruitment, retention & management strategies

Representatives from 15 different organisations joined this workshop to tackle the common issue of volunteer retention and ways to establish an enthusiastic and committed volunteer cohort to enhance their operations. A lively discussion resulted in new ideas to be immediately applied within their organisations.



"I'd love the rest of my Board to benefit, I'd love more training in relation to meetings, minutes, strategy formulation and risk management. It made a huge difference to me that this was local."

"As someone who is new to being a Board member, I found the lack of jargon in the presentation to be very helpful. It meant I could process the information without first having to translate it into real world terms."

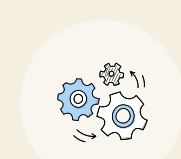
"I've already started working on a 'hook' and looking at a more structured roll out of volunteer recruitment."

"I took away the importance of team / task-based learning to develop skills rather than formal training or relying on networking."

Grants awarded

Five organisations in Taree / Wingham were awarded grants spanning the four strategic pillars of strategy, systems, people and efficiencies. They represented community-led solutions along the themes of strategic and operational planning, marketing, revenue strategy and a digital solution to support volunteers and NFP organisations. The projects demonstrated the unwavering commitment to bringing positive change to the region and to becoming more prepared in the days ahead. They contributed to the organisations' ability to scale operations and continue to provide essential services to their community as they recover from successive disasters.

Organisation	Project and Description	Grant
Circartus Incorporated	Making the Most of What We Have Boost the capacity and future sustainability of local circus school, Circartus Inc, through the development of a strategic plan and webpage design.	\$10,152
First Steps Count Incorporated	Genuine Co-design with Community Engage community in the development of the operational plan for a new community hub servicing children and families in Taree by resourcing a Co-Design Coordinator role.	\$25,000
Mid Coast Outreach Incorporated	Office and Marketing Support Grow the capacity and profile of newly established organisation, Mid Coast Outreach, through support for human resources, branding and marketing, and IT infrastructure.	\$34,000
Mission Australia	Mid Coast 4 Kids Revenue Strategy Boost the operational capacity of 'Mid Coast 4 Kids' collective impact project seeking positive social outcomes for children, young people and families, through the development of a revenue strategy.	\$6,500
Wingham Chamber of Commerce	Not-for-Profit Portal Build the capacity of not-for-profit organisations in Taree and Wingham through consultation and development of shared digital tools to improve volunteer efficiency and effectiveness, and overall organisational capacity.	\$74,500



Grants in action

Grant Amount:
\$6,500

Organisation Details:
Mission Australia

Project Title:
Mid Coast 4 Kids Revenue Strategy

- Project Locations:**
- Taree NSW
 - Wingham NSW

Mid Coast 4 Kids (MC4K) is a highly successful initiative, making a positive impact on the health and wellbeing of children and young people on the Mid Coast. MC4K attributes its success to robust community partnerships and is an initiative supported by Communities for Children. As the Communities for Children facilitating partner, Mission Australia received funds to enable MC4K to develop a Revenue Strategy.

With the MC4K initiative operating at capacity due to the limited number of funded backbone staff, planning for sustainability and scale is crucial, with partners committed to continuing their work and furthering their impact. While MC4K had already started working through their strategic planning process, MC4K used funds through the INFPC grant to engage a highly skilled consultant to develop a revenue strategy. This involved exploring various funding models to assess feasibility and viability to enable plan delivery and reviewing MC4K's financial position and future aspirations impartially. The process itself was inclusive and provided an opportunity to ensure all members had a mutual understanding of the funding challenges as well as input into the proposed solutions.

Both the Strategic Plan and the Revenue Strategy have been collaborative exercises that will support Mid Coast 4 Kids to articulate a clear strategic vision, supported by strong ideas, tactics and programs. This will enable the group to scale its impact and build sustainability over time, improving health and wellbeing outcomes for families with children and young people aged 0-24 years in the region in both the short and long-term.



“This was a meaningful contribution to the sustainability of the initiative that will help ‘future proof’ Mid Coast 4 Kids, while supporting the collaborative to scale its impact.”

Grant Amount:
\$25,000

Organisation Details:
First Steps Count Incorporated

Project Title:
Genuine Co-design with Community

- Project Locations:**
- Taree NSW

First Steps Count (FSC) Child and Community Centre is a community hub for children (aged 0-12) and their families in Taree, on the NSW Mid Coast. The journey to bring this space to the community began 12 years ago and excitedly, the centre has recently completed Stage One of construction and is now open to the public. The need for this Centre has been driven by local families and the intent has remained for community to be involved in the design, as well as the ways of working, to ensure FSC meets the needs of the community.

Authentic community co-design takes time and First Steps Count required increased capacity to be able to implement this plan effectively. With co-design an integral part of the First Steps Count approach, they received a \$25,000 grant to engage the community with the design and development of the operational plan for the centre.

The funding enabled the organisation to employ a part-time Co-Design Coordinator to support the work already initiated and maintain momentum established with already engaged families, as well as identify and overcome barriers that are preventing the least engaged families from participating in co-design work. Activities included coordinating a Community Partnerships group, made up of 10 local parents, working together to form a key component of the leadership team at FSC. Other innovative engagement activities included organising a coffee truck which offered free barista coffee in exchange for community ideas and input, particularly on ways the Centre could be safe and welcoming, and what services would be appropriate. An ice-cream truck was also arranged, offering

after school ice-creams in exchange for ideas from children and young people, specifically asking them to identify suitable names for the rooms in the Centre. FSC gave away 126 ice-creams in 45 minutes! Broader engagement and consultation activities were undertaken through social media, information stalls in educational settings and participating in community days such as NAIDOC Week and R U OK? Day events.

From the outset, FSC recognised the importance and value of close collaboration with children and families in designing this community facility as well as contributing to how it will work best. The result is a warm, welcoming centre that is truly embedded within the local community.



“We recognise the value of family and community involvement in establishing this amazing place-based hub in Taree. This level of community engagement requires an intensity of time and resources that we would never have been able to achieve without this grant opportunity from FRRR in partnership with Paul Ramsay Foundation. The flexibility in the use of the funds to achieve our aim made a significant difference to our organisation. We are so proud of what we have achieved together with the community.”

Learnings and next steps

Taree and Wingham have strong, resilient and committed community groups and leaders. However, successive disasters have taken their toll and brought fatigue and vulnerability – for services, employees and volunteers. Supporting the health and wellbeing of all community members is front of mind as the impacts of the past years are deeply felt.

The INFPC program has brought a spark of momentum to community groups across Taree and Wingham. It has enabled cross sector conversations, helped generate new ideas, and improved capacity for some organisations through timely, flexible funding. Local leaders have responded with positivity and enthusiasm and a clear willingness for ongoing opportunities to grow and connect, share and learn. Localised funding now is vital to capture this energy and ultimately effect positive and ongoing change.

Next steps and opportunities for NFP's and community groups in Taree and Wingham include:

- Continued focus on growing the skills of NFP Board members, staff and volunteers through greater exposure into topics including governance and Board skills, grant writing, volunteerism, strategic planning, building and maintaining a digital presence, and fundraising to help groups to strengthen and boost their capacity.
- Boosting Board and Committee member diversity, experience, skills and retention through deepening networks and integrating a focus on succession planning.
- Continued sharing of stories, including successes and challenges and how organisations have overcome these, both in Taree and Wingham, and also more broadly with other communities with similar experiences.
- Prioritising the health and wellbeing of employees, volunteers and community members by developing strategies for regular check-ins, creating space for meaningful connections, and encouraging professional support when appropriate.
- Investigating networking and collaboration across local organisations and in partnership with local government to share and develop new actions.
- Encouraging new and diverse perspectives by engaging the voices of young people in local organisations.
- Reconsidering traditional volunteer roles and seeking to incorporate new ways to engage with local people to attract and encourage broader diversity and skills in community groups.
- Advocating for multi-year funding opportunities allowing organisations to test new strategies and address sustainability issues with time on their side.
- Resourcing to support a 'community connector' on the ground who is not aligned to one organisation but can take a whole-of-community approach to identifying and supporting opportunities for meaningful collaboration and new ways forwards.

Lessons learnt and future opportunities

From the feedback received, **this program has made a valuable impact** in each of the communities, with that impact being **different in each place**, reflecting the **unique starting positions and priorities** of each community.

For FRRR, this program has reinforced the validity of our core tenet – that **local people are best placed to know what will work best** for them, and when those activities are best undertaken, and in what way they are best delivered.

We thank Paul Ramsay Foundation for **placing their trust in us, and in these communities**, to make wise choices about how best to invest these funds. Below we share a few lessons that we take away from this project, which may benefit other groups that seek to partner with communities in a trust-based funding model and to support local NFPs to best serve their communities through periods of disruption.

- NFP **Boards and Committees need the resources** to train, upskill, plan, encourage diversity, broaden networks and focus on succession;
- NFPs, community groups, staff and volunteers need **ongoing access to training** opportunities in grant writing, social media, marketing, strategic planning and fundraising;
- There is value in continuing to **share stories, success, challenges and learnings** as they emerge from the projects underway through the program – locally, and more widely with communities, donors and service providers;
- Maintaining positive **health and wellbeing** of NFP employees, volunteers and community members is critical and **must be actively prioritised and supported**;
- The **voices of young people need to be actively invited** into and harnessed in community activities and plans;
- More **partnerships need to be forged with First Nations communities**, celebrating greater diversity and awareness. This will take time to build trusted relationships but is critical to **creating an inclusive community**;
- Traditional volunteer roles are being redefined in a post-COVID era and **new ways of engaging in community organisations** are being realised. This requires ongoing support and enablement;
- NFPs will continue to seek to find new ways to work together towards local solutions for local issues. Providing opportunities for them to **continue to come together, to share ideas and experiences, agree common focus areas and pool scarce resources** will yield long-term benefits for any remote, rural or regional community;
- Funders need to continue to **trust that local people truly are best-placed to know what will work best** for their community;
- There are many **complexities to navigate for communities** responding to disaster which takes time, energy, courage, commitment and support. **Flexible funding opportunities** that NFPs can direct towards their strategic planning, governance capabilities, training, people, systems, and general operations are invaluable for organisations to **recover, reset and prepare** for the future.



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