Future Drought Fund's

Helping Regional Communities Prepare for Drought Initiative

Evaluation: Final Summary Report

Prepared by
nous

Commissioned by:
Foundation for Rural & Regional Renewal
Australian Rural Leadership Foundation
The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Australian Government
Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
Future Drought Fund
FRRR Foundation for Rural Regional Renewal
Australian Rural Leadership Foundation

Nous' promise: A bigger idea of success

Nous exist to achieve positive influence. This means we work with clients to improve services for people and communities, strengthen business performance, support a productive and inclusive economy, and protect the natural environment.

To increase our combined influence, when we partner with you we think big. We elevate your ambition and sharpen your sense of what's possible.

We recognise that diversity in people, thinking and approach can solve the most complex challenges. As we collaborate, we think deeply and adaptively. We draw on your strengths and invest in your capability. Working together in this way we become far more than the sum of our parts. We achieve a bigger idea of success.

Nous' professional standards

1. We act honestly and with integrity.
2. We always act in our client's best interests.
3. We ensure the independence of our advice and support.
4. We declare actual and potential conflicts of interest and manage them transparently with our clients.
5. We recognise and protect the confidentiality of our client's information.
6. We respect the confidentiality of our client's identity.

The Foundation for Rural & Regional Renewal and the Australian Rural Leadership Foundation receive funding from the Australian Government's Future Drought Fund to deliver the Helping Regional Communities Prepare for Drought Initiative.

Nous Group, the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, the Foundation for Rural & Regional Renewal and the Australian Rural Leadership Foundation continue to acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of Country across Australia. We pay our respect to Elders past and present and to the continuation of the custodial, cultural, and educational practices of Australia's First Nations People.

This artwork was developed by Marcus Lee Design to reflect Nous Group's Reconciliation Action Plan.

Australian Government
Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
Future Drought Fund
FRRR Foundation for Rural Regional Renewal
Australian Rural Leadership Foundation
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About this document

This document is a summary of the HRCPD Initiative evaluation findings. The full evaluation report and appendices, which include the detailed methodology and key sources that underpin the evaluation findings, are available online at https://frrr.org.au/reports/impact-reports/FDF-HRCPDI/

01

Background and Context

The Helping Regional Communities Prepare for Drought Initiative was a $29.6 million investment by the Australian Government's Future Drought Fund.

The Helping Regional Communities Prepare for Drought (HRCPD) Initiative's purpose was to strengthen preparedness and social resilience to drought across Australia. It builds upon previous Future Drought Fund (FDF) investments such as the Networks to Build Drought Resilience (NBDR) and Drought Resilience Leaders programs.

The HRCPD Initiative consisted of five elements, and together these elements delivered:

- Grants and funding for local projects and infrastructure.
- Leadership development activities and workshops.
- Access to expert advice and professional services.
- Mentoring relationships and learning opportunities.
- A national online network for sharing knowledge and building connections.

FRRR Foundation for Rural Regional Renewal

$19,643,570 investment

Australian Rural Leadership Foundation

$10,000,000 investment

Small Network Grants (SNG): Targeted funding for smaller or previously unfunded communities to strengthen social connectedness and support local drought resilience.

Expertise Pool: Access to a national network of consultants and expert services to help local organisations deliver projects and address capability gaps.

Community Impact Program (CIP): Grants and leadership activities to build local capability and networks in regions with higher drought risk.

National Mentoring Program: Connections between experienced mentors and mentees to build leadership capacity and broaden networks.

Drought Ready Network: An online platform connecting individuals and organisations to share knowledge, resources, and support for drought resilience..

Four key aspects were unique about the HRCPD Initiative:

Locally led, flexible design

The HRCPD Initiative put decision-making in the hands of local organisations. Communities could shape activities to fit their priorities, making projects more relevant and building stronger local ownership.

Layered, integrated approach

The HRCPD Initiative combined grants, leadership development, mentoring, expert advice, and a national learning network. This layered design meant each element reinforced the others, building capability and resilience over time.

Focus on inclusion

The HRCPD Initiative deliberately engaged underrepresented groups, including First Nations people, young people, women, and culturally diverse communities. About a third of grant projects specifically targeted these groups to broaden participation in drought activities.

Emphasis on social resilience

The HRCPD Initiative recognised that social connection, leadership, and local networks are as critical as technical solutions for long-term drought resilience. It invested in building relationships and community leadership alongside practical supports.

Nous evaluated the impact of the HRCPD Initiative and its elements using an innovative, participatory methodology

The evaluation set out to determine how effectively the HRCPD Initiative strengthened social resilience and drought preparedness in regional Australia. The approach was independent, practical, and inclusive — focused on generating credible insights that funders, delivery partners, and communities can use to improve future programs.

Nous designed the evaluation to support both learning and accountability. The approach used a mix of quantitative and qualitative data to understand what worked, what could be improved, and what lessons should inform future investments. Emerging findings were shared in real time, enabling delivery partners to adapt and improve as the Initiative progressed.

The evaluation followed ethical and culturally safe practices, including dedicated engagement with First Nations communities. The evaluation approach anticipated key limitations – such as data gaps and variability in local delivery – and addressed them through triangulation and transparent reporting. This ensured the findings are robust, credible, and relevant for future program design.

The evaluation was delivered in three stages between February 2023 and September 2025:

Stage 1 (Feb–Jun 2023): Collaborative planning to develop the monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) plan.

Stage 2 (Jul 2023–Jul 2024): Data collection and analysis for the Mid-Term Evaluation, assessing implementation progress, early outcomes, and opportunities for improvement.

Stage 3 (Aug 2024–Sep 2025): Further data collection and analysis for the Final Evaluation, focusing on achievement of short-term outcomes and overall impact.

There were four key defining features about the evaluation approach:

Program theory and key evaluation questions guided the process

The evaluation was anchored in a clear program theory and logic model, linking activities to short-term, intermediate, and long-term outcomes. Five key evaluation questions (KEQs) shaped the inquiry, covering appropriateness, alignment, efficiency, effectiveness, and impact. More detail on the theory of change and the key evaluation questions is provided overleaf.

Participatory design with delivery partners and communities

The evaluation was co-designed with delivery partners, regional participants, and stakeholders. This participatory approach ensured the evaluation reflected both technical evidence and lived experience, and built evaluation capability within local organisations.

Assessment against seven short-term outcomes

The evaluation measured progress against seven defined short-term outcomes, mapped to each element of the Initiative. Outcomes were reviewed and refined based on community feedback, and assessed using a mix of qualitative and quantitative indicators.

Mixed methods for data collection and analysis

The evaluation used a combination of program data, surveys, interviews, observations, and regional deep dives. This mixed-methods approach enabled triangulation of findings and provided a robust evidence base for conclusions and recommendations.

A program theory and five key evaluation questions guided the evaluation enquiry

THEORY OF CHANGE

Communities in rural, regional and remote Australia need to be prepared for the next phase of drought. The HRCPD Initiative aims to build enduring resilience to the impacts of climate change and drought, and to enhance the public good in agriculture-dependent communities. It will do this by investing in five programs that build individual and community capacity to prepare for and respond to drought.

Communities will have access to a suite of elements that provide grant funding, specialist expertise, mentoring support and opportunities for leadership development and community networking. This will support community resilience to the impacts of drought through strengthened community capacity, cohesion and belonging, as well increased effectiveness of networks and resources that support local responses to drought. These outcomes will contribute to stronger connectedness and greater social capital of communities in the long-term, and the implementation of transformative activities that improve community resilience to drought.

EVALUATION DOMAIN	KEY EVALUATION QUESTIONS
APPROPRIATENESS	How appropriate was the design of the Initiative to address the identified problem or opportunity, and the needs of rural and regional communities?
STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT	How well aligned was the design of the Initiative with the objectives of the FDF and other Australian government and state and territory government drought initiatives?
EFFICIENCY	To what extent was the Initiative administered and delivered efficiently and to the expected quality?
EFFECTIVENESS	To what extent was the Initiative and its individual elements delivering the outputs and achieving the outcomes (short-term, intermediate, intended and unintended)?
IMPACT	To what extent has the initiative contributed towards the FDF long-term outcomes (four+ years) and the vision, strategic priorities and objectives of the FDF?

A mixed methods approach enabled credible and context-rich insights

The evaluation undertook a robust and comprehensive approach to data collection:

To develop a baseline understanding of the regions and understand the place-based impact of the HRCPD Initiative, including:

- Review of over 200 documents to understand how the five HRCPD Initiative elements were delivered and their impact on drought resilience.
- Baseline assessment of regions to explore regional drought resilience before and after the HRCPD Initiative.
- 28 regional working sessions with 82 CIP grantee organisations to understand drought context and evaluation capability.

Engagements to understand program delivery and impact

- Eight interviews with ARLF and FRRR delivery leads informed understanding of program delivery and emerging outcomes for each element.
- Three interviews with DAFF program leads and advisors informed broader contextual understanding and strategic recommendations.
- 20 monthly Operational Cluster sessions provided governance and strategic direction for the evaluation.
- National outcome panels engaged over 90 participants across the five elements, including dedicated panels on First Nations and youth engagement

Additional data collection activities were undertaken for each HRCPD Initiative element:

CIP - Grants

20 Virtual interviews with CIP organisations

290 Final and interim project grant reports analysed

35 Co-design surveys analysed

CIP - Leadership activities

9 Virtual engagements with Changemaker and Leadership Action Initiative participants

1133 Activity completion survey responses analysed

SNG

6 Virtual interviews with SNG organisations

62 Activity completion survey responses analysed

Regional deep dive consultations covered 35 regions and explored the place-based impacts and community benefits of the Initiative. This included over 72 interviews with community members including Traditional Owners, local leaders, and youth representatives. Conversations took place around kitchen tables with a cup of tea, over lunch at the pub, in local offices, and out on country, reflecting the informal, grounded nature of the engagement.

Expertise pool

18 Virtual and Deep Dive engagements with interested & participating organisations

1 Interview with the Social Impact Hub, the delivery partner

13 Completed EOIs for the Expertise Pool analysed

National Mentoring Program

16 Virtual engagement with mentors and/or mentees

2 Graduation sessions with more than 47 mentors and mentees

115 Activity commencement and completion survey responses analysed

National Learning Network (Drought Ready)

16 Virtual engagements with nine Drought Ready members & the Working Group

59 Survey responses to a member survey analysed

Facebook platform insights data analysed

02

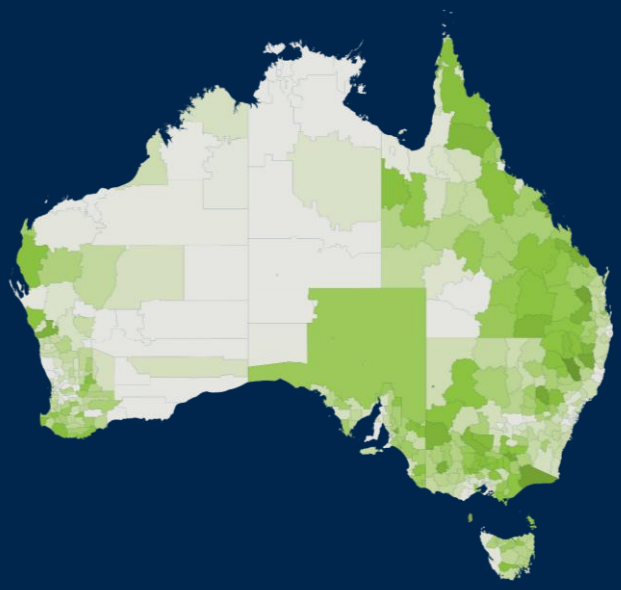
Evaluation of the HRCPD Initiative overall

The Initiative achieved impressive reach to strengthen preparedness and social resilience to drought across Australia

The HRCPD Initiative engaged organisations and individuals across 35 regions, funding hundreds of locally led projects and activities in just over two and a half years. Through its devolved, partnership-based delivery model, the Initiative reached thousands of participants, built new networks, and delivered practical support to strengthen drought preparedness and social resilience in rural, remote, and regional communities nationwide.

Initiative summary

- $29.6 million investment
- over 61,000 participants reached, across
- 438 Local Government Areas
- 232 locally-led projects funded that,
- Strengthened networks, supported events, delivered infrastructure and enabled training and learning.



Source: Program data provided by FRRR and ARLF.

THE INITIATIVE WAS MADE UP OF 5 ELEMENTS THAT DELIVERED THE FOLLOWING...

Community Impact Program Grants

158 projects were delivered across 157 LGAs by 121 organisations who received $9.83 million in funding. The projects reached an estimated 47,528 participants.

Community Leadership Activities

133 leadership sessions were delivered across 121 locations to more than 2,300 participants, including 4 Community Leadership Programs, 1 Emerging Leadership Program, 1 TRAIL Program, 1 Leadership Action Initiative, 1 National Changemaker Summit and 125 Changemaker workshops.

Small Network Grants

74 projects were delivered across 79 LGAs by 72 organisations who received $2 million in funding. The projects reached an estimated 9,808 participants.

National Mentoring Program

Delivered in 2 rounds, engaging 156 participants as mentors and/or mentees across 128 LGAs: Round 1 engaged 59 participants and Round 2 engaged 97 participants.

Drought Ready Network

Grew to over 1,421 members across 335 LGAs, representing 15 different sectors. It facilitated links to other elements and programs with 84% of members engaged in other HRCPD elements, 67% were Changemaker participants and 9% had participated in other FDF programs.

Expertise Pool

Included 156 vetted experts, 90 professional impact networks and 58 referral partners representing 67+ areas of expertise. 25 HRCPD organisations engaged the free concierge service and 12 HRCPD organisations engaged with experts.

The Initiative enhanced the foundations for drought resilience, shifted behaviours and reframed mindsets

Communities built the practical foundations of resilience by strengthening capability, infrastructure and networks.

The Initiative equipped communities with practical skills, upgraded shared assets, and fostered new and stronger networks. Training, leadership development, and peer learning increased confidence and adaptive thinking. Investments in physical, digital, and intellectual infrastructure – like community halls and the Drought Ready platform – created lasting resources. Formal and informal networks now enable ongoing collaboration and collective action, laying the groundwork for long-term resilience.

Communities shifted towards more inclusive, collaborative and adaptive ways of working.

The Initiative catalysed a shift from traditional, top-down approaches to more inclusive, collaborative, and adaptive practices. Leadership emerged locally, including among underrepresented groups such as women, young people, and First Nations communities. Flexible funding and support enabled communities to design and deliver locally relevant solutions, experiment, and learn. This shift has embedded adaptive, community-led approaches to resilience across regions.

Communities reframed resilience through three transformative mindset shifts.

The Initiative drove three key mindset shifts: from top-down, reactive practice to locally led adaptive practice; from individual, producer-focused action to whole-of-community agency; and from technical resilience to relational and cultural resilience. Communities now see resilience as a dynamic, shared journey rooted in relationships, culture, and place, with social connection and local leadership at the centre.

The Initiative strengthened resilience by empowering diverse cohorts through connection, capability, and leadership.

The Initiative prioritised First Nations people and young people, recognising their vital role in long-term resilience. Culturally safe activities, leadership programs, and targeted outreach built confidence, skills, and networks for these groups. This approach strengthened social cohesion, enabled intergenerational knowledge sharing, and elevated diverse leadership in drought resilience efforts.

Wheatbelt Central East in WA has reframed drought as a shared community challenge

The HRCPD Initiative helped communities across the region shift their view of drought as an external issue, to treat it as a shared responsibility.

Leadership activities and mentoring helped residents step into leadership roles, often for the first time. Flexible funding through CIP enabled communities to act on their ideas. They coordinated events, applied for grants and activated public spaces. These efforts built confidence, capability and collaboration.

The region now shows signs of embedded resilience. New leaders are driving action, cross-sector networks are forming and drought is increasingly understood as a social challenge that requires collective response.

Photo of Wheat Belt Rising's 'Town Team Movement' project, provided by Rebecca Parkhouse

Delivery enabled inclusive, adaptive and locally relevant resilience-building, and laid the groundwork for integration

Locally led, well-supported delivery was critical for inclusive, adaptive, and context-driven resilience building.

The Initiative's success was underpinned by empowering local leadership, flexible support structures, strong national coordination, and collaborative monitoring and evaluation. The devolved grant model allowed communities to design and deliver contextually relevant initiatives, while Community Partner Lead Organisations (CPLOs) provided practical support and sustained local networks. National partners ensured broad reach and diverse engagement, and adaptive governance enabled real-time learning and program refinement. Together, these mechanisms created the conditions for inclusive, adaptive, and context-driven resilience building.

Communities in North and Northwest Tasmania are leading local resilience with confidence and connection.

The Initiative harnessed local strengths to revitalise leadership and community connection.

It invested in creative engagement, shared spaces and targeted leadership development. Projects brought together young people, First Nations people and multicultural groups to collaborate, share knowledge and lead local solutions. Place-based outreach and volunteer matching further strengthened social ties and created new pathways for participation and leadership.

> "People now consider and understand what is happening [in their community]... so that they're not duplicating or doing something else that might be better suited elsewhere."
>
> **North and Northwest Tasmania regional deep dive interviewee**

Foundations for integration were established, with potential to deepen alignment.

The Initiative laid early groundwork for integration across program elements and with broader resilience efforts. Strategic design and sequencing allowed some participants to build cumulative capability, while locally embedded models enabled informal cross-program learning. Early alignment with policy and planning frameworks, such as Regional Drought Resilience Plans, created opportunities for greater impact. These integration enablers – strategic design, embedded delivery, and policy alignment – demonstrate the potential for cumulative and sustained impact in future programs.

Building the foundations for integration on the Eyre Peninsula SA.

Agricultural Innovation and Research Eyre Peninsula (AIR EP) leveraged learnings from previous programs (such as the Networks to Build Drought Resilience) to inform its role as regional CPLO. AIR EP used a network mapping tool developed in an earlier program to better understand and connect local organisations, enabling more effective coordination of resilience activities. This strategic design and sequencing allowed participants to build cumulative capability and apply learning across contexts. The region also used CIP and SNG funding for tailored training in governance and volunteer management, aligning with policy frameworks and supporting integration with broader resilience efforts. AIR EP demonstrates how locally embedded models and early alignment with policy frameworks can lay the groundwork for deeper integration and cumulative impact.

Photo of AIR EP's 'Young Farmer- Facilitated Peer to Peer Learning' project, provided by FRRR

03

Evaluation of the Community Impact Program

CIP grants delivered near $10m to 158 projects across Australia

The Community Impact Program (CIP) provided nearly $10 million in grants and leadership activities to support 158 projects across 30 regions and six states. Delivered by FRRR and ARLF, the CIP focused on regions with higher drought sensitivity and used a co-design process to ensure projects matched local priorities. The program invested in both community-led initiatives and leadership development, with dedicated support for coordination and inclusion.

CIP grants supported a diversity of projects across breadth of locations

158 PROJECTS

ACROSS

30 REGIONS

OVER

6 STATES

Including with...

- **16** Landcare organisations
- **6** Natural Resources Management organisations
- **3** Arts organisations
- **9** First Nations organisations
- **4** Women's organisations

Focused on a diversity of community members...

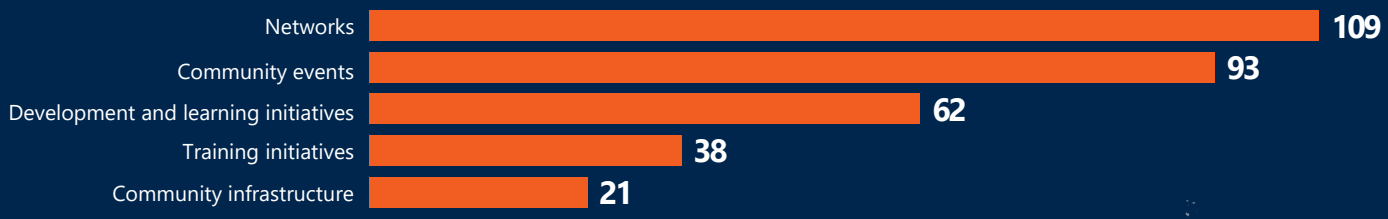
- **33%** Of projects involved the engagement and participation of First Nations people
- **16%** Of projects directly focused on young people (18-35 years)
- **16%** Of projects directly focused on rural women
- **4%** Of projects engaged culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities

PROJECTS REACHED
47,528
PEOPLE DURING THEIR DELIVERY.

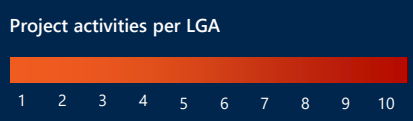
PROJECTS ARE EXPECTED TO REACH
156,306
PEOPLE ONGOING.

For every one person reached during a project, an additional **~3 people are expected to benefit from the outcomes achieved by that project.**

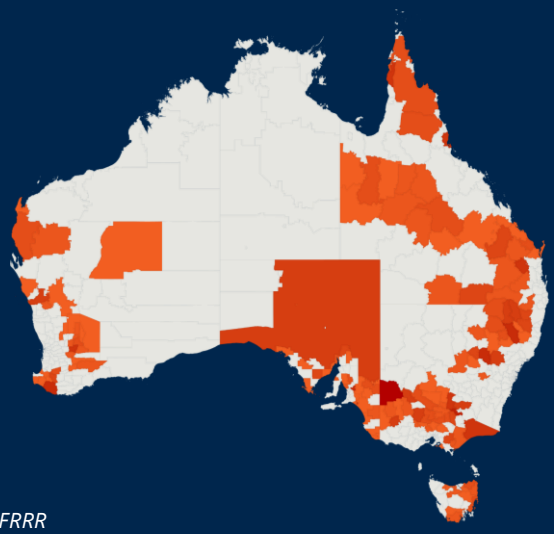
Networks was the most commonly selected output



Project activities were spread nationally, representing 157 Local Government Areas



25% of projects were delivered to remote, or very remote locations.



Source: CIP program data provided by FRRR, CIP final grant report data provided by FRRR

The CIP strengthened locally led drought resilience

The CIP strengthened social connection, networks and belonging

The CIP formalised or strengthened over 29 community-based networks, creating new platforms for collaboration and knowledge sharing.

- 105 out of 137 projects (77%) reported improved social connection, trust, and collaboration as a primary outcome.
- CIP-funded events engaged over 30,000 participants, with 33% of projects focusing on the engagement and participation of First Nations people and 16% focusing on young people.
- 74% of projects reported a large or very large improvement in community belonging.
- Through inclusive events and targeted outreach, the CIP reduced isolation and built resilience across diverse communities. Targeted initiatives deepened inclusion for underrepresented groups, such as First Nations communities, young people, and cultural groups, helping participants feel more connected and valued.

The CIP built local capability and adaptive capacity to support drought resilience

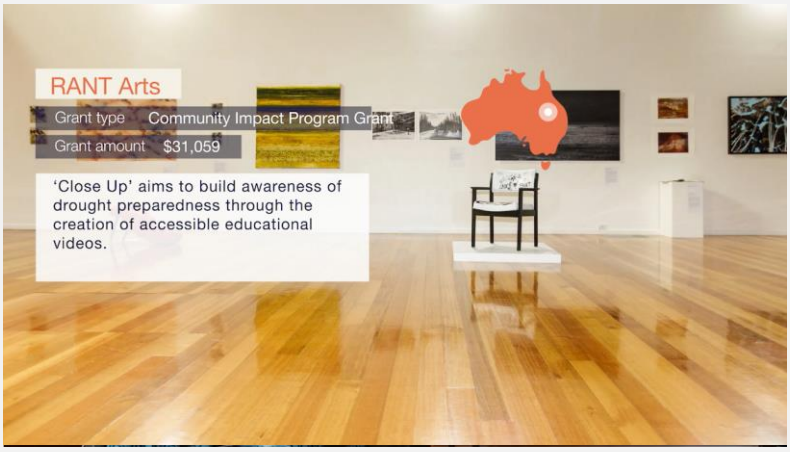
The program invested in building the skills, knowledge, and confidence of individuals and organisations to lead local resilience efforts.

- 27 projects selected strengthened individual leadership capacity as a primary outcome; nine invested specifically in leadership programs.
- 83% of projects focused on knowledge-building reported large or very large improvements in participant confidence.

Leadership activities, mentoring, and tailored learning equipped both emerging and established leaders to coordinate local action. Projects revitalised or created shared spaces, improved access to support services, and embedded practical knowledge for ongoing adaptation.

CASE STUDY

RANT Arts' 'Close Up' project in North and Northwest Tasmania used creative storytelling to engage young people in conversations about climate, resilience, and mental health. Karen spoke to the Evaluation about the impacts of the videos. Click to hear her story via the video.



The CIP laid foundations for enduring, community-led drought resilience

The CIP fully realised all seven intended short-term outcomes, including social connection, access to services, diversity, knowledge, place-based practices, leadership, and networks.

Regional delivery models elevated trusted local organisations and enabled peer learning, helping communities align efforts and reduce duplication.

Many networks and leadership efforts are continuing beyond the life of the grants, with regions now driving joint planning, shared governance, and long-term investment.

The program catalysed a shift in mindset– resilience is now seen as a shared, community-driven process, with social connection and local leadership at its core

CASE STUDY

Wimmera Southern Mallee Development delivered CIP projects in regional Victoria that built the capability of local networks and supported youth to build drought awareness, social connection and leadership.

Jess and Bernesh reflected on the impact CIP funding has had in their region

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE PROGRAMS

1. Support place-based, community-led approaches to resilience

Prioritise flexible funding models that allow communities to define their own resilience priorities. Invest in local coordination roles to support planning, engagement, and continuity.

2. Strengthen social networks and collaborative partnerships

Fund initiatives that build and maintain cross-sector networks. Encourage joint planning and shared governance across delivery partners to sustain collaboration and learning.

3. Embed First Nations knowledge and leadership in resilience planning

Require appropriate co-design with First Nations organisations in future program rounds. Fund culturally safe engagement processes and support intergenerational knowledge sharing.

4. Build the capacity of community organisations to lead and sustain resilience efforts

Include dedicated funding for organisational development (e.g. staffing, systems, governance). Provide support for professional development and succession planning to reduce key person risk.

04

Evaluation of the Community Impact Leadership Activities

The Community Leadership Activities reached over 2300 participants nationally

The Community Leadership Activities, delivered by ARLF, aimed to equip community members in remote, rural, and regional Australia with the skills and confidence to lead local drought resilience. By June 2025, over 2,300 people across 121 communities participated in workshops, applied learning sessions, and peer-led initiatives. The activities were designed to be flexible and locally relevant, supporting both emerging and established leaders.

The Leadership Activities have reached over 2300 participants

ARLF HAS DELIVERED...

133

LEADERSHIP SESSIONS

ACROSS

121 LOCATIONS

04
Community Leadership Programs

01
Emerging Leadership Program

01
TRAIL program

01
Leadership Action Initiative

125
Changemaker workshops

01
National Changemaker Summit

31%
Of sessions were delivered in remote or very remote locations

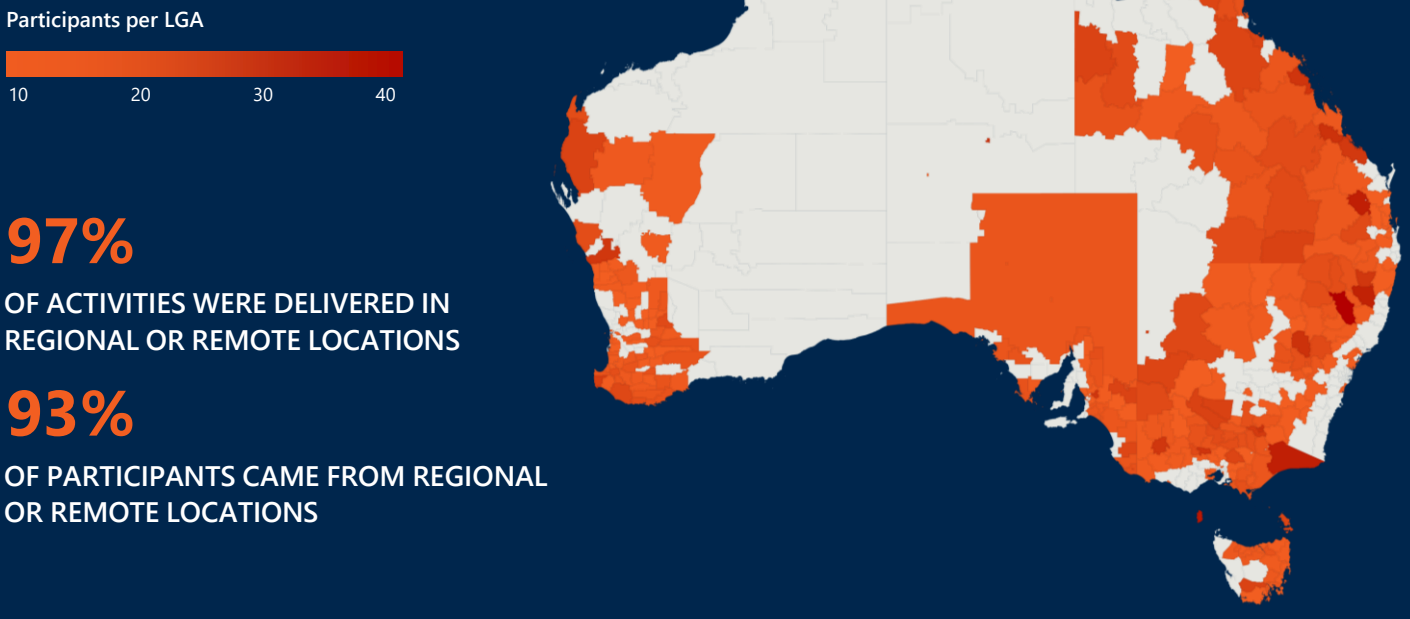
PARTICIPANTS

15%
Of participants were **young people (aged 18-35)**

8%
Of participants identified as **First Nations**

82%
Of participants were **women**

Participants were spread nationally, representing 297 Local Government Areas



97%
OF ACTIVITIES WERE DELIVERED IN REGIONAL OR REMOTE LOCATIONS

93%
OF PARTICIPANTS CAME FROM REGIONAL OR REMOTE LOCATIONS

Source: Participant location data provided by ARLF.

The Leadership Activities built capability and catalysed action, strengthening community resilience from the ground up

The Leadership Activities strengthened social capital to enable deeper collaboration and collective action

The activities created opportunities for participants to connect across sectors, regions, and roles, forming new relationships grounded in a shared commitment to resilience. Group discussions and collaborative exercises moved beyond surface-level networking, deepening trust and supporting ongoing collaboration.

- Over 2,300 participants engaged in leadership activities across 121 communities, including 41 remote or very remote areas.
- Nine out of ten participants reported the sessions enabled them to network and exchange skills and knowledge.
- 81% of Changemaker workshop participants said they felt more empowered to lead community initiatives or projects.

CASE STUDY

ARLF held a National Changemaker Gathering in Cairns, which brought together 47 community leaders. Hear more about the participant's experience in the video.

The Leadership Activities built adaptive leadership skills and confidence to act

Participants developed practical skills in adaptive leadership, systems thinking, and collaborative problem-solving. Many now lead initiatives in their communities and workplaces, with younger participants especially reporting the experience as a catalyst for stepping into leadership for the first time.

- 25% of Changemaker participants highlighted the value of tools and frameworks introduced during the sessions.
- 83% of projects focused on knowledge-building reported large or very large improvements in participant confidence.
- 12 out of 33 surveyed Summit attendees cited increased confidence as their most significant change.

The Mallee region in Victoria hosted an ARLF Emerging Leadership Program

The program was delivered to 18 to 30-year-old participants who reported the following outcomes:

Building connected communities

"I've committed to improving connectedness by uniting young people with volunteering organisations."

Leading with empathy and awareness

"I've stopped making quick assessments and started understanding the paradigms that shape people."

Communicating with confidence

"This program has added confidence within me, especially in speaking with my peers."

The Leadership Activities catalysed local action, strengthening community resilience through participant-led initiatives

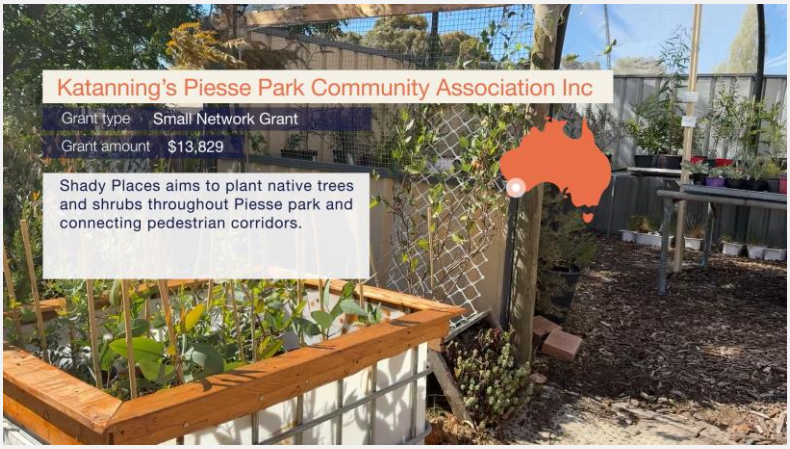
The activities translated individual learning into tangible community action, with participants launching new projects, building peer networks, and advocating for local needs. The layered design of the HRCPD Initiative– combining leadership, mentoring, and grants– helped scaffold ongoing engagement and capacity-building.

- **Participants initiated local projects** and formed informal support networks after the workshops.
- **47 Changemaker participants** attended the National Changemaker Summit, strengthening connections and expanding networks.
- **Participants consistently emphasised** the need for follow-up support to activate and sustain ideas sparked during the activities.

CASE STUDY

Katanning Piesse Park Community Inc. used planting, food growing and seed saving to build practical community responses to drought in Great Southern WA.

Bev Lockley shares how these changes are helping her community prepare for a hotter, drier future. Click to hear her story.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE PROGRAMS

1. Embed leadership development in resilience frameworks and programs

Position leadership development as a core part of national and state-level resilience strategies, not as an optional add-on. Integrate leadership initiatives within broader resilience programs and allocate sustained funding to support long-term capability.

2. Tailor programs to local context and readiness

Continue to offer flexible, community-led formats that reflect the diversity of regional and remote communities. Embed co-design processes to ensure content is relevant to local priorities and levels of readiness.

3. Strengthen visibility and access in under-served regions

Prioritise delivery in regions with limited prior access to leadership development. Map geographic and demographic gaps to inform targeted outreach and partner with local organisations to build trust.

4. Connect leadership development with activation pathways

Sequence leadership activities with other program elements, such as mentoring and grants, to provide clear pathways for participants to turn ideas into action. Align program timelines with local grant rounds and connect leaders with ongoing support.

5. Sustain engagement beyond the program

Facilitate locally led alumni events, regional group chats, or follow-up sessions to help participants maintain connections and peer learning. Encourage local stewardship by supporting alumni to take on facilitation or convening roles.

05

Evaluation of the Small Network Grants

The SNG funded small-scale projects to build drought resilience

The Small Network Grants (SNG) program provided accessible funding to support 74 small-scale projects across regional, rural, and remote communities. Designed to complement the larger Community Impact Program, SNGs targeted smaller or previously unfunded communities, enabling them to deliver practical, community-driven initiatives that strengthened social connection and built local capability for drought preparedness.

SNG grants supported 74 projects across 7 states and territories

Including with...

- **22** Landcare or other environmental organisations
- **14** Agricultural organisations
- **9** Community associations
- **5** Local councils
- **4** First Nations-led organisations

Focused on a diversity of community members...

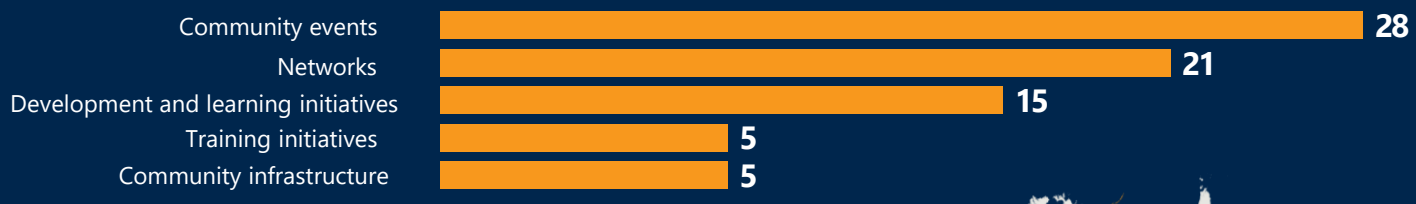
- **15%** Of projects involved the engagement and participation of First Nations people
- **19%** Of projects directly focused on young people (18-35 years)
- **66%** Of projects were delivered to a majority of rural women
- **0.6%** Of projects engaged culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities

PROJECTS REACHED
10,375
PEOPLE DURING THEIR DELIVERY.

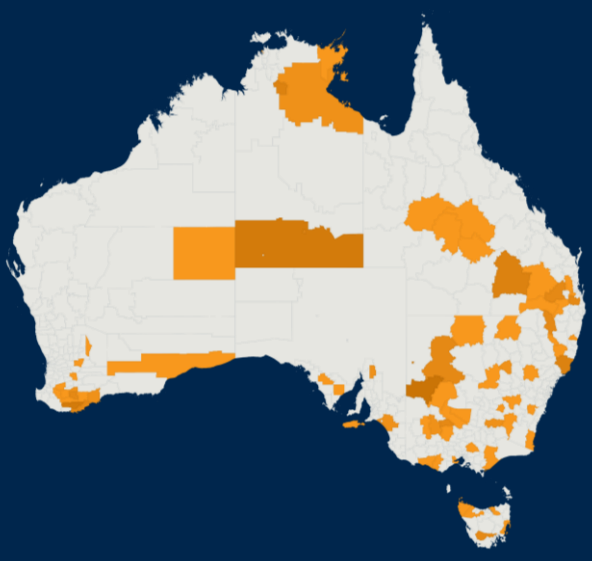
PROJECTS ARE EXPECTED TO REACH
69,912
PEOPLE ONGOING.

For every **one person** reached during a project, an additional **~7 people are expected to benefit from the outcomes achieved by that project.**

Networks was the most commonly selected output



Project activities were spread nationally, representing 79 Local Government Areas



Project activities per LGA

43% of projects were delivered to remote, or very remote locations.

Source: SNG program data provided by FRRR

The SNG catalysed local networks and practical preparedness

SNGs strengthened belonging and social connection through locally designed events and activities

SNG-funded events created safe, inclusive spaces for connection, trust-building, and collaboration. These activities reduced isolation, fostered intergenerational and cross-sector relationships, and helped communities feel more connected and ready to support one another during drought.

77% of SNG organisations delivered community events, engaging people who had not previously interacted.

39 organisations reported improved communication, social connection, and collaboration as a top outcome.

Events reached an average of **200 participants** each, with some events attracting over 1,500 people.

Big hART's 'Just Feasts' Project strengthened community and food system resilience in North and Northwest Tasmania.

The project brought people together through food and place-based learning. Six themed events immersed producers, youth, and locals in regenerative agriculture and food sovereignty.

Hear from Isabel as she reflects on her experience working with Big hART.

SNGs improved access to skills, resources, and infrastructure for practical preparedness

SNGs enabled communities to invest in assets and training that matched local needs, supporting ongoing engagement, service access, and practical skills for resilience. Mobile and shared resources extended reach into isolated areas, while training initiatives built confidence in first aid, mental health, and emergency response.

- **15 projects** reported improved access to infrastructure as a top outcome, with upgrades ranging from community halls and kitchens to weather data platforms and mobile resources.
- Infrastructure projects saw their reach grow from an average of **103 people during delivery to 1,668 in ongoing use;** a 16-fold increase.
- **73% of projects** delivering training or learning activities reported building local capacity to engage with services and respond to emergencies.

Porongurup Community Association kitchen upgrade restores local connection

The Porongurup district hall in WA was underused due to an outdated kitchen. Without a clean, safe and functional space, the community could not host events or support residents, especially during drought.

The Association used SNG funding to renovate the kitchen. The upgrade created a modern, safe and flexible facility for diverse users.

The hall is now a hub for community life. It supports community meetings and celebrations, helping residents to reconnect and build resilience.

SNGs catalysed systemic change by broadening participation and embedding adaptive practices

The program deliberately engaged non-traditional organisations and underrepresented groups, expanding leadership and shifting local mindsets about who can contribute to resilience. SNGs restored hope after adversity, sparked optimism, and enabled communities to trial new approaches and build feedback loops for continuous improvement.

- **70% of SNG projects targeted diverse cohorts, including First Nations people, young people, women, and CALD communities.**
- **32% of final grant reports identified strengthened community networks and collaboration as a key outcome.**
- **SNGs supported the creation of new networks, with 20 projects establishing ongoing, multi-purpose groups.**

Jawoyn Aboriginal Association used SNG-funding to bring back a ceremony for protection of country in the Northern Territory.

12 traditional leaders and diverse community members brought back a ceremonial practice that hadn't been practiced in 50 years (pictured right). This expanded and diversified networks by integrating Aboriginal knowledge into drought resilience efforts, fostering cross-cultural collaboration and long-term community stewardship. Jawoyn reported, "National Parks were in deep gratitude to the elders and this focus for bringing a new way of healing and empowerment."

Photo right of the Jawoyn Association Aboriginal Corporation 'Gawk Gawk Water for Wellbeing' project, provided by Elle Frederickson

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE PROGRAMS

1. **Use small grants to complement and extend larger programs**—sequence small grants to follow leadership or mentoring activities and target regions not reached by larger grants.
2. **Maintain simple application processes**—lower barriers for smaller and less-resourced organisations and offer tailored support.
3. **Engage diverse organisations and cohorts**—prioritise outreach to underrepresented groups and fund projects led by organisations with strong community ties.
4. **Prioritise social connection and networks**—fund activities that build and sustain community networks and shared spaces.
5. **Strengthen organisational capacity**—support training, mentoring, and governance development for local organisations.
6. **Connect grantees for shared learning**—facilitate opportunities for grantees to share insights, collaborate, and sustain connections.

06

Evaluation of the National Mentoring Program

The National Mentoring Program engaged 156 diverse mentees and mentors

The National Mentoring Program connected established and emerging leaders from agriculture-dependent communities in a 12-month mentoring and learning program. Delivered in two rounds (Jan–Dec 2023 and Jul 2023–Jun 2024), the program aimed to build national drought resilience capability by pairing mentors and mentees, providing learning sessions, and supporting knowledge exchange across regions and industries.

The Mentoring Program was delivered in two rounds to 156 participants

ROUND 1

- **30** MENTORS
- **30** MENTEES
- **1** BOTH

59 PARTICIPANTS ACROSS 7 STATES AND TERRITORIES

- **27%** Were young people (18 – 35 years old)
- **02%** Identified as First Nations
- **74%** Were women

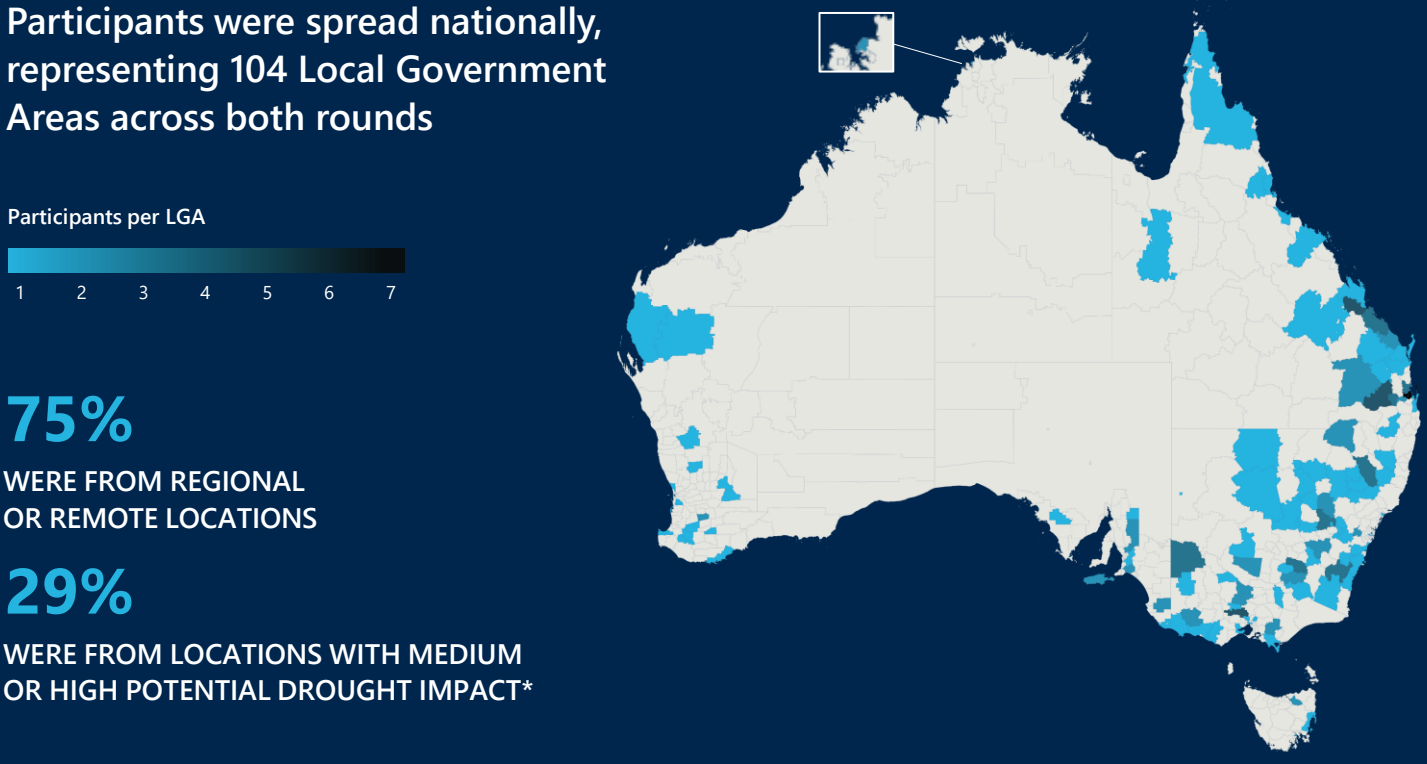
ROUND 2

- **53** MENTORS
- **53** MENTEES
- **9** BOTH

97 PARTICIPANTS ACROSS ALL STATES

- **35%** Were young people (18 – 35 years old)
- **01%** Identified as First Nations
- **61%** Were women

Participants were spread nationally, representing 104 Local Government Areas across both rounds



75%

WERE FROM REGIONAL OR REMOTE LOCATIONS

29%

WERE FROM LOCATIONS WITH MEDIUM OR HIGH POTENTIAL DROUGHT IMPACT*

*Regions ranked 0.33 or higher on the Potential Drought Impact indicator in the ABARES Community vulnerability and resilience to drought index. The indicator measures the potential of an LGA to be adversely affected by drought, accounting for both agriculture industry exposure and sensitivity and community dependence on agriculture. The indicator ranks LGAs between 0 to 1 with the most sensitive LGAs ranked near 1.

The National Mentoring Program strengthened social capital through a networked cohort of future leaders

The program strengthened leadership capability and confidence among participants

Mentors and mentees developed practical leadership skills, improved confidence, and gained new perspectives through both formal learning and informal mentoring relationships. Many mentees reported the experience as a turning point in their leadership journey, with several stepping into new leadership roles or seeking promotions as a direct result.

156 mentors and mentees participated across both rounds, representing a diverse mix of industries and regions.

74% of surveyed participants indicated the program strengthened their leadership capacity.

75% of surveyed participants rated the learning sessions as 7 or higher out of 10 for value.

The National Mentoring Program has strengthened the confidence of mentees to pursue further leadership opportunities.

A young mentee reflected on the program's effectiveness in building his confidence and launching his leadership journey. He highlighted that the program's short duration and minimal commitment made it an ideal introduction to leadership. The tailored support and guidance from his mentor combined with the practical leadership theories from the learning sessions, enabled him to develop self-awareness and confidence in his leadership abilities. He shared that his increased confidence motivated him to apply for other leadership programs and pushed him to become more active in local politics and community-based leadership initiatives.

The program expanded networks and fostered strong, sustainable connections

The program's effective matching process and national scope enabled participants to build relationships beyond their usual circles. Communities of practice and an in-person summit further strengthened connections, with many participants maintaining contact and collaborating beyond the program's duration.

- **91% of surveyed participants were satisfied or highly satisfied with their mentor or mentee match.**
- **71% of survey respondents created new networks outside their community through the program.**
- **76 out of 102 mentoring pairs involved participants from different states, broadening national connections.**

Participants are leveraging leadership and networking outcomes from the National Mentoring Program to deliver community programs.

One young mentee highlighted the program's significant role enhancing her confidence and expanding her network. The cross-sector match both enabled her to diversify her network and enriched her perspective due to her mentor's differing knowledge and experience. Beyond connecting with her mentor, she also noted connecting with other participants in the program which have formed a community of practice that she can lean on for support. She shared her plans to implement a leadership program for young women in rural areas, leveraging the skills and confidence gained from the program.

Participants intend to use their new skills, confidence and networks to deliver broader benefits

The program's impact extended beyond individual growth, with participants leveraging their new skills and networks to deliver tangible benefits for their organisations, communities, and the broader sector.

- 65% of survey respondents reported strengthening their community-based networks to a great or greatest extent.
- Participants applied new skills and knowledge in their jobs, initiated local projects, and shared resources to support community resilience.
- Several mentees reported running for local council, leading community initiatives, or supporting others to step into leadership roles.

Participants in the Mentoring Program are applying leadership skills to contribute towards building social resilience in their communities

One mentee ran for local council, was elected, and developed an on-farm tourism initiative based on their learnings about problem solving and creative thinking from the mentoring program.

Photo provided by ARLF

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE PROGRAMS

1. **Align mentoring with other program elements**—sequence mentoring alongside leadership activities and networks to maximise cumulative impact.
2. **Facilitate more local connections**—complement national networks with regionally focused activities and local mentoring circles.
3. **Incorporate more drought and climate resilience content**—embed technical sessions on drought preparedness and climate adaptation into the learning curriculum.
4. **Maintain personalised matching and tailored support**—continue the effective matching process and provide dedicated staff support for participants.

07

Evaluation of the National Learning Network

Drought Ready is an impact network, connecting more than 1,400 members nationally

The Drought Ready Network is an online impact network launched in August 2023 to connect individuals and organisations across regional, rural, and remote Australia. Delivered primarily through a Facebook group, supplemented by events, resources, and chat groups, Drought Ready enabled members to share knowledge, build relationships, and catalyse action for drought resilience.

Drought Ready is an impact network, connecting more than 1,300 members nationally.

AS OF 30 JUNE 2025, THERE WERE

1,421

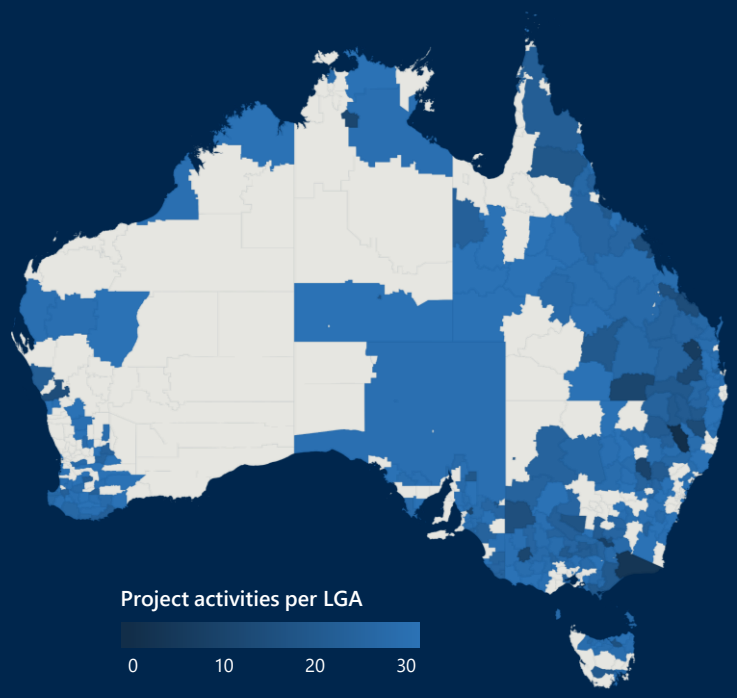
MEMBERS IN THE NETWORK

78%

OF MEMBERS ARE WOMEN

15%

OF MEMBERS ARE YOUNG PEOPLE (AGED 18-35)



DROUGHT READY MEMBERS REPRESENT

335 LGAs

ACROSS

ALL STATES AND TERRITORIES

AND AT LEAST

15 DIFFERENT SECTORS

84% of members
Engaged in other HRCPD initiative elements

67% of members
Participated in Changemaker workshops

9% of members
Participated in other FDF funded programs including Networks to Build Drought Resilience

Drought Ready is primarily delivered online through a Facebook group, supplemented with events, resources and chat groups.

The Facebook platform has offered:

37 CHAT GROUPS INCLUDING:

- General chat
- Youth engagement
- Requests, ideas and feedback
- Community café
- Changemaker
- Free community resilience video resources
- State and territory
- Community size

40 GROUP EVENTS INCLUDING:

- **21 EVENTS** promoted by individual members and organisations
- **13 ONLINE EVENTS** hosted by ARLF
  8 CHANGEMAKER EVENTS cross-promoted
- **3 EVENTS** hosted by TNQ drought hub
- **5 IN-PERSON EVENTS** offered by ARLF

7 GUIDES AND RESOURCES INCLUDING:

- **5 GUIDES** including 'how to make the most of this network' and ways to gain value
- **2 RESOURCES** including mental wellbeing resources and natural disaster preparedness and response resources

Drought Ready has connected people, curated knowledge and catalysed action to build drought resilience

The network achieved strong reach and engagement across diverse communities

Drought Ready's growth was driven by referrals from other HRCPD elements, especially the Leadership Activities. The network's diverse membership enabled cross-sector and cross-regional connections, with members reporting an average of nine new connections each.

- **Over 1,400 members joined the network, representing 335 local government areas and more than 15 industries.**
- **63% of members were Changemaker alumni, with others joining from mentoring, grants, and other Future Drought Fund programs.**
- **Active daily members grew by 86% in the final year, with engagement rates (11.8%) well above typical social networks.**

The Leading & Learning Series built practical leadership and inspired action across diverse communities.

Led by ARLF, the series comprised 19 webinars attended by 427 Drought Ready members from nearly every state and territory, demonstrating strong national reach.

Each session responded to community-identified needs and offered practical tools, resources and insights grounded in real-world leadership. Participants engaged in interactive Q&A and peer learning, exchanging ideas and building leadership capability in a collaborative setting.

Feedback showed that participants applied new strategies in their local contexts, strengthening their confidence and readiness to lead change.

Drought Ready enabled members to build knowledge, skills and confidence for resilience

Members accessed curated resources, peer learning opportunities, and practical tools for resilience. Regular content, such as "Wednesday Wins" and "Sunday Shares," helped sustain engagement and fostered a culture of sharing and support. Members reported increased confidence, motivation, and a stronger sense of belonging.

- **57% of surveyed members joined to access resources and knowledge about drought preparedness.**
- **The platform hosted 40 events (online and in-person), with participation in Community Cafés growing from 5 to 24 members.**
- **40% of surveyed members reported the most significant change was increased knowledge, skills, or motivation to take community action.**

"Having lived and 'managed' most, if not all, aspects of climate and associated challenges, [Drought Ready] enabled me to learn how to improve my self-awareness, confidence and control of life, business and environment. A big part of this improvement is being able to seek assistance along my journey.

Drought Ready member

Drought Ready enabled and extended mindset shifts, helping turn reflection into action

Drought Ready helped members broaden their perspectives, sustain momentum from other HRCPD activities, and turn reflection into action. The platform supported the evolution of peer learning relationships, joint projects, and ongoing collaboration– helping communities move from isolated efforts to collective resilience.

- **71% of survey respondents created new networks outside their community through Drought Ready.**
- **Nearly half of surveyed members reported collaborating with or receiving support from another network member.**
- **38% of surveyed members said Drought Ready helped them maintain long-term connections.**

Leadership Circles demonstrate the Drought Ready network's reach and engagement.

ARLF piloted four online circles, connecting 31 leaders from over 20 regional communities across five states.

Delivered in small, peer-led groups, each circle supported deep listening, shared problem-solving and real-time leadership practice.

Participants, many of whom were alumni of ARLF's leadership programs, built trusted networks and explored complex challenges in a safe, collaborative space.

Feedback showed stronger peer support, increased confidence and deeper engagement across diverse communities.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE PROGRAMS

1. **Clarify the platform's purpose and value proposition**—refresh onboarding and communications to help members engage meaningfully.
2. **Integrate Drought Ready with related programs**—design shared pathways and cross-program strategies to maximise cumulative impact.
3. **Maintain a decentralised model with consistent moderation**—combine peer-led content with professional coordination and use platform analytics to guide engagement.
4. **Enhance content governance and accessibility**—improve tagging, navigation, and visibility to ensure all members can benefit from resources and connections.

08

Evaluation of the Expertise Pool

The Expertise Pool was designed and refined to support regional organisations overcome capacity constraints

The Expertise Pool was a national online platform, delivered by the Social Impact Hub, designed to connect rural and regional organisations with expert advice to strengthen their capacity for drought preparedness. The service launched in mid-2023 and was available to all FRRR-supported organisations and the broader not-for-profit sector. It offered a free concierge service and access to a vetted pool of specialists across more than 67 areas of expertise.

The Expertise Pool provided access to specialist professional services and advice.

156 EXPERTS, INCLUDING:	
98	PROFESSIONAL IMPACT NETWORK
58	REFERRAL PARTNERS

REPRESENTING 67+ SKILLS, SUCH AS:		
Advocacy	Monitoring and Evaluation	Web design
Legal	Business planning	Impact measurement
Project management	Governance	Strategic planning
Communications	Training and development	Fundraising

OUTPUT	DELIVERED TO HRCPD-FUNDED ORGANISATIONS
Concierge occasions	25
Expert referrals	12
Short explainer video	1
Governance & planning webinar	1

The Expertise Pool delivered value to a few, but overall had limited reach and impact

The Expertise Pool delivered practical value to a small number of organisations

The concierge service helped organisations clarify their needs, provided tailored referrals, and offered practical guidance on issues such as legal structure, governance, and funding strategies. Organisations valued the responsiveness and relevance of the support, particularly for those with limited prior experience accessing advisory services.

- 156 experts were onboarded to the platform, exceeding recruitment targets.
- 25 HRCPD-funded organisations received support from the free concierge service, with 13 organisations referred to an expert for tailored advice.
- The most sought-after support areas were governance, strategy, planning, legal advice, and business development.

The Concierge Service helped organisations access a range of expert help and resources.

Wheatbelt Beyond Youth Mentoring (WBYM) in WA accessed legal support through the Expertise Pool, facilitated by the Concierge service. MinterEllison provided pro bono legal services that enabled WBYM to successfully apply for Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR) status. This unlocked critical philanthropic funding opportunities and strengthened the organisation's long-term sustainability.

> The FRRR Expertise Pool has been of great value as WBYM has been connected with professionals with regional experience in areas that have been required as an NFP association.
>
> **Interviewee from WBYM**

Uptake and impact were limited by timing, funding, and design constraints

Despite improvements to the platform and targeted outreach, the Expertise Pool was underutilised. Organisations preferred local expertise and trusted relationships over national offerings, and many lacked the scale or maturity to benefit fully from the service.

- The platform fell short of its revised milestone of 44 concierge occasions, reflecting lower-than-expected demand.
- Many organisations did not utilise their grant to engage paid expert services, and most did not progress beyond initial enquiries.
- Although promoted through multiple channels, low awareness and uptake, coupled with a delayed rollout, limited integration into project planning for some early grantees

Photo provided by FRRR

Scaling governance capability through accessible, expert-led delivery.

Social Impact Hub delivered a 1-hour governance and planning webinar that reached 293 organisations, providing accessible, light-touch support and practical tools for community leaders. The group webinar format proved an efficient way to spread governance knowledge and expert insights at scale.

The Expertise Pool demonstrated that investing in organisational capacity is a valid community need

Community organisations found greater value in embedded, relationship-based support, such as peer learning, guided workshops, and just-in-time coaching, rather than national expert brokerage. These models better matched the operating realities and readiness of regional organisations.

- Over 100 CIP and SNG organisations delivered training or learning initiatives through other Initiative elements.
- At least 11 organisations reported that local facilitators and tailored content amplified the success of their capacity-building activities.

Foundation Broken Hill's tailored governance training helped regional organisations build confidence, improve board participation and strengthen long-term sustainability.

Foundation Broken Hill in NSW used its Small Network Grant to deliver a hybrid governance training program tailored to the needs of local community boards. The program addressed key challenges such as ageing membership, succession planning and grant writing – issues that many regional organisations identified as barriers to long-term sustainability.

The training has already led to increased board participation, including the appointment of a new trainee board member. It is expected to improve the sustainability of local organisations and their ability to respond to future climate impacts.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE PROGRAMS

1. **Tailor capacity-building models to organisation needs**—co-design support options with delivery partners and offer a mix of peer learning, webinars, online tools, and facilitated workshops.
2. **Embed expert support early and across the project lifecycle**—integrate relevant expert input into project design, budget planning, and key delivery stages.
3. **Deliver timely, tailored communication**—enhance onboarding materials, clarify available support, and provide reminders at key project milestones to prompt engagement.

09

Future direction

The Initiative has set strong foundations for ongoing transformation across regional Australia

The evaluation of the HRCPD Initiative highlights clear priorities for future investment in drought resilience. Drawing on lessons from all program elements, these recommendations reflect what worked on the ground and what communities, delivery partners, and funders say is needed to build lasting impact. Six design features are recommended to maximise future impact.

01

1. Design for complementarity across program elements

Future programs should intentionally link sub-elements, such as grants, leadership development and mentoring, to enable participants to build layered, cumulative capability. Sequencing activities and aligning content will help sustain engagement and amplify outcomes.

02

2. Coordinate distributed delivery for collective impact

Shared frameworks, aligned timelines and clear communication channels are needed to connect sub-programs and enable system-wide learning. National coordination should support local autonomy while ensuring strategic alignment and knowledge exchange.

03

3. Embed place-based co-design for relevance and uptake

Regional stakeholders must be actively involved in shaping priorities and delivery. Co-design processes should reflect local context, capacity and aspirations, ensuring that programs are relevant, inclusive and well-targeted.

04

4. Balance investments across social and human capital and both physical and digital infrastructure

Resilience depends on more than physical assets. Future programs should recognise social infrastructure such as networks, leadership and belonging, as core outcomes, and balance funding across community capability, relationships and built assets.

05

5. Embed inclusion and support diverse leadership

Underrepresented groups must be actively engaged and supported to lead. Programs should create pathways for First Nations, CALD, youth and women to shape resilience efforts, recognising the value of diverse perspectives and lived experience.

06

6. Fund local innovation through flexible small scale-investments

Low-barrier funding streams can unlock experimentation, local activation and grassroots transformation. Small-scale investments should be integrated into broader program ecosystems to sustain momentum and seed new ideas.

nous

A bigger idea of success

Nous Group is an international management consultancy working with clients across Australasia, the United Kingdom and North America. We are inspired and determined to improve people's lives in significant ways. When our strengths complement yours and we think big together, we can transform businesses, governments, and communities. We realise a bigger idea of success.

750
PEOPLE

75
PRINCIPALS

9
OFFICES

91%
of clients rate their experience and our service as excellent or good. This makes Nous the best performer for overall client service – *Beaton Research, 2024.*