

**SEARCH CRITERIA**

<b>Model</b>	Model A: Empowerment Model
<b>Industry</b>	Community
<b>Focus/Level</b>	Community
<b>Outcomes</b>	Building individual confidence, Building community, Building management skills
<b>Special Interest Groups</b>	Other

**1. PROJECT TITLE:**

Progress Rural Western Australia

**Reviewer** Dr Fionnuala Frost

**2. FUNDERS:**

The State Government of Western Australia

**3. PROVIDERS:**

The Department of Local Government and regional development is the principal provider. The Department of Agriculture has had a considerable commitment to the programme in recent times.

**4. KEY CONTACTS:**

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**5. INDUSTRY/ISSUE/GEOGRAPHY**

Progress Rural is a programme designed to provide people with skills in community development, leadership and working with people and in so doing provide confidence and capacity to rural economies to establish new industries, value add or improve existing industries and reinvigorate rural communities who are beginning to show signs of waning or stagnating. The programme is very much based on principles of self help and regional development. Communities in traditional farming areas of Western Australia and other regions throughout the world have limited diversity and have struggled against unprecedented rates of change in their industries. The emergence of strong viable enterprises and dependent rural communities, together devising strategies to change their economic, social, cultural, and/or environmental situation offers some hope for a reversal of rural decline. Ideally, the role of government is to create an environment conducive to positive change and to work in partnership with rural industries and communities to foster community development initiatives.

**6. PROJECT CONTEXT**

The *Progress Rural Western Australia* comprises seven programs, funded and overseen by a State government department (Agriculture WA) but driven and directed by regional community members. Importantly, the focus of the programs

were not specific industries or issues, rather the focus was improving the capacity of people to learn about and do something about local economies, community development opportunities and promote local community attributes. In many ways, the skills learnt were those that could be readily applied to any community development aspiration, and in so doing reinvigorate both the person in their own right as well as the community in general.

The government department co-ordinated and funded the programs although participants were usually required to pay a portion, perhaps with some local community contribution, to promote outcome commitment.

Programmes that were part of Progress Rural included the *Rural Leadership Programme*, including Foundations for Rural Leadership, Future Leaders and Rural Women in Leadership. Another initiative was the *Community Builders* programme where participants were encouraged to revitalise their skills in community development and local project development.

## 7. PROJECT NICHE

Haslam-McKenzie, in her review of Progress Rural describes the content and intent of the components of Progress Rural as follows.

### *Community Builders*

The intention of the *Community Builders Initiative* is to equip local residents with the necessary skills, information, resources and motivation to generate community development. It encourages neighbouring communities to collaborate with each other to find ways to support and nurture business development and entrepreneurs. The development of networks across communities and regions is promoted as a way of sharing resources, experience and information.

### *Rural Leadership*

The *Western Australian Rural Leadership* programs are more specifically aimed at providing a full range of leadership training opportunities and experiences for people working and living in rural communities and industries. Each course included a set of modules over a prolonged time period of up to six months but usually 3 months. Each module addressed specific leadership and self-development skills and endeavoured to build on the skills, knowledge and experiences brought by each participant to the course. The three to four week break between modules allowed the training to be assimilated into daily life before new learning was introduced.

## 8. PHILOSOPHY/APPROACH:

*Capacity building, self determination and empowerment.*

The philosophy of the programme is very much based on principles of self-determination and self-help. The programme contends that where people are provided with confidence and capacity to undertake new initiatives and promote their communities, new life and economic capacity is effectively brought into the community and local economies are stimulated. The programmes run through Progress Rural are delivered to 'like minded' people which in part explains the need to have a Rural Women's Leadership Course in addition to Future Leaders and Foundations for Rural Leadership. It was found that while women have considerable capacity to contribute to local community development, most felt that courses such as Foundations for Rural Leadership were not suited to their needs or styles of learning.

The approach of the courses was to employ high calibre trainers, whose responsibility -was to not only impart content but provide hands-on training. Workshops included: communicating with others, conflict resolution, public speaking, managing public meetings and personality typing (Myers-Briggs).

## **9. RESOURCES, MANAGEMENT AND STAFFING STRUCTURES**

Progress Rural is managed by an overall coordinator, but has regional coordinators whose task is to identify local needs and facilitate the process of bringing a course to local communities. The coordinators have been government agency staff as well local community members who have nominated themselves to manage local leadership or community development training. Local government offices and Departments of Agriculture provided administrative support.

## **10. PROCESS/METHODS USED**

### *Community Builders*

Interested participants irrespective of age, gender or industry base, form a team of up to six people from each community. Between 6 and 10 community teams with common interests and close geographical location form a cluster. These Community teams meet together monthly. The meetings enable shared learning and discussion about community economic challenges, opportunities and options; enhanced awareness of available resources; and the discovery of the diversity and interconnectedness of their local and regional economies. The program activities are designed to create communication networks and opportunities to explore their needs and skills. There are five major activities:

- a residential workshop retreat;
- monthly meetings which are rotated around participating communities and enable each community to demonstrate its attractions and discuss specific community development priorities;
- community team meetings conducted by individual teams between monthly cluster meetings to facilitate discussion on the local application of ideas being generated;
- learning-in-action opportunity whereby community individuals or groups undertake practical projects as outcomes of the program;
- other skills development through training events, roadshows, conferences, regular Progress Rural WA mail-outs and the newsletter for any information sharing and advertising of events and projects opportunities.

A cluster facilitator (encourager) supports each Cluster. This person is appointed by a Local Sponsor Group. The clusters meet with the facilitator regularly to discuss the relevance of what is being learnt and how it can be applied to their community.

### *Rural Leadership Programmes*

Specifically, the *Future Leaders* course is targeted at emerging leaders in their mid 20's to 40's who are keen to develop their leadership skills and want to make a difference. Participants had to be actively involved in agriculture or fisheries, and rural or regional communities and were usually nominated by community or government sources. Each course had a maximum of 20 participants who were required to commit to 25 days over a six month period. The participants were not from a specific region or community. The courses included high impact leadership development training, intensive skills development, interaction with industry and community leaders and case studies with a regional, national and international application. Each course included an International Study Tour, the destination of

which was determined by the particular case study theme and to a lesser extent, the business and community interests of the participants. Each *Future Leaders* course had a different budget, depending on the destination of the study tour and the Experiential Learning Week consultancy cost, but the cost overall for each course averaged \$150,000. Each participant was expected to contribute \$500 towards the course.

The *Foundations for Leadership* courses target potential leaders aged between 18 and 35 years and are community and industry based. This course was more likely to draw upon people from a particular region. Each course is tailored to the leadership training needs of specific communities or industries, which is determined by the use of local steering committees and co-ordinators. Each course is six days split between three separate modules of two days and one night duration and run within a three month period. The courses included sessions on personality types, presentation skills, team building, group dynamics, conflict resolution, problem solving skills, decision making processes, leadership styles, meeting procedures, time management and media skills. Participants also work in case study groups examining leadership issues within their communities or industries. Each course is supported by a group of mentors, most of whom are leaders within the industry or community who can offer advice and guidance to participants both during and following the course. The *Foundations for Leadership* course participants were expected to contribute \$100 each (until 1999, when the contribution was \$200). Overall, each *Foundations for Leadership* course averaged \$20,000 in cost.

The *Rural Women in Leadership* course is an opportunity for rural women over the age of 40 to examine leadership issues and learn to effectively manage the many issues facing women in rural WA. The course offers the women access to training opportunities that will help them to recognise their own skills and support them in their commitment to effectively contribute to their communities and industries. In the process, it is anticipated that a network of likeminded women who can support and encourage each other in leadership endeavours will be developed. Each course had approximately 20 participants and was run over three modules of two days each. The three modules were designed to build on the skills and experiences the women already possessed and took the group through the themes of self discovery, self improvement and self motivation. Module one introduced the participants to individual personality profiles and styles followed by leadership styles. Module two covered media, time management and meeting procedure. The final module included communication, public speaking, networking and goal setting.

The women were assigned to one of four case study groups and were required to research their topic and prepare a group presentation for the final afternoon. No time was allocated to this during the modules. The case studies required the groups to communicate between modules and apply the skills learnt during the course. Working with different personality styles, initiative and communication were areas that were significantly strengthened during this task. The two day and overnight stay allows participants to interact in the evenings and provides more time away from home and work commitments for the course content to be absorbed. Each participant was expected to pay \$200 to attend the course and the average cost of each course was \$16,000.

The age base was chosen because younger women had other leadership development opportunities through the *Foundations for Leadership* and *Future Leaders* courses. Women over the age of 40 are more likely to be less tied to domestic and young child rearing duties and are the demographic cohort most active in community and industry activities. Participants came from a variety of backgrounds

and experiences but each shared a long term involvement in community work at local, regional or state level. They were nominated from a range of state organisations such as CWA, Regional Tourism Associations, State Sporting Associations, The Isolated Children's Parents Association and community groups.

### **11. IMPACTS TO DATE.**

*Very high.*

The Progress Rural WA programs do not have a caveat that projects and programs should only proceed if they were economically viable in the long term. The only participation prerequisite in most cases was a demonstrated desire to develop leadership skills and a commitment of some funds to the program. Regional development, involving people and personal development were the focus of the programme, with the view that this investment in transformational leadership would be reflected in community development and regional development outcomes. While economic viability was a desired outcome, the Progress Rural WA programs also encouraged and valued the less tangible goals of sense of community and 'place' that are quite different in emphasis to regional development as it is currently funded in Western Australia

Participants in the regional focus groups, who had not had a direct involvement in the Progress Rural WA programs but were in a position to assess the outcomes, were generally very positive of the project. It would seem however, that the smaller towns and communities were more enthusiastic than bigger towns such as Esperance where there is greater likelihood of other regional initiatives being introduced.

### **12. EFFECTIVENESS:**

*Outstanding – very high.*

Many participants have gone on from their Progress Rural Training to positions in Local Government and the National Party. A number of local community initiatives have also been instigated and maintained in many country towns as a result. The investment in building the capacity of local people has been very effective. While the investment in the programme has been rescinded towns have gone to instigate their own development programmes, such as Cultivating Carnamah and Future Leaders in Esperance. In both cases, local community groups sought out new funds and sponsorship to run these workshops.

### **13. PROJECT DOCUMENTATION AVAILABLE:**

Review of Progress Rural. Fiona Haslem McKenzie, June 2001. State Government WA.

Department of Commerce and Trade (a). (1999, 9 September). *Community Wise*. Western Australian Municipal Association and the Department of Commerce and Trade. Available: <http://www.communitywise.wa.gov.au/> [2001, 22 March, 2001]

Regional Development Council. (1999). *Living in the Regions: The Wheatbelt Report*. Perth: Department of Commerce and Trade.

WA Department of Local Government and Regional Development Website.

### **14. ISSUES:**

The most significant issue for this programme is ongoing government support. The programme, once housed in the Department of Agriculture has shifted to Local Government and Regional Development. Here more 'niche' style programmes, such

as writing grant applications have been run. Where towns have wanted to run community development and leadership training, funds have had to be raised from sponsorship and local people.

**15. COMMENTS/CONCLUSIONS:**

The investment in transformational leadership has been significant in terms of encouraging people to become involved in their local communities and to have the courage to make a difference. A number of new members of shire councils and Members of Parliament have been encouraged to 'have a go' as a result of this investment. It would seem that ongoing investment and profile of this programme may have been lost, but rather than totally disappearing, its impacts and resurgence will become less apparent.

**16. REVIEW METHODS:**

Interviews with selected Progress Rural participants. Desktop analysis. Information was drawn from Haslem McKenzies's review.