



Transitioning Towns Toolbox



Tools for
community building
in small towns



Regional
Development
Australia
LODDON MALLEE
Regional Development Australia
and Regional Development Victoria



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Toolbox **aims**

The purpose of the Toolbox is to provide a practical guide for community planning groups, local government authorities and other stakeholders, that will assist in the positive transition of small towns into the future.

For readers that may already be well advanced in responding to the transition happening in their community, the toolbox may offer fresh perspectives and new ideas.

Ultimately it is up to each individual community to decide what it wants to be, how it defines “quality of life” and what its priorities are. The intention of this toolbox is to guide the reader through the decision-making and planning process towards realising their aims, through understanding their community, its role in the region, what influences the future of small towns, and how to respond effectively.

While this start-up toolbox provides around 30 tools, the list is by no means exhaustive. The authors envisage that communities, government and other stakeholders will build on this over time. [A blank interactive template](#) is included for you to fill in and share examples of successful tools that you’re using in your community”.



How to use this toolbox

This document is presented in the following parts, which can be read independently.

Tip:

Click on a page number below to jump to the start of that section.



A. About the toolbox

[p.4](#)

Outlines the structure of this booklet and provides background on the issue of transitioning towns as well as explaining the aims of the toolbox.



B. Principles of community building

[p.8](#)

Explores recent theory about community building and notes where the thinking has changed.



C. Mapping your community

[p.23](#)

Helps you to track the changes in your community in preparation for developing response strategies.



D. Possible Responses

[p.38](#)

Offers some strategic options to respond to the challenges of transition in your community.



E. Tools

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Contains four categories of tools: Community Mapping, Community Building, Liveability Enhancement and Economic Development.

Booklet

Toolbox





"Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much".

Helen Keller, Author and Political Activist

Part A outlines the structure of this booklet.

It goes on to provide background to the issue of transitioning towns, defines a transitioning town and explains the aims of the toolbox.

Contents of this part are:

- Toolbox background
- What is a transitioning town?





Toolbox background

This booklet has been designed as a resource to assist small towns in the Loddon Mallee that find themselves in transition.

Small towns dominate the Loddon Mallee landscape and the majority of them are currently undergoing significant social and economic shift. Not all the forces propelling this transition are linked to the economy, however, major structural adjustment in the agrifood sector and changes to Victoria's irrigation infrastructure are among the primary factors that have impacted and created change within these communities.

'Transformative Towns' is one of seven regional strategic priorities identified by regional leaders for Loddon Mallee. The Transformative Towns priority aims to create shared understanding of the changing nature of small towns and settlements and how they can best transition to meet their future needs.

Larger regional centres are usually able to adapt to change because of their critical mass of population and economic diversity; indeed the majority of regional centres in Victoria are transitioning. Small towns however are generally faced with increasing challenges as a result of population decline. They are usually dependent on one or two dominant industry sectors, therefore; any challenges in these key sectors are felt more acutely. Loddon Mallee is exposed to the challenging aspects of transitioning small towns with 84% of towns in the region with a population of less than 3000 and many with economies dependent on agriculture. Many of these towns are experiencing population decline and in some cases a subsequent reduction in the quality of life. Conversely, certain small towns in Loddon Mallee are experiencing population growth due to the spill over from urban sprawl and the tree-change factor. However, the influx of new entrants to such towns can also create some social and environmental challenges.

This toolbox booklet refers to such towns as 'transitioning towns' to reflect the fact that they are experiencing a journey of change which either negatively or positively impacts:

- economic performance
- quality of life
- opportunities for youth
- the ability to retain a viable commercial retail and service sector
- the ability to sustain essential services
- access to appropriate healthcare
- opportunities for social interaction
- changing land use
- environmental conditions.





The booklet has been designed to provide practical advice to community members, local government representatives and others about how to address the challenges of transition, whilst taking advantage of the opportunities.

The focus of the booklet is on community building. The authors view community building as being the harmonisation of economic and social capital development. Community building is far from an exact science. It is certainly unrealistic to attempt to provide a “cookie cutter” approach to it, as in reality every community is different. Every transitioning town faces a unique set of challenges and therefore requires different intervention responses. Every town has its own unique personality that reflects its heritage, people and geography; so it follows that every town has differing aspirations.

Ultimately it is up to each community to work together to develop a way forward to address the challenges and opportunities presented by transition.

Just because an approach has worked well in one community does not necessarily mean that it will work in another. Indeed, some of the stories gathered through this process were stories of failed interventions, indicating that a “trial and error” approach is often required.

The intent of this booklet is to support communities to look forward to the future. It shares experiences of communities who have found solutions to effective transition through a number of case studies and records their learnings in the hope that others can learn from the mistakes as well as the successes. The authors have also drawn on their own observations gained from working on various development projects across regional Australia. A review of relevant literature has been undertaken to provide academic context.





What is a transitioning town?

Every community is in a state of transition driven by a blend of global, national, political, sociological, technological, economic and community forces. However, this booklet predominantly focuses on transition in small towns (with populations of less than 3000 people) located in the Loddon Mallee region, which are affected by similar drivers of change and are experiencing similar consequences. However, many of the issues outlined here also impact the larger towns within Loddon Mallee who may also find some useful learnings.

The Loddon Mallee has three distinct categories of transitioning towns:

1. Towns facing significant long-term population decline.
2. Towns that are enjoying population resurgence, largely on the back of urban sprawl from regional centres, together with new arrivals from urban locations who are seeking a lifestyle change.
3. Towns where the population has remained relatively stable or grown modestly, but where there has been a shift in demographic, socio-economic and cultural profiles (e.g. the population has aged significantly).

Although there are differences across these types of transitioning communities, the thing they have in common is that they are undergoing significant economic and social shifts. Many of the smaller towns are fighting for their survival, in the sense that the population levels are approaching or falling below the threshold required to maintain basic life services, which in turn, impacts quality of life. Others are transitioning towards a more positive outlook and improved quality of life, albeit with some social adjustment along the way.





"The world as we have created it is a process of our thinking. It cannot be changed without changing our thinking."

Albert Einstein, Theoretical Physicist

Part B Principles of community building

This part of the booklet explores recent theory about community building. It summarises the key principles and findings that emerge from a literature scan on transitioning towns and cross-references these with the experiences of the authors. It also presents a summary of the theory on town typology, principles of community building and place-making.

Contents of this part are:

- Principles of community building
- The steps of community building
- Theory of small town typology
- Drivers of change
- Critical elements and success factors for sustainable small towns





This section develops a number of key principles of community building derived from the literature, together with McKINNA et al's own research. These principles are discussed in brief in the following pages.

1. Progressive communities determine their own destiny

In the final analysis, the strength of a small town community is defined and measured through the lens of its citizens based on their aspirations, ideals and value systems. In order to determine what these are, it is important to involve a high proportion of the community in developing the vision, the strategies and priorities that they aspire to for their town. Ultimately it is up to the community to decide “what good looks like”. It is not up to a local government authority to tell the community what they should be. Beyond their broader role of strategic planning for the entire shire, local government supports small town communities to maintain infrastructure, service their essential needs and aid them where possible in implementing their plans.

The strength of a small town community is defined and measured through the lens of its citizens based on their aspirations, ideals and value systems.

2. Strong leadership is not a dictatorship

A common factor in many small towns that are transitioning in a positive way is the presence of several committed community leaders. Many volunteers in the community do assume natural leadership roles, without realizing the importance of their own strengths. Some of history's strongest leaders come from within the community and are not trained leaders with a background in politics or government. Strong leadership should not be understood as having a dominant personality or perhaps even a so-called “benevolent dictatorship” style. Strong leaders are generally good facilitators who ensure that all voices are heard and the greater good is reflected in the outcomes. Although there will always be differing opinions, strong leaders are those with the skill to summarize all viewpoints and articulate a consensus position on the way forward. Strong leaders also have the intellect to recognize the value of other people who may have more visionary or creative ideas than they do, that together will create new opportunities to strengthen communities.

Every community is unique and needs to build its strategy around its own particular set of circumstances.

3. Successful community building is not a set formula

A “one size fits all” approach to community building is not possible. Although there are commonalities across transitioning towns, the characteristics and driving forces can differ significantly and therefore require a customised solution. Although some high-level strategic cues can be gleaned from using typology models to track common attributes and trends, every community is unique and needs to build its strategy around its own particular set of circumstances.





4. Quality of life is generally improved with economic prosperity

Community strength is often the product of a link between economic prosperity and quality of life. Generally, a community with greater economic advantage enjoys a better quality of life overall as the community has both the means and ability to contribute more.

5. Strong communities are not measured on economic capital alone

The literature about community building refers to three types of capital: Economic, Social and Human.

- a) **Economic capital** is the resources available to a community, be they publicly or privately owned. These resources can be applied to improving prosperity or quality of life by creating employment or investing in infrastructure.
- b) **Social capital** refers to the energy that stems from interaction and relationships between individuals and organisations. Social capital is the sum of the institutions or relationships that underpin a society (i.e. the glue that holds the community together). The literature strongly reinforces the importance of social capital to a community's strength and its ability to grow (McKenzie and Frencken, 2001)¹. Although it is a critical element, social capital is intangible and impossible to quantify.
- c) **Human capital** is the sum total of the energy, attitude and vision of individuals which exist in the community. Human capital can be built by growing the population, attracting creative and motivated people and through education and training.

Strong communities protect, value and build their social and human capital. Ultimately the difference between a strong community and weak community is the level of social capital. Building social capital requires a mix of skills. The research for this project uncovered one source that described three personality types needed to build social capital:

- 1. **Leaders** who have the vision and presence to inspire confidence.
- 2. **Community builders** with the ability to turn a vision into a plan of action.
- 3. **Spark plugs**² who quietly and tirelessly work away behind the scenes to make it happen.

¹ Fiona McKenzie and Michelle Frencken, 2001, 'The Lively Dying Town?', *Australian Planner* Vol 38

² This term was first used by The National Governors' Association in the USA





It is therefore important to identify who these people are in a community and empower them to do what they are good at. Also critical is the need to identify and nurture the next generation of change agents to ensure smooth transition.

Networks are critically important for achieving social capital.

According to Pope (2011), there are three types of networks³:

1. **Personal networks** that connect individuals in the community with each other.
2. **Bridging networks** that connect various cluster groups within a community and across the region with each other, in order to create a stronger focus and the critical mass required to achieve results.
3. **Governance networks** that connect individuals and organisations with decision makers be they in local, federal or state government, industry or other organisation.

All three of the network types are essential elements of community building.

6. A strategic approach is needed to achieve more with less

Because of the scarcity of resources (both economic and social), it is essential that communities take a strategic approach to community building, systematically reviewing the challenges and opportunities and focusing the investment of economic and social capital onto the projects that will make the biggest difference. This is an area of community building in which local government can play an important supporting role.

Planning for small towns needs to be made within the context of the shire and its Council Plan, Municipal Strategic Statement, and other strategic documents. Furthermore, it needs to broadly consider the directions and priorities of other regional strategic plans and regional growth plans.

³ Jeanette Pope, 2011, *Indicators of community strength in Victoria: framework and evidence*, Department of Planning and Community Development





The steps of community building

The journey of community building in small towns involves a number of simple steps. Commonly, there is an adverse issue or incident that harnesses emotion and drives the community into action – although, for other communities, it can be a perceived opportunity which provides the catalyst. Sometimes a little impetus from the local shire council is all it needs. Some communities may be already mobilised and on the journey and may not need to start at the first step. For those who are just starting out, the following step-by-step approach may be suggested:

- 1. Engage your community** by calling them to action with a community meeting.
- 2. Form a working group and develop strategies** to engage with the broadest possible set of community members.
- 3. Identify the natural leaders** in the community and work together to allocate each other roles.
- 4. Identify what type of town you are** and chart your characteristics, drivers and pin point the impacts of transition, happening in your town.
- 5. Develop a community planning framework** and process ([see Tools 2.1 and 2.2 in Part E](#)), engaging as many of the community members as possible. The framework should bring together the various existing clubs and organisations into a single focus as well as inviting individuals with particular projects to participate. One of two approaches could be applied here:
 - i. *A bottom up approach (project-based approach), whereby a small number of projects or actions are identified and prioritized according to the level of positive impact they will have on the community.*
 - ii. *A top down approach (values-based approach), whereby a vision for the town is decided upon, and the steps to achieving this vision are identified.*
- 6. Identify the people and organisations within the community** who have the best skill set to drive a particular project/vision. Any good book on teamwork will indicate that a mix of skill sets and personality types is required to be an effective planning team. Not everyone is a creative ideas person and not everyone can think strategically. Recruiting a mix of such attributes is essential to the community building process.

You will find tools to help you know your community in [Part E](#)





Theory of small town typology

A number of typology models exist that characterise transitioning small towns in Australia. Typology models are used by academics as a tool to categorise the objects of their study into segments, in order to identify common traits and respond to them. Three such models were reviewed as part of this study: Henshall Hansen and Associates (1988), Budge et al (2012) and Planisphere (2012). Whilst a large degree of overlap exists between the three different typology models, there are also significant variations. The first model by Henshall Hansen Associates bases six town types on the economic drivers and is applied to the whole of Victoria.⁴

Typology models are used as a tool by academics to categorise the objects of their study into segments in order to identify common traits

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. Manufacturing/resource base | 4. Dry-farm/rural base |
| 2. Government/private sector services | 5. Irrigated-farm/rural base |
| 3. Tourism/resource base | 6. Community base. |

Planisphere, on the other hand, closely aligns the typologies with farming methodologies, identifying seven cluster settlements:⁴

- | | |
|------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. Coastal peri-urban | 5. Reliable rainfall |
| 2. Dryland cropping | 6. Distant from regional centre |
| 3. Irrigation | 7. Transition from irrigation. |
| 4. Regional peri-urban | |

As is the case with Henshall Hansen Associates, Planisphere incorporates “dry land cropping” and “irrigation” typologies. There is the additional “transition from irrigation” typology, which the authors of this report deem as somewhat superfluous.

The Budge et al typology model is also based on the nature of the economy that underpins the towns; their proximity to other places and the associated amenities; the history of their settlement pattern and the social and demographic characteristics. The five Budge *et al* typologies include:⁶

- | | |
|---------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. Agricultural community | 4. Rural towns and centres |
| 2. Rural enclave | 5. Rural gentrified. |
| 3. Diverse town | |

McKINNA et al has identified a refined typology model (detailed later in this report) to support the development of the Transitioning Towns Toolbox.

⁴ Henshall Hansen Associates, 1990. *Study of Small Towns in Victoria*.

⁵ The Planisphere study looks at regional Victoria as a whole, therefore both “coastal peri-urban” and “reliable rainfall” typologies do not apply to the Loddon Mallee region.

⁶ Budge et al, 2012, *Typology of Towns in the Loddon Mallee Region*. Bendigo, LaTrobe University.





Drivers of change

The starting point for developing a strategic response to assist a transitioning town is to gain an understanding of the drivers of change, i.e. the causes behind the change.

The literature reviewed puts forward commentary on the drivers of change in the transition of small towns in Australia. Whilst the list of possible drivers of change is extensive, the following common themes have been identified that impact Loddon Mallee and Victoria more widely.

1. Structural change of industry

The economies of most transitioning towns in the Loddon Mallee region are underpinned by agriculture. Agriculture in Australia is itself going through a huge period of transition and structural adjustment driven by a number of factors:

- **The changed economics of agriculture:** The profitability of agriculture is being impacted by flat commodity prices and rising input costs. As a consequence, farms need to get bigger to support a living wage for a family. As a rule of thumb a farm today needs to be twice the size it was a decade ago to produce the same income. Economies of scale are a critical element of farming in Australia's high-cost environment.
- **The ageing of Australian farmers and the lack of succession planning:** This trend, alongside other factors, means that the current generation of regional youth is seeking opportunities outside of agriculture. Many farms are being sold to neighbours as the next generation have made their lives elsewhere, resulting in land aggregation.
- **The prolonged drought:** The so-called "one in a hundred year" drought resulted in high debt levels that have become unsustainable, forcing many families to leave the farm and/or seek off farm incomes, which may involve commuting to a regional centre.
- **The separation of water from land and the Murray Darling Basin Plan:** These two water events have resulted in a large proportion of irrigation water being traded out of the Loddon Mallee region. Furthermore the Goulburn-Murray Water (G-MW) Connections Group (formerly NVIRP) irrigation renewal project has meant that it is no longer economic for farms that are away from backbone channels to irrigate. The loss of irrigation land has had a major impact on local economies, as irrigation farms are on average 20 times more productive than the same land without water, so these regions have permanently lost a large proportion of their economic value.

Agriculture in Australia is itself going through a huge period of transition and structural adjustment





- **The impact of technology:** The use of innovations such as larger equipment, GPS-enabled technologies, smart phone applications, direct-seeding and the move away from livestock in cropping areas has greatly reduced the number of people required to operate a farm. There are less on-farm employment opportunities available, particularly in traditional farm labourer roles.
- **Corporate farming:** Over the past decade there has been a growing interest by professional investors in agrifood investment projects. This started with the managed investment scheme (MIS) projects and has since been followed up by superannuation schemes, sovereign funds and trust funds. The corporate farming models are based on scale, investment in technology and sophisticated financial management. This usually has positive impacts for a small town although less labour units per hectare are employed. In fact, many larger family farms are now operating on a corporate model with independent directors advising them.
- **The loss of value-adding businesses in regional communities:** Commonly agricultural towns, particularly in irrigation areas, support processing and value-adding businesses such as fruit and vegetable packing and canning, dairy factories, flour mills, etc. Since the economics of these facilities are volume driven, reduced production resulting from less water usually makes these plants uneconomic. In most circumstances, these businesses are the largest employer in their small town and the closure of the factory results in job losses on a scale that affects the whole town's economy. While some sectors such as dairy are now rebounding, continued rationalisation in processing plants is inevitable as it is relatively cheap to move milk around the country for processing at a location that offers most scale and efficiency. There has been very little reinvestment in agrifood processing around Australia despite the more positive outlook in some sectors.

The above factors in the agricultural sector have strongly contributed to a reduced population in farming towns, which for many has impacted their ability to sustain services and amenities.

The development of extractive industries (earth resources) can also have a huge impact on small towns due to the sheer size of operations. The closure of a site can result in a direct (and indirect) displacement of local employees. Whilst extractive industries do not predominate in the Loddon Mallee region, growth in the mineral sands and salt mining industries is currently taking place (Planisphere, 2012).⁷

⁷ Planisphere, 2012, 'Understanding Smaller Settlements in Victoria: Final Report', Department of Planning and Community Development, Victoria. pp16-21





2. Global economics

As highlighted earlier most of the economies of transitioning towns in the Loddon Mallee region are underpinned by agricultural production. Most agricultural products produced in the region are internationally traded commodities and therefore, subject to the vagaries of global economics.

In a free trade environment, agricultural industries are subject to the full forces of global competition. Australian agrifood companies have been impacted by a number of global economic forces that include:

- The high Australian dollar, which has reduced export competitiveness and increased competition from imports.
- The global financial crisis, which has impacted the global demand for products, dented consumer confidence and caused a tightening in credit markets.
- High labour costs relative to competitor countries.
- Supermarket power has driven down the price of food, which has had a flow-on effect through the supply chain.
- The proliferation of supermarket private-label products, mostly consisting of imported food, has forced local producers to compete at unsustainably low prices and limited their ability to reinvent their businesses.

These global economic forces have impacted the fruit and vegetable processing industry in particular, and the dairy and grain industries to a lesser extent.

3. Tourism

Tourism is usually a driver of positive change in a regional community because, not only does it stimulate the kind of investments that add to the quality of life for residents (e.g. local entertainment facilities, a wider choice of restaurants), it creates and maintains labour demand. The economic diversity provided by tourism promotes the economic resilience of a region, reducing reliance on agriculture alone.

Tourism also drives demand and development of services and amenities that improve the quality of life for residents and tends to attract people to live in the town. Without tourists these businesses would not be viable servicing the local community alone.

Tourism is usually a driver of positive change in a regional community because, not only does it stimulate the kind of investments that add to the quality of life for residents, it creates and maintains labour demand.





Developing a tourism economy is not a realistic option for many towns with a very small population, particularly in the Loddon Mallee region. However, building a culture of good customer service and best practice hospitality not only enhances the quality of life for local residents, it maximizes the capture of any revenues that may come into the community from visitors. This may challenge some business cultures that currently exist which may be barriers to servicing the needs of the tourist. Small towns should champion their food and beverage heroes, such as a famous pie shop or a microbrewery. Often one great operator can attract other complementary operators to a region. For example, the Brown Brothers cellar door in Milawa, gave rise to a whole gourmet precinct in the town and created a food culture. Although it is a regional city, the same could be said of Stefano de Pieri's restaurant in Mildura.

4. Major infrastructure projects

Major infrastructure works such as road construction, irrigation schemes, energy developments, major buildings and new business developments can open up “once in a lifetime” opportunities for regional towns. Even after the development jobs are completed, major projects can create both direct and secondary employment opportunities. Secondary beneficiaries can be in transportation, engineering, mechanical, accommodation, catering and entertainment jobs (Planisphere, 2012).

However, it needs to be emphasized that major projects need to be carefully planned to avoid adverse environmental, economic and social outcomes inherent in such drastic change. It is also important to consider that the economic impact of the building phase is short lived and the investment must make longer term contribution to the economy.

5. Transport & connectivity

The ability of a town's residents to easily access basic services in the region is crucial if the town does not have an adequate population to sustain those services themselves.

Restricted public transport limits the demographic mix of smaller towns to more mobile residents. Frequently older residents must move when they are too old to drive (McKenzie and Frencken, 2001).⁹ In some of the more remote towns, younger residents can be forced to relocate even for a high school education.

8 Planisphere, 2012, 'Understanding Smaller Settlements in Victoria: Final Report', Department of Planning and Community Development, Victoria. pp16-21

9 Fiona McKenzie and Michelle Frencken, 2001, 'The Lively Dying Town?', Australian Planner Vol 38





For both the elderly and teenage youth, the social isolation resulting from a lack of access to transport can negatively impact health and wellbeing. Improving the frequency and reliability of public transport between regional centres can significantly alter the capacity of a town to retain its residents and raise the quality of life and liveability.

Bypasses can make or break small towns. On the one hand, they can provide the benefit of safer, quieter streets yet on the other, this can also have negative repercussions for retailers. Towns that are subject to a highway by-pass need to develop response strategies to ensure a positive impact from the change. A good example of this is the joint marketing by businesses in Malmsbury (Macedon Ranges Shire Council) to attract visitors.

6. Affordability of property and suitability of housing

Median housing prices in some of Victoria's regional cities are now approaching those in some areas of Melbourne. This is resulting in the growth of peri-urban regions around major metropolitan zones. The other side of this is that in some more remote towns, housing prices have dramatically declined, which has sometimes resulted in welfare-dependent families moving into the town to access cheaper rents, with negative social impacts, or people being unable to purchase a property closer to amenities (such as the aged).

Growth in housing prices in peri-urban areas can also negatively affect farming operations as farmers cannot afford to pay residential land prices to expand their farming businesses onto adjoining land. Without the ability to expand, their farming operations cannot achieve economies of scale. At a certain point in time the value of the land will outgrow the value of the farming operations.

A further factor concerning housing which is driving change in transitioning towns is the suitability of available homes for the current mix of residents. As the demographic shifts in many small towns, the mix of existing housing may no longer be appropriate. For example, in communities like Kerang, which has an ageing population, there are many affordable family-sized homes vacant, but a shortage of single person dwellings exists. In some communities, a lack of quality, homes with modern facilities can be a real barrier to attracting professional workers such as police, doctors or public officials. Loddon Shire Council took the initiative to build a council-owned, family home to attract Council management to live in Wedderburn.





In some transitioning towns the devaluation of property is the prevailing property issue. Housing quality is deteriorating because landlords or even owner/occupiers cannot justify investment in maintaining a home in a town where property values are falling. Poorly maintained homes impact quality of life and the streetscape and can have a demotivating affect on other residents, as well as further devaluing the neighbourhood. Absentee home owners are increasingly common and can also result in property neglect.

7. Climate change

Small regional towns are vulnerable to environmental hazards such as drought, climate change, increased pest and disease incidence, and bush fire. This vulnerability to disaster is enhanced where there is reliance on an agricultural economy.

As the climate becomes increasingly more volatile, the frequency of environmental hazards is expected to increase. Parts of the Loddon Mallee region, particularly in the Mallee, are more exposed to environmental hazards.

8. Policy decisions

Government policy decisions can act as significant drivers of change in transitioning towns. There have been a number of policy developments over recent years that have impacted (or will impact) on small towns in the Loddon Mallee:

- The National Broadband Network (NBN)
- Murray Darling Basin Plan and water policy
- G-MW 'Connections Group' (formerly Northern Victorian Irrigation Renewal Program (NVIRP))
- Carbon/emissions trading
- Government support for renewable energy
- Managed investment schemes
- Expansion of the Calder Freeway.

Dealing with policy change is a reality for any business. Because small town industries are often family businesses, they can be slower to respond to change. A key role of local and State Government is providing adequate information about change and supporting people to understand and respond to the possible implications of these new circumstances.





Critical elements and success factors for sustainable small towns

The literature identifies a number of factors that are considered to be crucial to the sustainability of small towns. These can be summarised into the following six themes. Tools that respond to these and other themes can be found in [Part E](#).

1. A town's self image can be self-fulfilling

An attractive appearance in the streetscape and ambience of a small town is important for the residents as much as for those passing through. Well-maintained communities instill a sense of confidence and self-worth in residents (Martin et al, 2005).¹⁰

The task of keeping the town looking and feeling clean can foster community empowerment and ownership. Town aesthetics, such as the main street and town entrances are a tangible reflection of local pride and send strong messages to visitors about the kind of place it is to live in or what the town is famous for. Australian towns are comparatively poor at celebrating their hero industries compared to European and American towns (e.g. Gilroy in California USA is known as the garlic capital of the country).



An attractive appearance in the streetscape and ambience of a small town is important for the residents as much as for those passing through

2. Infrastructure expectations

Communities in regional areas generally aspire to the same standards of services as their metropolitan counterparts at the same rate/tax base. In terms of infrastructure, these include:

- Clean water
- Proper sanitation
- Connectivity - roads and public transport
- Reliable telecommunications
- Effective long range infrastructure planning
- Access to health services
- Waste management.

This expectation does seem reasonable, as the provision and assurance of these basic services can make a significant difference to a community. However, the costs of delivering these services in regional areas are significantly magnified.

¹⁰ John Martin, 2005, 'Revisiting the 1986-7 study of small towns in Victoria: How theory and method in town studies have changed over the last two decades', *Australasian Journal of Regional Studies*, Vol 11, No 3, pp289-302





3. Economic health is fundamental

Clearly a healthy economy is a base requirement for the survival of a small town. As noted previously, economic diversity is key to sustainability of regional towns. Stimulating economic diversity improves the resilience of a town when faced with significant structural change in any one sector. This economic diversity does not need to be in large-scale enterprises. Retaining and cultivating small local businesses also contributes to economic diversity and is the principle behind Economic Gardening concept as pioneered by Chris Gibbons in the USA.

As highlighted earlier in the booklet, most towns in the Loddon Mallee region are heavily exposed to the volatility inherent in agriculture. Diversifying an economy reduces exposure to the fluctuations of an agricultural economy. Local economies can be further strengthened by fostering industry clusters that support strategic alliances between local businesses along the supply chain (e.g. producers and suppliers working together). Encouraging local competition (e.g. industry benchmarking) can help develop an overall lift in the quality of output.

A town's competitive strengths need to be identified and nurtured to attract investment that stimulates diversity. There needs to be a willingness to be creative and explore new investment opportunities that may value-add to existing industries or generate new industries.

Awareness of the external factors impacting the local economy is crucial. By promoting interest and participation in the global market place, producers can better understand and therefore respond to the drivers impacting their sector. Both industry associations and government have a role to play in transferring this knowledge.

A town's competitive strengths need to be identified and nurtured to attract investment that stimulates diversity.

4. The critical importance of community planning

The literature emphasizes the importance of effective community planning in the sustainability of towns. As noted in numerous journals, effective strategic planning begins with community ownership of the planning process. A shared vision and realistic objectives can be obtained through public consultation and input. From there, short, medium and long-term objectives and goals can be identified. Once the plans are put in place, progress needs to be monitored and ongoing evaluation undertaken. Many communities may have already commenced the planning process. It is important to update these plans every three to five years.





5. Community reference groups enable some control over a town's destiny

Community groups are important touch points in transitioning towns. Not only do they encourage local leadership, they assist in the formation of networks. These include personal, as well as broader connecting and governance networks (Pope, 2011).¹¹

The formation of networks and community groups has countless advantages. Improvement in health and well-being can be observed; positive norms can be fostered; the spread of information and innovation can be facilitated; and finally, a platform for collective problem solving can be built. Community groups can also assist in the inclusion of the disadvantaged, strengthening social cohesion. Towns that do not have some type of reference or action group run the risk of others outside their town deciding their destiny.

Community groups are important touch points in transitioning towns. Not only do they encourage local leadership, they assist in the formation of networks.

6. Role of government is broadening

Based on the principles of Chris Gibbons' Economic Gardening (which is articulated elsewhere in the booklet), it is suggested that government can best assist by providing information, infrastructure and introductions in order to support and promote entrepreneurial activities. Providing access to market intelligence and competitor intelligence, of the nature that is usually available only to large firms, will improve a smaller entrepreneur's strategic capability and broaden their thinking. There is an argument for government to invest in this data and knowledge transfer for key industries in their jurisdiction.

Governments need to provide the necessary infrastructure that will build and support the development of community assets essential to commerce and overall quality of life (e.g. roads and services).

And finally, facilitating introductions or networks are key in order to improve the interaction amongst business owners and critical resource providers. This last element is particularly important in agricultural communities where business owners spend much of their working day in isolation and so are not always exposed to new ideas, resources or introductions that could help them grow their business.

¹¹ Jeanette Pope, 2011, *Indicators of community strength in Victoria: framework and evidence*, Department of Planning and Community Development





"Intelligence
is the ability to
adapt to change."

Stephen Hawking, Cosmologist and Author

Part C Mapping your community

Essentially this section is about tracking the changes in your community in preparation for developing strategies to respond to challenges. This part of the booklet will help you to gather the intelligence needed to understand the position of your community, record key trends and identify which typology of transitioning town fits your community. The text in this part of the booklet will refer you to the appropriate tools and templates at the end of this document.

Contents of this part are:

- Mapping your town
- Identifying your town typology
- The concept of community advantage
- The importance of future scanning





The process of mapping your community does not refer to drawing a map of your town but rather completing an exercise of identifying and recording the defining characteristics, impacts of change and driving forces in your community. The resulting information will make it possible to characterize your town with one of the four types from the typology model outlined and then, from that, it may be easier to identify the most appropriate intervention approach. The mapping exercise is important because it provides a foundation for developing strategies and devising community-building responses suited to the characteristics and conditions of your town. Tools [1.1](#) to [1.8](#) in Part E of this booklet help to make it a relatively simple exercise.

You will find tools to help you know your community in [Part E](#)



Community snapshot

The following table outlines some key demographic measures of a town or community for which there is data readily available. The table below uses Sea Lake as the sample town. Tool 1.1 – Community Snapshot provides a blank template you can use to compare your town to the Victorian average. The data sets for your town can be found on the ABS website at: www.abs.gov.au.

ABS have now made this website user friendly for anyone to access statistical information. 2011 Census QuikStats have been listed in an easy to read format, with Victorian and Australian averages listed as a point of reference.

At the time of writing, a new website was being launched by Regional Australia Institute that provides additional information, breaking the available data down into LGA zones (i.e. your local government) and Regional Development Australia (RDA) zones (i.e. Loddon Mallee RDA region). The Institute has named this resource [In]Sight and it can be found at: insight.regionalaustralia.org.au. Developed in collaboration with Deloitte Access Economics, [In]Sight is an online index and interactive map, which ranks Australia's 560 Local Government Areas (LGA) and 55 RDA regions across ten themes. It also contains useful information for assessing community advantage.

Fifty-nine indicators within these ten themes capture the underlying drivers of sustainable growth in Australia, ranging from unemployment, proximity to major infrastructure, internet connectivity, natural assets and small business income. Whilst it may not provide Victorian and Australian averages as a point of reference, it does provide a national rank for each LGA and RDA.

The mapping exercise is important because it provides a foundation for developing strategies and devising community-building responses suited to the characteristics and conditions of your town.





However, for the purpose of this report and the toolbox, ABS 2011 Census QuikStats have been used:

Measure	Sample Town (Sea Lake)	Regional Victoria	Australia
Population (2011) Population (2006) Population (2001)	616 634 635		1
Percentage change 2006 to 2011	-2.8% *	+8.6%	+8.3%
Percentage change 2006 to 2011	-0.2%	+7.0%	* 5.8%
Percentage under 25	27.2%	31.5%	32.6%
Percentage between 25-49	39.2%	44.2%	47.8%
Percentage over 60	33.6%	24.3%	19.6%
Male /female percentage split	47.4% male	49.1% Male	49.4% Male
Percentage with ancestry, other than Australia	64.5%	59.1%	74.6%
Percentage of indigenous in population	0.7%	1.5%	2.5%

After reviewing your data against the state and national average, note what the key differences are. This will assist in formulating strategies later on. The Community Snapshot Tool ([1.1](#)) contains more information and the above template.

The community strength scorecard is a diagnostic tool designed to help you measure the strength of your community and to identify areas of weakness which should then become a priority in terms of where to intervene.

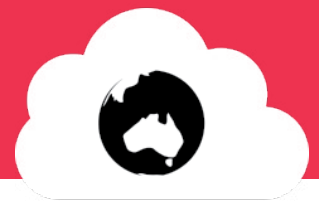


Community Strength Scorecard for a template and more information. The community strength scorecard is based on four dimensions of community strength: ([see Tool 1.2](#))



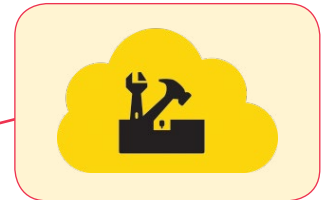
1. Economy (Strength, diversity, jobs, etc.)
2. Level and quality of services (medical, retail, transport, etc.)
3. Liveability of the town (appearance, activities, amenities, entertainment)
4. Cohesiveness and functionality of the community (pride, inclusiveness).





While this scorecard is a qualitative methodology (i.e. based on interview research or personal responses rather than statistics), and therefore subjective, it is still a robust measure of community strength. Ultimately, community strength is a subjective measure as it is a reflection of satisfaction with the quality of life for residents – therefore each community will judge their own town on the issues that are important to them.

The Scorecard template ([see Tool 1.2](#)) includes instructions of how to collate the results. It may be helpful (but is not essential) to conduct the scorecard exercise before reading on.

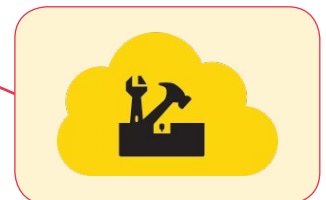


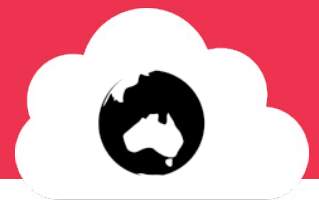
Strengths and weaknesses

The scorecard can also be used to identify your town's strengths and weaknesses. To do this, go back to the table and refer to the scores that you gave to each attribute. The template provides space to write any attribute that you scored at 6 and above as a strength; and any attribute that scored at 4 or below as a weakness.

Community Survey

Although not essential, it would be a valuable and interesting exercise to survey your community to see how other residents rate the town on these dimensions. One approach is to engage local high school students or members of a local service club to run a community survey. The rating scales can be printed out as a survey questionnaire ([see Tool 2.6 - Community Survey](#)). Other ways to get residents to rate their town is to post the questionnaire on the town website using a free survey tool such as Survey Monkey ([surveymonkey.com](https://www.surveymonkey.com)). Alternatively, have your local paper publish the questionnaire and ask residents to post it back. As an incentive to improve the response rate, offer a prize such as a voucher at a local store.





What is your town typology?

Typology models are used by academics as a tool to categorise the objects of their study into segments in order to identify common traits. As with any segmentation model, the intent of this town typology model is to use it as a framework from which to develop strategic responses, as is explained later in [Part D](#) of this booklet. There will always be cases that do not fit precisely with the model; the idea is to find the closest fit with your town. Based on the authors' interpretation of the literature and empirical research they have identified four basic categories of transitioning towns within the Loddon Mallee region:

1. Aggregating Dry Land towns (e.g. Quambatook)
2. Restructuring Irrigation towns (e.g. Cohuna)
3. Surviving Service towns (e.g. Sea Lake)
4. Advancing Lifestyle towns (e.g. Newstead)

There is a sub segment of towns within the Advancing Lifestyles segment, specifically relating to smaller, more remote goldfields towns, which have not yet fully developed into type. These towns are rich in the sense of their legacy from the gold rush days with charming historic buildings. However they are not located as close to larger centres such as Bendigo and Ballarat as others of this type. These towns, while still part of the Advancing Lifestyle towns type, may not exhibit the full set of characteristics. This sub-segment includes towns that are not experiencing growth or attracting tree-change, and may face a number of challenges as they transition. Examples of challenges may include loss of local services, proximity and ease of access to other centres, and decline of housing stock. However the authors contend that this will occur over time as regional centres are continuing to expand. It could be argued that over time, these towns will become Advancing Lifestyle towns as the NBN and growing property values push the tree-changers into new communities. The available small land holdings and heritage value of these small towns will enhance their appeal to remote professional workers. However, a future challenge of such communities is dealing with the servicing and investment required to maintain these towns in the meantime.





The characteristics and driving factors for the four segments of towns are outlined in the following tables.

Typology 1: Aggregating dry land towns

Characteristics	Change Drivers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dry land farming is the backbone of the economy. • Farms are aggregating because scale is required to be economic. • Population is declining and ageing. • Difficulty in maintaining retail and community services. • Influx of transitory disadvantaged families cohort due to falling house prices. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Climate volatility. • Changed farming models: i.e. direct seeding, GPS, no livestock. • Changed terms of trade in commodities. • Rationalisation of regional services. • Loss of professional and high skill workers. • Reduced employment opportunities for youth and working families.

Typology 2: Restructuring irrigation towns

Characteristics	Change Drivers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced regional economic activity due to the sale of water. • Farm aggregation as small farms without water become uneconomic and neighbours sell out due to lack of family succession. • Corporatisation and the adoption of labour saving technology. • Loss of jobs in processing due to factory closures because of less raw material. • Support services to irrigators involving skilled jobs reduce because of less demand. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Separation of water from land entitlements make it possible to trade water. • The impact of the Murray Darling Basin Plan. • The impact of a high \$AUD on commodity prices and global demand. • Global competition from low-cost producing countries. • Cost of on-farm infrastructure upgrade.





Typology 3. Surviving service towns

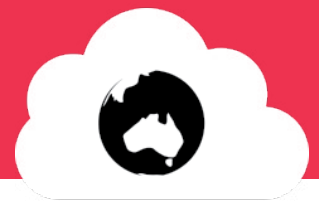
Characteristics	Change Drivers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Survive because of their location as a regional service centre to surrounding small towns. Impacted by loss of business to larger regional centres with brand retailers and a wider range of services. Economics subject to the dry land agricultural cycles. Local businesses struggle, but survive because of limited competition. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Same as the dry land farming. Retail and service leakage to larger centres. Increased mobility and online shopping means loss of retail economy. Loss of regional government offices. Loss of major employer.

Typology 4. Advancing lifestyle towns

Characteristics	Change Drivers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Close to a large regional centre. Usually within two hours of Melbourne. Attractive geography. High liveability. Accessible to retail, services, education and entertainment. Strong tourism and Visiting Friends and Relatives (VFR) element. Strengthening housing values. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Separation of water from land entitlements make it possible to trade water. The impact of the Murray Darling Basin Plan. The impact of a high \$AUD on commodity prices and global demand. Global competition from low-cost producing countries. Cost of on-farm infrastructure upgrade.

[Tool 1.3](#) - Town Typology Assessment gives a step-by-step guide as to how to identify your town typology.





The Community **Advantage** factor

Identifying your town's Community Advantage

The notion of 'Community Advantage' as presented in this booklet (and expanded in The Community Advantage Tool - [1.4](#)) has been unashamedly borrowed by the authors from Michael Porter's concept of "Competitive Advantage" that is widely used in the formulation of business and industry strategic planning. A key principle of strategic planning is that an organisation must build its strategy around its points of competitive advantage – the things that differentiate it from its competitors. Since first developed by Porter in the Harvard Business Review,¹⁰ the concept of Competitive Advantage has advanced considerably.

There are four guiding principles that underlie the determination of competitive advantage:

- 1.** It needs to be something unique or differentiating for the organisation or region.
- 2.** It needs to be sustainable over a long period of time.
- 3.** It needs to be something that cannot be readily copied or replicated by others (i.e. it has a degree of natural protection).
- 4.** It needs to be an element that can be leveraged to the organisation or region's advantage.

In the context of community building the concept of Community Advantage can be a powerful tool in terms of:

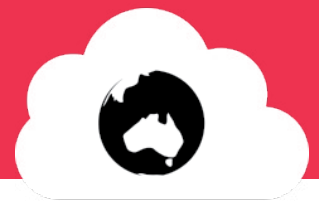
- Identifying opportunities for economic development and employment growth.
- Developing selling propositions for promoting the town to attract investment or for advocacy in the relevant government jurisdictions.
- Identifying a town's strengths that need to be protected and built upon.
- Helping a town define its identity to be used as a basis for developing a town's brand and personality.



A key principle of strategic planning is that an organisation must build its strategy around its points of competitive advantage – the things that differentiate it from its competitors.

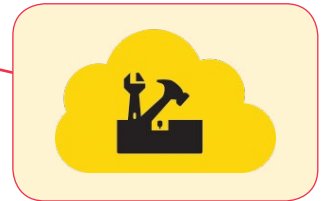
¹⁰ Michael Porter *Competitive Advantage: Creating and sustaining superior performance*. Free Press 1985





The recognition of a community's competitive advantage helps to unify and strengthen it.

Refer to [Tool 1.4](#) - Assessing Community Advantage for a template to assess your town. This is best done as a group exercise after reading this part of the booklet, as many of the responses are subjective. The town or community's competitive advantage can result from a number of sources as outlined below:



1. Landscape

A town's Community Advantage can be defined by its landscape which may include features of natural beauty such as rolling hills, valleys, rivers and streams, soil type, river beaches, etc. Landscape is an important feature that enhances liveability. For example the Mornington Peninsula is an attractive place to live and visit because of the rolling hills, the sea views, the range of landscapes and the range of products that it produces. Because of these features, together with the proximity to Melbourne, the Mornington Peninsula has a competitive advantage in culinary tourism.

2. Climatic conditions

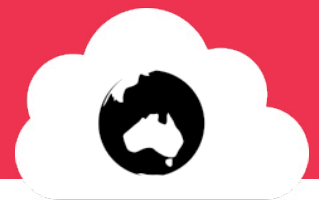
Climatic conditions provide a strong point of competitive advantage.

Climatic factors include:

- Rainfall - its timing, distribution and reliability
- Temperature range
- Sunlight hours, number of days and intensity
- Wind velocity, frequency and direction
- Microclimates that are a highly suitable for the production of specific crops
- Humidity.

Examples of climatic advantage include Bairnsdale, which is judged to have the most liveable climate in the state; Gannawarra which has very high ultra violet light levels making it ideally suited to solar energy; or the Alpine Valleys which have microclimates perfect for growing specialty products such as green tea and berries.





3. Natural resources

Sometimes towns are blessed with natural resources that may include minerals, flora or fauna. Sea Lake for example has a natural asset in the salt lake that provides a sustainable salt industry that employs a significant number of people. Being close to a water body such as the sea, a river or lake, can usually offer a powerful advantage.

4. Location

The dimensions of the location aspect of Competitive Advantage include distance and accessibility to a major centre; or being on an arterial road that carries a large amount of traffic; or geographic position relative to neighbouring towns. For example, Swan Hill benefits from the fact that is ideally located to be a central service hub to a number of neighbouring towns.

When discussing the concept of competitive advantage in a workshop situation, invariably community members cited 'our people' as their competitive advantage. Realistically, although people may be a great strength, they cannot be classified as a point of competitive advantage as they are transient. However, famous people from the past or the present can contribute towards a towns' competitive advantage. The focus needs to be on finding unique points of difference, which can be claimed over any other town.

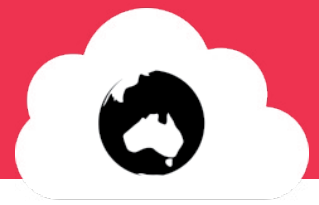
The focus needs to be on finding unique points of difference, which can be claimed over any other town.

5. History and heritage

History and heritage can often provide a competitive advantage. The Goldfields region is an example of this, where many towns benefit from the legacy stemming from the prosperity and rich cultural history of the gold rush.

Commonly the personality and spirit of a community is defined by its people be they current or past. Northern Victoria for example has been able to leverage the history of Ned Kelly to advantage.





Future scanning

Critical to community building is the need to anticipate and plan for the future situation and community needs for the next 5, 10 and even 20 years. By definition, transitioning towns are on a journey of change. The factors driving this change and their impact will vary from town to town. It is therefore critical in the planning process to think about what the key drivers of change in your town are; what impact they will have; and how your community is likely to look 5, 10 or 20 years out. It is impossible to accurately predict the future, however, by identifying the key drivers of change, you can gain some understanding about what the future might look like. Your local government may be able to assist you or your group to undertake this process.

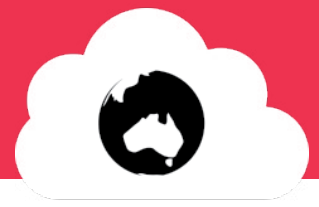
To a large extent, the forces that will determine the shape of your town in the future are factors beyond your control. Nevertheless it is important to anticipate them, in order to prepare to take advantage of any emerging opportunities or take action to neutralise the impact of any negative forces and manage risks. Some of the high-level factors likely to have the greatest impact on your future include:

- Demographic trends, locally and nationally
- Local and global economics, particularly the impact on the key agricultural industries in your town
- Structural adjustment
- Government policy at the local, state, federal and global level
- Climate change, volatility and global warming
- Technology advancement
- Shifting social values
- Globalisation

These factors are discussed in further detail in the following pages.

By identifying the key drivers of change, one can gain some understanding about what the future might look like.





1. Demographic trends

The population trend of a small town is the single biggest factor affecting its future because it impacts on the local economy and the town's ability to sustain the services that ensure quality of life. Also critical is the demographic mix within the community, particularly the age distribution. A common characteristic of smaller transitioning towns is the ageing of the population with a reduction in the number of working families in the community. In many cases these towns are not very culturally diverse, which can limit the community's potential. The benefits of cultural diversity in a community have been widely researched and acknowledged as contributing to improved entrepreneurship, greater inclusiveness and an openness to new ideas and thinking (as well as offering new culinary and other cultural experiences).

A further demographic issue is that the number of school-age children in a town directly impacts the ability to sustain a quality education system. Loss of the school also results in a loss of teaching and other professional jobs in the community.

As well as considering the local situation, it is also important to consider the broader population trends in Australia. The overall population in Australia is growing strongly, particularly in capital cities, largely on the back of high migration and to a lesser extent, a resurgence in the birth rate. This is leading to congestion in big cities and reduced housing affordability, which is impacting on the quality of life for urban dwellers. As a consequence, regional towns are likely to become progressively more attractive to the sector of the population known as "tree changers". This urban congestion plus the retiring baby boomer cohort may present future opportunities for both retirees and young families to relocate to regional areas, including small towns.

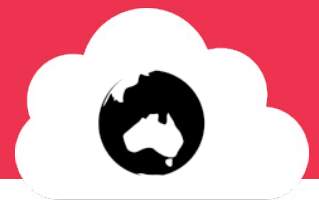
The benefits of cultural diversity in a community have been widely researched and acknowledged as contributing to improved entrepreneurship, greater inclusiveness and an openness to new ideas and thinking

2. Global economics

Australia with its open market policy, free trade environment, floating exchange rate and independent reserve bank is very much a global economy. Australia is also part of the internet economy, which timelessly and seamlessly transfers information and allows people to shop around the world from their lounge rooms or local cafe. A clear sign of Australia's part in the global economy was the impact of the global financial crisis. Even though Australia was sheltered from the direct impact, it did have flow-on effects, the repercussions of which are still being felt.

Virtually all businesses in Australia must face the full force of global competition.





3. Industry structural adjustment

Largely as a flow-on from global policy and economic factors, there has been a continuing process of structural adjustment in regional industries.

This is being manifested in a number of ways including:

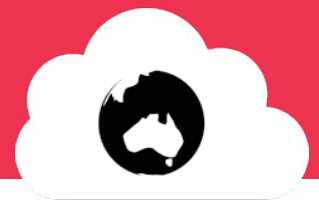
- Regional centres becoming larger at the expense of smaller towns.
- The growth of large retail chains which is impacting on smaller independent retail businesses.
- Concentration within industries through mergers and acquisitions, which is impacting on competition.
- Australian businesses being absorbed by large multinationals.
- The privatisation of government-owned businesses such as Telstra and other utilities and the nationalization and restructuring that goes with this.

4. Government policy

Government policy, locally, federally or globally can have a major impact on the community both positively and negatively. Some examples that have seriously impacted the Loddon Mallee region are:

- The Murray Darling Basin Plan and water policy
- Carbon abatement policy
- Education policy
- Health, child support and aged care policy
- Superannuation policy and retirement benefits
- Transport and road policy
- Government services and location of government offices
- North South Pipeline policy and resulting G-MW Connections Group (formerly NVIRP project)
- Managed investment scheme tax law.





5. Climate volatility and global warming

There is growing scientific evidence to support the view that climate volatility will impact in a number of ways including:

- Increased temperatures and more extreme heat waves.
- Changed rainfall patterns with reduced rainfall in some areas, increases in others, together with more extreme rainfall events.
- More extreme weather events, including wind and thunderstorms, resulting in more frequent extreme floods and bushfire conditions together with wind damage.
- Rising sea levels.
- Changes to microclimates which impact on agriculture and particularly horticulture.
- Changes in the migratory patterns of birds and insects which impacts pest and disease management in crops.

These environmental factors will have a significant but differential impact on virtually every community.

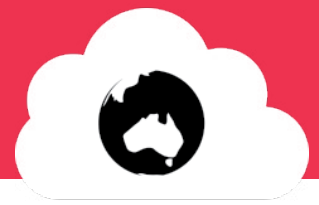
6. Technology

Technology will continue to have a major impact on all aspects of life including industry and commerce, health, education and entertainment. The following are just some examples of technologies that will significantly impact on small town communities:

- The impact of the NBN, which will open up small rural towns to the world, impacting on commerce, education, healthcare, smart phone enabled technologies and entertainment.
- Robotics and artificial intelligence, which will replace labour but at the same time create new opportunities.
- Satellite enabled technology such as GPS.
- Rapid advancement in medical technology, diagnostics, pharmaceuticals and treatments, which will increase life expectancy and reduce mortality rates.
- Improved technology in motor vehicles that will improve safety and fuel efficiency.
- Drone-enabled technologies (e.g. crop monitoring).

Technology will continue to have a major impact on all aspects of life including industry and commerce, health, education and entertainment.





7. Social values

Australia's social values are evolving under the influence of various forces including educational levels, intergenerational contrasts, the internet (particularly social media), increased globalisation, the impact of travel and Australia's continuing ethnic diversity, through migration. The following are some examples of changes to Australian societal value systems based on a large and ongoing body of social research conducted by McKINNA et al:

- Intolerance to discrimination on grounds of sex, sexual preference, ethnicity, age or disability.
- A greater sense of entitlement i.e. people now expect as a right, what were once considered to be the luxuries of life.
- The right to a well-paid job.
- The right to affordable health care.
- A greater emphasis on work-life balance.
- The need for inclusion and to be heard.
- Higher expectation of participation and 'a voice' in community issues.
- Greater ethical accountability in business and government.

These changes in values have implications for community building as they influence expectations with respect to quality of life, service levels and the rules of community engagement.

*Australia's social values are evolving under the influence of various forces including educational levels, intergenerational contrasts, the internet...
...increased globalisation, the impact of travel and Australia's continuing ethnic diversity*





"While people have the capacity to choose, they have the ability to change."

Madeleine Albright, 64th United States Secretary of State

Part D Possible responses

Now that you have the information you need to analyse and map your town, this part of the booklet offers some possible responses. There are strategic options presented for each of the four types of towns identified in Part C.

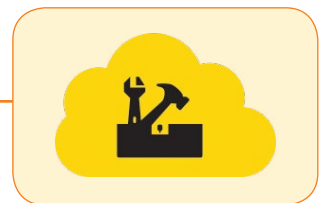




Selecting, scoping and planning possible responses

The purpose of this part of the toolbox booklet is to provide some guidance in terms of developing informed responses and strategies to the issues impacting transitioning towns. From the previous section you should have a fair understanding of the characteristics and driving forces of your town and which typology it fits into. This section works through the process of developing responses.

This section of the booklet provides some guiding principles and the tools in Part E (Tools [2.1](#)- Values Based Community Planning and [2.2](#) – Project Based Community Planning) serve to outline the basics. For some steps you may need to call on some external assistance such as a facilitator or some professional support from your Council.



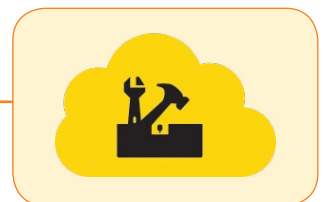
Basic principles of strategic planning

The most effective strategies are those which identify the handful of factors that will have the biggest impact in the future or make the biggest difference to achieving your goals. In simple language the key steps in strategic planning are as follows:

- 1. Understand your situation:** What are the driving forces of change and the prognosis if you don't do anything to respond to them.
- 2. Decide what you want to be:** Based on the above, develop a realistic mission statement. Without a clear idea about where you want to get to, it is impossible to develop an effective strategy.
- 3. Plan how you will get there:** Set short (5 year), medium (10 year) and long-term (20 year) goals.
- 4. Identify the opportunities, challenges and potential blockers:**
What is going to get in the way of achieving your goals?
How do you maximise the opportunities and neutralise the threats?

The most effective strategies are those which identify the handful of factors that will have the biggest impact in the future or make the biggest difference to achieving your goals.

[Tool 2.1](#) Values-based Community Planning and [Tool 2.2](#) Project-based Community Planning (in Part E) provide more useful context and a simple process to follow.



Your local council can assist in connecting you to people in your area with experience in strategic and community planning.

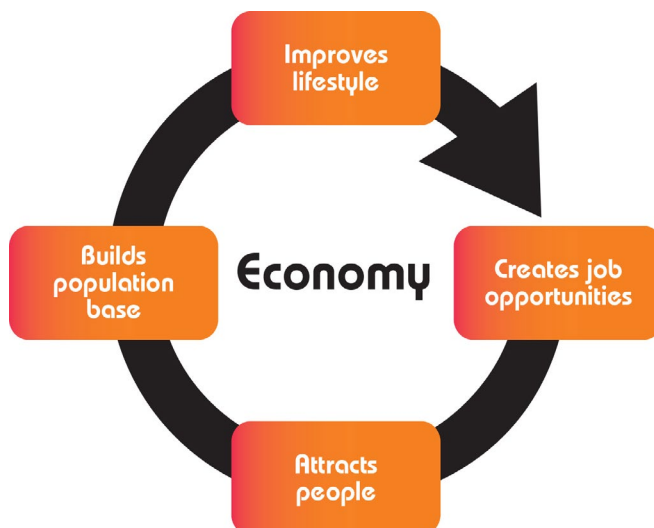




Ways to grow community capital

Community capital is the product of a symbiotic relationship between economic prosperity and quality of life, according to the value system of the community or town in question. To some extent this is a chicken and egg situation; in that economic prosperity strongly impacts on population levels, which in turn impacts on to quality of life and liveability as depicted in the diagram below. On the other hand, improved liveability can contribute to the economy by attracting people who create demand for goods and services, which in turn generate jobs. Indeed, many sea and tree-change towns are experiencing a population-driven economic recovery.

Improved liveability can contribute to the economy by attracting people who create demand for goods and services, which in turn generate jobs.



If we accept the link between economic prosperity and liveability as being a determinant of community strength, it suggests that there are two types of response strategies, depending on the circumstances of a particular town.

These are:

1. Economy-led, top-down strategy
2. Community-led, bottom-up strategy





1. Economy-led, top-down strategy

This strategy is driven by the imperative of finding and attracting new industries/investors to a region. The underlying rationale is that attracting new industry sectors and investors will create jobs that in turn will build demand for services to support the improvement of quality of life and liveability. The strategy needs to be built around a unique and sustainable point of competitive advantage. Economic led strategies are particularly effective if there is a natural resource that can be built upon e.g. minerals, solar energy, affordable water or tourism assets.

There are some differences of opinion in the academic literature as to the effectiveness of this strategy. Some argue that whilst the rewards are high, so too are the risks. There is no doubt that attracting large new businesses to your town creates jobs. On the other hand, the loss of a major employer/investor can do more collateral damage than if it didn't exist in the first place. The cost of incentives to attract them to the region may be prohibitive.

The reality is that for many communities the economy-led top-down strategy is not an option because very few opportunities to attract new industries and investors exist for most small towns of the scale in the Loddon Mallee. Furthermore, given Australia's poor global competitiveness in manufacturing, few large-scale investors would consider opening a green field (or new) site here.

The strategy needs to be built around a unique and sustainable point of competitive advantage

2. Community-led, bottom-up liveability strategy

The second strategy is predicated on the notion of organically building a community from the bottom-up by improving the attractiveness and liveability of a town so that it attracts population. The population in turn create the demand for goods and services, which in turn provide economic stimulus to the local economy. Inherent in the strategy is the notion of Economic Gardening, which is about steadily building capability and capacity of existing businesses rather than attempting to attract large-scale new industry or investors from outside of the community. This strategy is heavily reliant on community capital and leadership.

A good example of where this works is in tree and sea-change towns closer the major centres with the natural assets to attract residents for lifestyle reasons. This strategy tends to work well for towns which are accessible to Melbourne for commuting or day-trips. However, it is also evident in other communities further into the Loddon Mallee. For example the Murray River community of Koondrook has unconsciously applied Economic Gardening principles by investing in one or two pivotal businesses from which others have grown. Together the strength of these six or seven businesses is enhanced as a whole.





Intervention levers

This section outlines the potential intervention levers that a community or its local council can apply to respond to the challenges and opportunities posed by its current transition. Although the challenges will vary depending on the typology segment that the community fits into, broadly speaking the generic intervention strategies will be the same, falling into three basic categories:

1. Economic development
2. Social capital and development
3. Liveability development

However the specific levers and tools will be different as outlined below:

1. Economic development levers

Attracting new industries and businesses:

- Scope out and conduct market research to identify investment opportunities, investor classes and potential investors.
- Review elements of competitive advantage for cues as to possible business opportunities.
- Use the above to develop an investment attraction strategy.
- Identify and respond to potential barriers to investment.
- Develop an investment attraction prospectus.
- Ensure that there are business friendly planning schemes available.
- Develop or support business parks or industrial precincts.

Retaining existing industries and businesses:

- Identify “at risk” businesses or industries.
- Identify the change forces impacting local industries.
- Develop a defence strategy for “at-risk” businesses.
- Develop strategies to support transitioning industries.
- Lobby and advocate for key businesses/industries.
- Support capability building.
- Identify capital needs and investment sources.
- Develop community enterprises to replace exiting businesses.
- Assist local businesses to become investor-ready.





Economic gardening with existing businesses:

- Promote community support for existing businesses (e.g. buy local campaigns).
- Support businesses to find growth opportunities.
- Support businesses to obtain capital or finance.
- Build capability within existing businesses, particularly with respect to customer service and management skills.
- Support talented young people to establish a business in the community.
- Promote entrepreneurialism.
- Recognise and celebrate achievement.
- Facilitate business/industry networking and mentoring opportunities.

Infrastructure development:

- Research critical infrastructure needs for growth.
- Identify and foster opportunities for infrastructure development.
- Encourage and promote partnerships between industries.
- Develop framework for assessing infrastructure priorities.
- Support and advocate for the development of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) infrastructure.
- Lobby at all levels of government, arguing a sound business case for the investment in infrastructure required.

Tourism destination development:

- Undertake a stock take audit of tourism assets, including those in the natural and cultural environment.
- Develop a tourism destination strategy.
- Establish tourism cluster/network.
- Support tourism businesses in building their capability particularly with respect to social media and customer service (www.visitvictoria.com has numerous resources available).
- Establish a framework for tourism cross-marketing.
- Establish a unique branding identity for the region's tourism product linking it to the wider regional strategy.
- Develop and maintain quality recreational infrastructure and public amenities.
- Improve the attractiveness of the town and make it inviting to tourists.
- Grow a culture of tourism friendliness within the community.
- Provide quality information and signage for visitors.
- Develop infrastructure to attract visitors passing.
- Develop a program of events appropriate to the tourist product and targeted market segments.





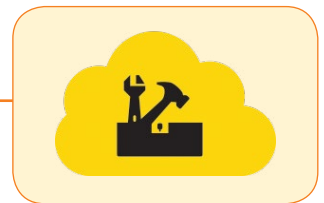
2. Social capital development levers

Community planning:

- Develop a formalised community planning framework.
- Establish a registered association.
- Identify and empower leaders, community builders and so-called 'spark plugs'.
- Develop a multipronged approach to engage people in between the planning process.
- Build formalised bridging networks to capture the collective energy and resources of various industry sector groups.
- Develop a short, medium and long-term community development plan.
- Work closely with your Council to ensure the integration of the community plan in setting investment and service priorities.

Community building and engagement:

- Develop a community skills register ([see Tool 1.8](#)).
- Create multi-level platforms for community interaction.
- Develop programs to welcome newcomers to the community.
- Promote a culture of volunteerism and recognize and celebrate the contribution of volunteers.
- Engage youth in all aspects of community life.
- Leverage the power of social media to engage and to better connect regionally, nationally and globally.



3. Liveability: development levers

- Undertake a future scan and audit of community's needs over the next 5, 10 and 20 years.
- Work with local government authorities to determine service and infrastructure priorities.
- Improve streetscapes and appearance of towns.
- Promote a food and lifestyle culture.
- Lead and advocate to improve transport and communications infrastructure and service levels.
- Identify opportunities and the people who can develop the arts and cultural aspects of the town.





Typology based strategies

In the previous part of this toolbox booklet, different town typologies were presented and the profiles outlined:

1. Aggregating dry land towns
2. Restructuring irrigation towns
3. Surviving service towns
4. Advancing lifestyle towns

This section puts forward high-level strategic responses for each of these four types of towns. Although many of these strategic levers are only actionable by government, communities can be proactive in driving change. The starting point is to confront the issues.





1. AGGREGATING DRY LAND TOWNS

STRATEGIC RESPONSES

The Aggregating Dry Land Town typology is characterised by increasing farm size and changed farming practices with a commensurate reduction in the population. At the same time, the population is ageing because working family aged people are leaving the town to seek alternative employment. As a consequence of this, the towns are struggling to maintain their services with the impact of reduced liveability. Additional to this impact, is the influx of transitory, disadvantaged newcomers attracted by both lower house prices and living costs.

STRATEGIC IMPERATIVES

1. Stop the decline in population.
2. Develop alternative job opportunities outside of agriculture, particularly for working families.
3. Maintain and engage young people to encourage them to remain living in the town (or at least coming back after completing their education) by improving liveability and job opportunities.
4. Maintain basic life services and liveability assets.
5. Build community cohesiveness.

STRATEGIC LEVERS

- Create jobs through investment attraction.
- Create a calendar of events.
- Introduce 'shop local' campaigns.
- If on a major arterial road, develop facilities that encourage passers-by to stop.
- Initiate a series of projects and improve quality-of-life and the amenity.
- Implement community planning.
- Refurbish the streetscape.
- Lobby for public transport to connect with other service centres.
- Embrace newcomers and engage them in the community.
- Manage community expectations.





2. RESTRUCTURING IRRIGATION TOWNS

STRATEGIC RESPONSES

Terms for this typology have been impacted by the restructuring of the irrigated farming sector with the sale of water by some farms whilst at the same time experiencing the influx of larger corporate operators. Many of the farms that have sold their water now lie dormant. Often the reduced productivity due to the sale of water has resulted in the closure of processing factory such as a dairy factories or fruit cannery, resulting in the loss of a large number of jobs.

STRATEGIC IMPERATIVES

1. Retain remaining irrigation water and infrastructure availability.
2. Attract investment based on water availability.
3. Improve the efficiency of water usage.
4. Protect 'at risk' businesses.
5. Find alternative uses for unproductive dry land farms.
6. Encourage irrigators to take up on-farm upgrades to infrastructure.

STRATEGIC LEVERS

- Provide advocacy and leadership.
- Implement community planning to set priorities and strategies.
- Form an alliance with neighbouring towns to build regional cohesiveness and explore collaborative opportunities.
- Drive support for 'buy local' campaigns.
- Encourage innovation and investment in best practice irrigation.
- Ensure farming communities have access to knowledge and information about the drivers of change in global agribusiness.





3. SURVIVING SERVICE TOWNS

STRATEGIC RESPONSES

Towns in this typology set are similar to Aggregating Dry Land towns with one important exception: they have emerged as the regional service town to other smaller surrounding towns that have a population below the critical mass necessary to maintain basic services and infrastructure. Surviving Service Towns survive because of their location, which is within an accessible distance to other satellite towns. The economy of these towns is underpinned by their services including schools, health, retail outlets, sporting clubs and entertainment, etc. Although they too are struggling to survive, they continue because of the essential nature of the services they provide to outlying towns.

STRATEGIC IMPERATIVES

1. Protect at risk businesses and services.
2. Muster community support across the greater region.
3. Reverse the regional population decline.
4. Attract new businesses.

STRATEGIC LEVERS

- Provide leadership and advocacy with water policy.
- Scope out new business and new industry opportunities.
- Attract funding to improve water usage efficiency.
- Introduce industry cluster groups and networking.
- Find new ways to bring the community together in the face of declining sporting and social activity (e.g. Moonlight Cinema evenings).
- Lobby to retain as many services as possible.
- Cooperate with neighbouring communities to pool resources and rationalise community assets.





4. ADVANCING LIFESTYLE TOWNS

STRATEGIC RESPONSES

Unlike the other three cohorts, towns in this typology set are not usually experiencing population decline, but rather have stable or growing populations. The key differentiator for towns in this set is their ability to attract people from cities and larger regional centres who are escaping the impact of urban sprawl and rising housing prices. In the majority of cases, these towns are within two hours of Melbourne or an hour of Bendigo or Ballarat and have good accessibility including public transport. Because of their situation and location, they have access to quality life and retail services, education, entertainment and culture.

The biggest challenges facing this type of town is maintaining the tranquility and existing values in the wake of a growing population and new entrants with new ideas. Some currently do or will have issues with the harmonisation of the aspirations of older traditionalists with those of the newcomers who may have a different value system. For example, many have high expectations of service delivery and don't understand the cultural norms such as community volunteering. Note also the sub-segment of this town type which includes those towns who are likely to fall into this category as they eventually become closer to the spill from regional centres (e.g. Tarnagulla, Loddon Shire).

While these towns are not experiencing growth and do not currently have proximity to major centres, the advent of high speed broad band and their unspoiled cultural value may see them more connected and growing in appeal to tree-changers. This sub-segment includes towns that are not experiencing growth or attracting tree-change, and may face a number of challenges as they transition. Examples may include loss of local services, proximity and ease of access to other centres, and decline of housing stock.

STRATEGIC IMPERATIVES

1. Improve liveability and provide services appropriate to the changing demographic.
2. Engage the community.
3. Manage potential tensions resulting from a mix of cultures and value systems.
4. Protect traditional industry sectors.
5. Leverage the skill sets and abilities of newcomers.

STRATEGIC LEVERS

- Implement community planning and engagement.
- Run projects to bring people together and break down social barriers.
- Conduct formal 'welcome' events to meet new residents.
- Compile a skills register and invite new residents to apply those skills as volunteers in community projects.





“It’s not the tools you have faith in – tools are just tools - they work or they don’t work. It’s people you have faith in . . . ”

Steve Jobs, Entrepreneur and Co-Founder Apple Inc.

Tools

This part of the booklet presents a range of tools that have been designed for community building. It has been divided into four sections:

1. Community mapping tools
2. Community building tools
3. Liveability enhancement tools
4. Economic development tools

The tools have been designed to provide guidance to community leaders looking for solutions to priority issues that are confronting their towns along the transition. They have been written in a very user-friendly language and, by design, have been kept short and sweet. Wherever possible we have also provided links to other sources of information.

The tools draw heavily on the practices and experiences of communities, including case studies of approaches that have worked and handy hints from some that haven’t worked. The tools have been informed by interviews and case studies with people who live and work in small towns and regional areas and the authors’ many years of consulting practice in regional communities.

In designing the toolbox, attempts have been made to identify the most pressing issues that confront transitioning towns. It is recognised that this is by no means an exhaustive list and some things will have been missed. This toolbox is a starter kit. It is a work in progress and will be built on over time.





1. COMMUNITY MAPPING TOOLS	
1.1	Community snapshot
1.2	Community strength scorecard
1.3	Town typology assessment
1.4	Community advantage assessment
1.5	Future scanning
1.6	Regional mapping
1.7	Community survey
1.8	Skills register
2. COMMUNITY BUILDING TOOLS	
2.1	Values-based community planning
2.2	Project-based community planning
2.3	Community leadership
2.4	Special project delivery
2.5	Youth Council
2.6	Community inclusiveness
2.7	Applying for grants
2.8	Fundraising without grants
2.9	Branding and identity
2.10	Digital connections
3. LIVEABILITY ENHANCEMENT TOOLS	
3.1	Townscapes
3.2	Festivals and events
3.3	Community gardens
3.4	Youth activity
3.5	Viable sporting facilities
3.6	Arts and culture
4. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT TOOLS	
4.1	Farmers markets
4.2	Building a tourism culture
4.3	Buy local programs
4.4	New agricultural models
4.5	Community owned enterprises
4.6	Community Banking





1. Community Mapping Tools

The starting point for community building is developing a clear understanding of ‘what’ and ‘who’ you are and ‘where’ you want to go. This involves answering questions such as:

- What are the defining characteristics of your town?
- What are the key change drivers?
- Which town typology best captures your situation?
- What human capital exists within your community?
- What are the gaps in liveability, skills or assets?
- What do you want your community to look like down the track?

The tools in the ‘Community Mapping’ category provide a guide to mapping the demographic and socioeconomic parameters of your town, assessing community strength as well as identifying the town’s strengths and weaknesses.

Critical to community planning is an informed understanding of what your town might look like in 10 or 20 years time. To this end, the tool on future scanning helps evaluate the shifting sands, including the likely impact of trends in demographics, socioeconomics, changing values, economic forces, structural shift within industry sectors, government policy, technology, etc.

Another tool provides a framework for identifying your town’s areas of Community Advantage, the foundations on which social capital can be built.

The skills register tool provides a means of doing a stocktake of your town’s human capital, natural talents, experiences, qualifications and skills.





Tool 1.1 Community Snapshot

“Errors made using inadequate data are much less than those using no data at all”

Charles Babbage, Mathematician

WHY DO IT?

Charting your town's demographic and socio-economic profile is an important starting point for community building. It allows you to compare yourself with the average for regional Victoria and from that, get a feel for the issues that you need to focus on.

HOW IT WORKS

Data sources for small towns are very difficult to extract a great deal of detail from. The starting point is the [Australian Bureau of Statistics \(ABS\)](#), which has statistics at a town level. ABS have made their website user-friendly for anyone to access information. 2011 Census data has been converted into QuikStats which is listed in an easy-to-read format, with Victorian and Australian averages as a point of reference. Your Council may already have some analysis of the ABS data available that you can draw from.

At the time of writing, a new website was being launched by [Regional Australia Institute](#) that breaks the available data down into LGA zones (i.e. your local government area) and RDA zones (e.g. Loddon Mallee region). The institute calls the site [In]Sight.

WHAT YOU NEED TO MAKE IT HAPPEN

A person on your team who enjoys statistics and analysis.

STEPS TO GET YOU THERE

1. Go to the main statistical websites: www.abs.gov.au and insight.regionalaustralia.org.au.
2. Insert the data for your town in the chart below (the comparative data here has been drawn from ABS).
3. Check through the table and note measures where your town varies significantly from the average. Use this information to inform your community future scan analysis ([See Tool 1.5](#)).





Tool 1.1 Community Snapshot

Measure	Your town	Regional Victoria	Australia
Population (2011)			
Population (2006)			
Population (2001)			
Percentage change 2006 to 2011		+8.6%*	+8.3%
Percentage change 2006 to 2011		+7.0%*	5.8%
Percentage under 25 years		31.5%	32.6%
Percentage between 25-49 years		30.3%	35.1%
Percentage over 60 years		24.2%	19.6%
Male/female percentage split		49.1% Male	49.4% Male
Percentage with ancestry, other than Australia		59.1%	74.6%
Percentage of Indigenous in population		1.5%	2.5%

ACTION: Note the measures where your town is different: to the average

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.



THINGS TO LOOK OUT FOR:

1. ABS data is only collected every four years and is a year out of date by the time that it is released. You therefore need to be mindful of any abrupt changes that may have impacted on the demographics of your town since the last census.
2. Sometimes there are errors in ABS data. You therefore need to be confident to give it a reality check.





Tool 1.1 Community Snapshot

CASE STUDY SHIRE OF GANNAWARRA COMMUNITY VISION

In 2011 the Gannawarra Shire Council commissioned a community vision study called Gannawarra 2025. The starting point for this study was to undertake a demographic snapshot of the shire on a larger and more detailed scale than this Community Snapshot tool. The process revealed some interesting results. The key findings included:

- The population was declining at a rapid rate.
- The percentage of residents under 25 was well below the state average.
- The percentage of residents over 60 was significantly above average.
- The percentage of working families was below average.
- The number of school-aged children was declining.
- There was a 48/52 gender imbalance in favour of males, particularly in the young working family age cohort.
- The community was also well below the state average in cultural diversity.

Although Councillors were aware of the above trends, seeing the figures in black and white brought the scale of demographic shift into far greater focus. When confronted with a statistical analysis of the situation, Council management was able to respond to the implications for their community. Analysis of the trends made it possible to paint a clearer picture of what life in the shire might be like if no interventions were enacted. If the Council had not intervened with a response strategy, some likely scenarios may have included:

- It would be more difficult to maintain services across the smaller communities as populations aged.
- There would be more pressure on Council for support services for the aged.
- The drop of working-aged families would have direct consequences for the local economy.
- The fall in the number of school-aged children would make it necessary to rationalize the school network.
- The gender imbalance could significantly impact the birthrate longer term and could lead to some social problems.
- The mono-cultural factor was denying the community the richness that comes with cultural diversity and exposure to new thinking and ideas.

The insight gained from this exercise has informed the development of more focused intervention strategies and influenced all the subsequent strategic planning.





Tool 1.2 Community Strength Scorecard

“There is no power for change greater than a community discovering what it cares about.”

Margaret J. Wheatley, Educator and Community Leader

WHY DO IT

This scorecard is a diagnostic tool aimed at helping communities gain a better understanding of where they sit and how they are travelling. It not only gives an overall score, but more importantly, provides diagnostics to help towns develop community building strategies. For example, your town may score relatively well in economic strength but poorly on liveability. This would then suggest that the focus should be on implementing projects to enhance liveability. By digging more deeply into the liveability responses, the scorecard highlights the key issues.

HOW IT WORKS

The template below lists the dimensions and attributes that contribute to the community strength of your town, within four areas: Economy, Services, Liveability and Community. The intent is that a number of people work together to rate your town, either using a community survey ([see Tool 1.7](#)) or collectively in a workshop format. Scores are then collated and used to identify your town's strengths and weaknesses. This information will help highlight focus areas to be considered in community planning and to set project priorities.

STEPS TO GET YOU THERE

1. Rate each of the following statements out of 10 in terms of your level of agreement. In the scoring: 10 is 'strongly agree' and 1 is very 'strongly disagree', and 0 is 'non-existent' and 5 is 'barely acceptable'. Consider your responses carefully, although your first instinct will usually be accurate. The intent is to discuss each one in your workshop.

It will be helpful to have a calculator on hand when using this tool.





Tool 1.2 Community Strength Scorecard

Economy	Score 1-10
1. Overall, I believe our local economy is very strong	
2. It is pretty easy to get a job here or nearby	
3. Our economy is reasonably stable; it doesn't really experience the ups and downs that some towns do	
4. There are plenty of job opportunities for young people here	
5. Our town seems to be growing - there are new people moving in	
6. Our town attracts a lot of tourists	
7. Housing prices are rising in our town in line with the wider market	
8. The retail businesses are doing well in our town	
9. Most people here have enough money for a comfortable life	
10. Our town has at least one key event that brings money in from outside the area	
TOTAL SCORE	

Liveability	Score 1-10
1. I'm proud of the appearance and tidiness of our town	
2. We have strong, active sporting clubs	
3. I feel very safe living here	
4. We have reliable mobile phone coverage	
5. There is plenty to do here in the way of hobbies, clubs, activities and entertainment	
6. There is a good local offering of food and coffee	
7. Our town has a great annual calendar of events and celebrations	
8. There is plenty here for people interested in arts and culture	
9. The internet is pretty fast and easy to access	
10. There are nice places around here to take visitors to	
TOTAL SCORE	





Tool 1.2 Community Strength Scorecard

Community	Score 1-10
1. Our community is one where we help each other out	
2. Most of us are very proud of our history and heritage	
3. We are a very welcoming community to newcomers	
4. Our town is very accepting of people of all nationalities	
5. Almost everyone here has been a volunteer at some point in their life	
6. Our town is good at community planning	
7. Most people here feel they could have a say in community planning if they wanted to	
8. If anyone here got into difficulty, they would certainly have someone they could call	
9. Most young people who leave for study or work come back to raise a family here	
10. Young people have a pretty good life here outside the area	
TOTAL SCORE	

Services	Score 1-10
1. We can access most medical and health services fairly easily	
2. We are close to a hospital with emergency services	
3. I can buy most of the things I need in the town	
4. We have adequate banking facilities here	
5. There is a good public transport service to the nearby larger towns	
6. We have good primary school facilities here	
7. Our youth have access to a quality secondary education	
8. Young families in our town can access childcare if they need it	
9. Our town has comfortable aged care facilities	
10. Access to tertiary education is within commuting distance	
TOTAL SCORE	





Tool 1.2 Community Strength Scorecard

STEPS TO GET YOU THERE

2. Calculate the score of each of the four dimensions (e.g. Economy) by totalling the column. Write these scores in column (a) below.

Dimensions	Total dimension score (a)	Divide (a) by 4 to get the weighted score = (a) ÷ 4
Economy		
Services		
Liveability		
Community		
TOTAL SCORE		

3. Divide each of the scores in column (a) by 4 to reach your weighted score.
4. Add the four weighted attribute scores to get your total community strength score.
5. Analyse and discuss your score.
How does it measure up against the scores below?

The overall score provides a rating of the community strength of your town.
The ratings are as follows:

Excellent	90 and above	Average	59 to 50
Very good	75 to 89	Very poor	30 or below
Good	74 to 60		

6. Assess your town's strengths and weaknesses. To do this, go back to the first group of tables and refer to the scores that you gave to each question. The template below provides space to write any attribute that you scored at 6 and above as a strength; and any attribute that scored at 4 or below as a weakness.

STRENGTHS (attributes that scored 6 and above)	WEAKNESSES (attributes that scored 4 or below)



HANDY HINT

Turn the questions in this template into a questionnaire and distribute via the local paper or local shops. Leave a drop box for people to lodge completed questionnaires. Be sure to have an equal number of questions in each attribute.





Tool 1.3 Town Typology Assessment

“Segmentation is an academic process of dividing a large homogeneous set into clearly defined segments or types based on their characteristics, so that they may be better understood.”

WHY DO IT

Segmentation is a powerful strategic tool because it allows a community to better understand its characteristics, driving forces and appropriate strategic interventions. It is a way of narrowing down the issues to provide more focus.

HOW IT WORKS

Various transitioning towns typology models have been postulated in the literature (see part B). The authors have built upon these models to produce typology sets that provide a simple way to segment the towns across the Loddon Mallee region.

STEPS TO GET YOU THERE

1. Complete the earlier diagnostic tools to gain an understanding of the attributes that define your town. The following list provides some thought starters or cues as to what to look out for. It is not intended as an exhaustive list, there will be other characteristics unique to your town.
 - Population trend and demographic shifts.
 - Strength of the economy and employment opportunities.
 - Dynamics of the main industry employment sector.
 - Strength of local businesses.
 - Access to essential and life services.
 - Quality of life and liveability.
 - Distance from and accessibility to a major regional centre.
 - Distance from and accessibility to Melbourne, or other capital city.
 - Housing occupancy and housing prices.
 - Strength of tourism sector.
 - Attractiveness of the local geography.





Tool 1.3 Town Typology Assessment

STEPS TO GET YOU THERE

- 2.** Identify the top five changes that occurred in your community over the past 10 years under the following headings:

Demographic: Significant changes of population and/or a shift in the demographics

Economic: Changes in the economic circumstances.

Liveability: Changes in lifestyle or quality of life.

Social: Changes in the community values, attitudes or spirit.

Environmental: Any changes in the local environment due to climate volatility.

ACTION: List the 5 biggest changes in your town in each theme:

Demographic Changes	1.
	2.
	3.
	4.
	5.
Economic Changes	1.
	2.
	3.
	4.
	5.
Liveability Changes	1.
	2.
	3.
	4.
	5.
Social Changes	1.
	2.
	3.
	4.
	5.
Environmental Changes	1.
	2.
	3.
	4.
	5.





Tool 1.3 Town Typology Assessment

STEPS TO GET YOU THERE

3. Closely cross-reference the material generated in Steps 1 and 2 to determine which of the four typologies best describes your town. [Refer back to Part C](#) of the booklet for the descriptions of the four typologies, which are:
 1. Aggregating dry land towns
 2. Restructuring irrigation towns
 3. Surviving service towns
 4. Advancing lifestyle towns

ACTION: Our town typology is:	<input type="text"/>
The reasons we believe this are:	
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	





Tool 1.4 Community Advantage Assessment

“Whoever moves into a community has a vested interest in it.” **Andrew Goodman, American Activist**

WHY DO IT

The key to building community strength is to first understand the competitive advantages and the features that differentiate your town from others. In the context of community building the concept of ‘community advantage’ can be a powerful tool in terms of:

- Identifying opportunities for economic development and employment growth.
- Developing selling propositions for promoting the town for the purposes of investment attraction or advocacy.
- Identifying a town’s strengths that need to be protected and built upon.
- Helping a town define its identity to be used as a basis for developing a brand and identity that residents can feel proud of.

The recognition and articulation of a community’s competitive advantage helps to unify and strengthen it. The town or community’s competitive advantage can result from a number of sources as outlined below:

HOW IT WORKS

There are four guiding principles that underlie the determination of competitive advantage:

1. It needs to be something unique or differentiating for the town or region.
2. It needs to be sustainable over a long period of time.
3. It needs to be something that cannot be readily copied or replicated by others.
4. It needs to be an element that can be leveraged to the town or region’s advantage.





Tool 1.4 Community Advantage Assessment

STEPS TO GET YOU THERE

1. Set up a community think tank to brainstorm your community advantage.
Use the following checklist as a starting point for your deliberations:

- Landscape
- Climatic conditions
- Natural resources
- Location
- History and heritage
- Noteworthy citizens

Refer back to Part C for more detailed descriptions.

2. Write down your ideas on a white board.
3. Check each of your ideas against the four decision principles outlined above and eliminate any which don't pass the test.



HANDY HINT

Don't fall for the trap of believing that your people are an area of competitive advantage; every community thinks that about itself.



Need more information?

www.slideshare.net





Tool 1.5 Future Scanning

*“It is not in the stars to hold our destiny,
but in ourselves.”* **William Shakespeare, Author**

WHY DO IT

The key to effective planning is being able to anticipate the future. Community building is a long term, on-going project that demands forward thinking.

HOW IT WORKS

It is very useful for a community to undertake a future scanning exercise as part of its community planning process. This is best done in a workshop format, whereby a dozen or so people from a cross-section of the community work together. The workshop needs an external facilitator, preferably with experience in future scanning.

STEPS TO GET YOU THERE

1. Identify the thought leaders in your community from a cross-section of backgrounds including business, government and community. The ‘thought leaders’ or ‘opinion leaders’ are those people in the community who are the visionary thinkers that enjoy sharing ideas and leading or mentoring others. They are usually very successful in their own fields and easily identified on that basis.
2. Organise a workshop (or a number of smaller think tank sessions) with a skilled facilitator to moderate. The session should include some expert opinion and discussion on areas such as:
 - Demographics, socioeconomics and social values
 - The global and local economy and government and policy
 - The environment and climate change
 - Technology (see checklist on next page for more detail).
3. After analysis of the trends, the workshop/s need to resolve four key questions:
 1. What are the likely changes over the next five, ten and twenty years?
 2. What is the most likely scenario?
 3. What is the likely impact and implications for your town, be they threats, challenges or opportunities?
 4. What actions can the community take to address the above?
4. Bring together the findings from the workshop/s to compile the future scan for your town. Share the knowledge with the community.





Tool 1.5 Future Scanning

CHECK LIST

The following are some thought starter topics to lead discussion in your future scanning workshops:

Demographics, socio-economics and social values

- Population levels
- Demographic breakdown:
 - *Age*
 - *Sex*
 - *Ethnicity*
- Household structure
- Household income levels
- Social values
- Community expectations with respect to services
- What are the likely impacts on the above in terms of community services?

The global and local economy *and* government and policy

- What industries in your town are likely to grow?
- What industries in your town are likely to decline?
- Are there any new industries or businesses that could come to your town?
- Are there any areas of structural adjustment that are, or have the potential to impact on the local economy? e.g. aggregation of farms
- Are there any current or potential areas of government policy that could impact on your town?
- Are there any aspects of the global economy that that could impact on your town? e.g. the strength of the Australian dollar

The environment and climate change

- What are the potential impacts of climate volatility on our region?
- Temperature rising – more heat waves
- Reduced or variable rainfall patterns
- More extreme weather events, thunderstorms, wind storms and floods
- Greater bushfire risk
- Changes to micro climates impacting on agricultural/horticultural production





Tool 1.5 Future Scanning

CHECK LIST

Technology

- What is the likely impact of emerging technology, either positive or negative?
 - NBN broadband
 - Satellite technology
 - Medical technology
 - Robotics
 - Any others?

Sample template

The following is a sample table that can be used to capture the findings from the future scanning exercise.

Change Factor	Scenario (sample only)	Implications for your town
Demographics	Population decline	1.
		2.
Economy	Decline in horticulture	1.
		2.
Structural Adjustment	Agriculture shifts to dry land farming	1.
		2.
Government Policy	Murray Darling Basin Plan	1.
		2.
Technology	Impact of NBN	1.
		2.
Social Values	Ageing population means less new ideas	1.
		2.
Others	Volunteer burn out	1.
		2.



HANDY HINT

As a cost saving measure or to broaden the range of views, this activity could be done at a regional level. Assistance from the local or state government may be possible if resources are pooled across the region.



Need more information?

www.mckinna.com.au





Tool 1.6 Regional Mapping

“When it comes to community halls, my attitude is we should have half as many but make them twice as good!”

WHY DO IT?

When measuring your community strength, it is important to do so in the context of the wider region you live in. In an era with growing demand for community services and a shrinking rate base, it will be increasingly difficult to maintain all of the services to which we are accustomed. Furthermore, with improved mobility it is better to have access to a more comprehensive or higher quality service within your region, than trying to maintain lesser quality services and amenities in every single town. In the longer term, this won't be sustainable. Even in major capital cities people have to travel some distance to get access to particular services. In cities they also have to deal with parking and traffic!

HOW IT WORKS

Many small towns have a number of assets that are under-utilised (e.g. a Senior Citizens Hall that is only used once a week). The way regional mapping works is to effectively 'stocktake' the facilities available in the wider region so that gaps or synergies can be identified and acted upon to make overall improvements to meet current and future needs.

WHAT YOU NEED TO MAKE IT HAPPEN

- A map of the shire and the knowledge of where key facilities are located.
- A willingness to ask the question – it is most likely that the club or association in the next town is facing exactly the same challenges as you are. Someone has to make the first move!

STEPS TO GET YOU THERE

1. Convene a meeting with your local community planning group to complete the checklist provided in the following pages. This will help you evaluate what the accessible amenities are.
2. Evaluate where the gaps and opportunities for synergies exist.
3. Think through the pros and cons and imagine what the viewpoint of each township is likely to be.
4. Prepare a business case of the risks/benefits of joining forces.
5. Contact neighbouring towns to see if a win/win solution can be devised.
6. Meet with your local council representative to discuss how they could help you make it happen.



HANDY HINT

If you are seeking assistance from council for your project, it helps to have a whole-of-shire perspective – outline how it impacts the shire, not just your town.





Tool 1.6 Regional Mapping

The following table is designed to allow you to take a stocktake of the services and amenities available to you within your wider region. Tick the cells where services are available within the nominated drive time. Review the final table and assess the community need for those amenities that are over 30 minutes drive away.

	Within my town	Within 30 min drive	Within 1 hr drive	Within 2 hrs drive
Retail Services	Supermarket			
	Chemist			
	Clothing store			
	Petrol station			
	Car service			
	Post office			
Medical Services	GP			
	Dentist			
	Chiro/ Physio			
	General hospital			
	Surgical hospital			
	Midwifery hospital			
	Nursing home			
Schools	Kinder/ day care			
	Primary			
	Secondary			
	P 12			
	University			
	TAFE			
Leisure Facilities	Football team			
	Basketball team			
	Heated swimming pool			
	Non-heated pool			
	Multi purpose community centre			
	Movie theatre			
	Gallery			





Tool 1.6 Regional Mapping



THINGS TO LOOK OUT FOR:

1. There is an expectation by some communities of having every service or amenity on your doorstep. Even in the city this is not always the case.
2. Some community members may need convincing that change is for the greater good of the whole community. There is still a sense of entitlement in some small towns, which is a hangover from shire amalgamations. If there is a risk that the idea of collaboration and amalgamation will meet resistance, be sure to clearly articulate the risks and benefits when putting your case forward.

CASE STUDY

BERRIWILLOCK MULTIPURPOSE COMMUNITY CENTRE

If pooling resources with your neighbouring town is not a practical option, another solution to the challenge of providing 'more with less' is to create multipurpose facilities. The remote Mallee community of Berriwillock in Buloke Shire is building a multipurpose community centre (due to open in 2013) that will leverage a recent grant to the fullest extent to benefit more of the 200 people in the community. The design of the centre has explored ways to cater to the broadest possible range of community groups and activities, replacing five existing facilities in the process - the Berriwillock Public Hall, Bowls Club rooms, Arts and Craft Centre, the CFA building and the Maternal Child and Health Centre. All of these facilities were aged and in need of repair.

Because the new facility is multipurpose with a range of users, it will reduce maintenance time and costs, electricity usage and insurance costs. It will also reduce the burden on volunteers as the maintenance, cleaning and administration of many of these facilities was once run by multiple volunteer committees of management.

This greenfield project has been jointly funded by government grants, Buloke Shire Council and the CFA, reducing the development cost for all parties.

Note: The same multipurpose use principle can be applied to existing infrastructure as well as new developments. The Inglewood community in Loddon Shire is investigating the development of a community business hub in their historic town hall so the facility can be utilized during the working week.



Need more information?

www.buloke.vic.gov.au



Buloke Shire 1300 520 520





Tool 1.7 Community Survey

“A well-executed survey can either provide you with the proof that confirms what you always thought or new information that might surprise you”

WHY DO IT?

- Community surveys provide valuable and insightful information about your community.
- It is a great way to collect information about the behaviours, needs and opinions held in the community.
- Surveys can be used to find out attitudes and reactions, to measure client satisfaction, and to gauge opinions about specific issues.
- A soundly constructed survey can provide the evidence needed to argue your case, and give you new information to help your planning.

HOW IT WORKS

A community survey involves circulating a questionnaire to all or a sample of the community to collect their views on the issues at hand. The results are analysed, interpreted and used to inform planning or advocacy.

WHAT YOU NEED TO MAKE IT HAPPEN

- A clearly defined objective
- A survey instrument (see below)
- A person who is good with Excel or statistics to assist in analysis. Excel spreadsheets are an easy way to manage the data and cross-reference the findings.

STEPS TO GET YOU THERE

1. Decide on the purpose of the survey
2. Decide who you will survey (the sample)
3. Decide what instrument or method you will use to collect your survey data (will your survey be oral, written or on-line?)
4. Develop your questionnaire
5. Analyze and compile survey results.



HANDY HINT

Survey Monkey is a very powerful on-line survey instrument, not only for collecting the data but also for collation and presentation.



THINGS TO LOOK OUT FOR:

1. Don't over do the surveys – survey fatigue is common.
2. Keep questions simple and focused on the key issues you wish to test.
3. Whenever possible, use closed multiple-choice questions. Open-ended questions are subject to misinterpretation and are difficult to collate.
4. Avoid leading or ambiguous questions – this will damage the survey's validity when it is examined later.
5. Small sample sizes may limit the viability of the data you collect.



Need more information?

www.surveymonkey.com





Tool 1.8 Skills Register

“It amazed me when we looked around our community what a pool of talent we had; people from many different backgrounds with totally different skill sets that we would have never known about.”

WHY DO IT?

Community capital is built from networking and leveraging the human capital of individuals. Community building requires a wide mix of skills, personality types and motivations. The key to building community capital is to harness this talent pool by putting the right people in the right positions, connecting them and empowering them to do their thing.

HOW IT WORKS

Building a skills register requires compiling a directory of the skills, backgrounds, qualifications and interests of people in your community. The register can be used as a basis for identifying people for various roles such as running particular projects, leading committees, assisting to organise artistic activity, running events, etc.

WHAT YOU NEED TO MAKE IT HAPPEN

- Someone in the community who is prepared to take it on as a project.
- A volunteer to keep the list up-to-date.

STEPS TO GET YOU THERE

1. Develop a data collection template (see example below).
2. Circulate throughout the community and encourage people to fill in.
3. Compile the data. The database will be easy to manage if it is compiled in a program such as Outlook or Excel. This will allow it to be sorted by fields.
4. Update the register every year, and invite new residents to add their details.



HANDY HINT

Ask the local genealogy or history group to take this on as a project.



THINGS TO LOOK OUT FOR:

1. It will be important to protect people's privacy in the process. When asking them to participate, explain who will use the list and where the database will be kept.





Tool 1.8 Skills Register

SAMPLE TEMPLATE

Contact Details
Name:
Address:
Phone number(s)
Email:

	Interested	Some practical experience	A lot of practical experience	Qualification	Experience
Life Skills Level	Leadership				
	Organising				
	Project management				
	First aid				
	Other				
Office Skills Level	Secretarial				
	Word processing				
	Accounting/ book keeping				
	Desk top publishing				
	Legal				
	Graphic design				
	Computer/ IT				
	Other				
Hands-on Skills Level	Carpentry				
	Plumbing				
	Electrical				
	Motor mechanical				
	Welding				
	Painting				
	Gardening				
	Sound systems				
	Watering systems/drainage				
	Other				





Tool 1.8 Skills Register

SAMPLE TEMPLATE

Music/Arts Level		Interested	Some practical experience	A lot of practical experience	Qualification	Experience
	Classical music					
	Contemporary music					
	Piano					
	Guitar					
	Drums					
	Brass instruments					
	Dance					
	Other					





2. Community Building Tools

The tools in this section deal with 'Community Building', the foundation of which is planning and leadership.

In the process of researching this toolbox the authors observed a range of different governance models. The two Loddon Mallee case study towns Newstead and Sea Lake had very different approaches. In broad terms they can be categorised as a 'top down' strategic approach versus a 'bottom up' project approach. The top-down approach is based on a community working together to decide, in the first instance, what it wants to be and its future direction, then choosing priority projects based on this. In contrast, the bottom-up approach is project driven; building community strength through series of pivotal projects that organically build community capital.

An interesting contrast in the two case study towns was noted, yet both seem to work well. The Newstead approach was highly inclusive with a multitude of touch points for community consultation. In contrast, the approach employed by Sea Lake can be best described as a super group or a "committee of committees" where the ideas, priorities, and energies of many community groups are focused through one lens. This super group called Advance Sea Lake has representatives from most of the key organisations in the town, but anyone is welcome to attend meetings. It meets formally to progress a number of projects in the community.

It ensures good communication across the various groups and that resources are leveraged to the fullest. The authors make no judgments as to which approach is best, in the final analysis it is about what works best for each individual community.

This section of the toolbox also includes tools for youth activity and leadership, both of which are critical to sustaining strong communities. A further common element shared by strong communities is a strong sense of identity and understanding of what differentiates them from others - a tool on the fundamentals of identity and brand development covers this. There are also tools on fundraising; one on getting the best out of grants and another outlining other fundraising techniques.

Community capital is built by networking people in the community to leverage their talents, energy and skills. In today's world, social media and the internet are very powerful tools for linking communities together. This section includes some ideas for harnessing the potential of these resources.





Tool 2.1 Values-based community planning

“For our community, the planning journey was just as important as the outcome.”

WHY DO IT?

- To help residents decide what they would like their community to be. It provides a vehicle for a community to determine who it is, what it stands for, and what kind of town they want.
- To provide a means of deciding on priorities and how to invest limited resources to achieve the best outcome.
- To provide a framework to prepare and respond to the future.
- It gives a town a clear voice and a common frame of reference when dealing with government.

HOW IT WORKS

Values-based community planning starts by engaging the largest possible proportion of the town’s population to canvas ideas about what they would like the community to be in the future, taking on board its values and aspirations. Once this is determined, the next step is to identify plans and projects to work towards these aims.

WHAT YOU NEED TO MAKE IT HAPPEN

This approach will not work for every community. Values-based community planning needs to have an inclusive community with many people who have the confidence and ability to articulate their views and translate ideas into actions.

STEPS TO GET YOU THERE

There are many different approaches to values-based community planning; the following is just a guide.

1. Canvass the idea with community ‘thought leaders’ and devise a process to make it happen.
2. Hold a public meeting. This needs to be widely publicised and promoted to get maximum participation from all corners of the community.
3. Develop a series of events that stimulate conversations among groups within the community. As a stimulus, prepare some questions.
4. Conduct a community survey ([see Tool 1.7](#)).
5. Convene a community-planning summit with an open invitation. Ideally this is professionally facilitated, but if not, consider how you will stimulate discussion and capture the ideas. Circulate the outcomes from the summit.
6. Form a volunteer task force to prioritize the ideas, identify themes and projects.
7. Develop an action plan that nominates appropriate individuals or organisations to drive particular projects.
8. Form a committee to meet at regular intervals to monitor progress.



HANDY HINT

It is important to articulate what you want your community to be before you can work out how to get there – a vision statement is important.





Tool 2.1 Values-based community planning



THINGS TO LOOK OUT FOR:

There is a danger that community planning can lead to community polarization with opposing views on issues, values and priorities. It is important to go to great lengths to avoid factionalism. This needs to be carefully managed with early intervention if there is a risk of this occurring.

CASE STUDY NEWSTEAD, VICTORIA

Inspired by Kevin Rudd's 2021 national summit, Newstead initiated their own one-day Community Summit. In May 2008 around 150 people (from a community of around 500) gathered at the Newstead Community Centre to participate in 'Newstead 2021' to talk about their aspirations, issues and ideas for the future. The intention was to build a whole-of-community vision capturing the views and ideas from the widest possible sample of the community. Several projects were initiated at the summit and individuals and groups took action to make them happen. These projects included: implementing traffic speed limits; tree plantings and street beautification; a free WiFi network for the town centre; construction of a community garden; and construction of a playground.

Newstead 2021 was incorporated and set up as an umbrella organization to support and assist with community planning and projects. The group repeated the consultation process in February 2013 with some funding from Mt Alexander Shire to pay for an experienced community member to capture the feedback and draft the plan. Again the focus was on engaging as many people in the community as possible using a range of engagement tools including:

- Community meetings and surveys
- The local paper, The Echo
- Mail-outs
- Christmas cards inviting ideas
- Social media
- Dinner parties and drinks with neighbours
- A drop in centre with suggestion box

From this process a well-considered and very strategic five-year plan was drafted and launched in August 2013. The intention is that this will be an on-going process based on a five-year cycle.



Need more information?

www.newsteadplan.wordpress.com



Your own local Council will have ideas and information on community planning





Tool 2.2 Project-based community planning

“Before we started this approach, each group was doing its own thing and there was a lot of crossover and wasted resources”

WHY DO IT?

- To provide a means of deciding on community project priorities and how to invest limited resources to deliver the best outcome.
- To provide a vehicle to coordinate the resources, talents and energy of various interest groups to achieve a common goal.
- To provide a focal point for funding applications.
- Essentially, it provides a framework for a ‘social contract’ with Council for project funding and priority setting.

HOW IT WORKS

The project approach to community planning involves establishing a “super group” or an ‘Association of Associations’ which acts as a central peak committee representing various community groups to funnel and manage the ideas and key projects. Each group brings its projects to the table to canvas, prioritize and action. Having decided on the list of project priorities, the committee delegates the management of the implementation to a group or sometimes an individual who is willing to make it happen and has the appropriate talents and resources. The super group is able to link activities and action the appropriate networks to make it happen.

WHAT YOU NEED TO MAKE IT HAPPEN

- A disciplined committee of special interest groups who are prepared to work together.
- A willingness of your Council to cooperate with and recognize the peak committee as the central community voice.
- A strong chair who can run a tight meeting and manage individuals with differing priorities and agendas.

STEPS TO GET YOU THERE

There are many different approaches to project-based community planning, the following is just a guide.

1. Convene a meeting with the committees of the various special interest groups (including service and sporting clubs, church groups, schools, the CFA, SES and police to workshop the idea of starting a community planning process).
2. If there is enough interest, establish a super committee with each party nominating its representative.





Tool 2.2 Project-based community planning

STEPS TO GET YOU THERE

3. Register an entity as an incorporated association to provide a legal framework and protection to individuals on the committee.
4. Negotiate with your Council to recognise the committee as the peak advisory forum with an in-principle agreement to accept the committee's recommendations to inform investment decisions. Conversely, Council would commit to consult with the committee before making any significant investment or policy decisions in the town.
5. Convene regular meetings open to the public and the media. Representatives of each body bring their ideas to the table for discussion and decision-making. Meetings are minuted.
6. The committee also agrees a plan for each project and delegates responsibility for management to one of the special interest organisations.



THINGS TO LOOK OUT FOR:

Succession planning is critical with this framework; without new blood on the super committee it will become stale. The chair role should be rotated for a set term to avoid burn out and inject fresh ideas. Every effort needs to be made to bring in new people and to coach younger people by inviting their opinions and involvement.

CASE STUDY SEA LAKE VICTORIA

Advance Sea Lake is a town Super Group, which grew out of an initial piece of community planning work conducted by Peter Kenyon, which was followed up by community planning activity facilitated by RMIT University. Advance Sea Lake was incorporated in March 2003 to create a town forum representing a range of community and business interests and all age groups. The committee members are elected for a two-year term and half the committee stands for re-election each year. Meetings are held on the first Monday of each month and open to the public. The committee launched a community plan in 2009 for the 2010-2014 period. The plan outlines a series of priority projects based around four focus areas.



Need more information?

www.sealake.vic.au/community/advance



Buloke Shire 1300 520 520





Tool 2.3 Community leadership

“Leadership is not about titles, positions or flow charts. It’s about one life influencing another.”

John Maxwell, Business Author

WHY DO IT?

Effective community leadership is increasingly being recognized as a critical element in community building. Effective leaders mobilise and empower others to want to get extraordinary things done in their organisations and in the community. True leadership is about the ability to take a group of people on a journey. Leaders can transform ideas into actions, visions into realities, obstacles into innovations, separateness into solidarity and risk into reward.

HOW IT WORKS

Values-based community planning starts by engaging the largest possible proportion of the town’s population to canvass ideas about what they would like the community to be in the future, taking on board its values and aspirations. Once this is determined, the next step is to identify plans and projects to work towards these aims.

WHAT YOU NEED TO MAKE IT HAPPEN

Whilst for many leadership is an innate skill, it can also be a learnt skill. Leadership skills can be learnt through work experience, life experience, mentoring or formal education. There are formal community leadership development programs in place which identify, nurture, empower and encourage natural leaders in a community. The Loddon Mallee region has three such programs:

1. Annual leadership program
2. Graduate programs
3. Community programs.

Many other community leadership training programs are available and may be funded by grants or other means. Ourcommunity.com.au has a database of courses, making it a good starting point. The Community Leadership Centre in Melbourne offers a range of courses.



HANDY HINT

Remember, visionary leaders are a valuable and precious asset in any community. Truly great ones are rare so support and acknowledge them.





Tool 2.3 Community leadership

IDEAS FOR FOSTERING A LEADERSHIP CULTURE

The following list presents a few tips for growing community leadership skills in your town:

1. It is important for communities to develop the next generation of leaders. Be sure to create opportunities in your town to engage with young future leaders. Include them in community planning activity and community consultation.
2. Consider implementing a mentoring program for young leaders who need a little more experience and wisdom to make a success of the leadership job they have volunteered for. A retired business person may be more than willing to help with this initiative.
3. A youth mentoring program is a way to develop the next generation of leaders.
4. Small towns with volunteer fatigue sometimes struggle to attract leaders. Ensure that every chair or leadership role in your community has a deputy in the wings for smooth transition. Don't be afraid to tap someone on the shoulder to take this on, some people just need to be asked.
5. If you have had a leadership role thrust upon you and feel you need some help, seek out a sounding board. Approach someone in the community who is a respected leader in any field and with whom you could have a cup of tea and a chat about leadership styles and team problem solving.
6. Support leaders in your community by recognizing and rewarding the leadership work they do. An expression of public thanks can be all the motivation some need to keep going.



Need more information?

www.leadershipvictoria.org

www.cilm.org.au

www.ourcommunity.com.au/leadership



Leadership Victoria: +61 3 9651 6590

Contact your local Council to find other leadership programs in your area





Tool 2.4 Special project delivery

“We didn’t set out to be local heroes, we just saw the need and got on with the job of trying to address it”

WHY DO IT?

At some point in time, in many towns, there is a special project that some members of the community feel especially passionate about. It may involve raising man power, rather than raising money. Such one-off, special projects might include:

- Raising funds to buy a new wheelchair for a community member.
- Rallying to paint the house of a local person who has fallen on hard times or physically unable to do it themselves.
- Acting to rescue an endangered species.
- Preserving a heritage asset from being condemned.
- Reaching a target of planting 1,000 trees in the local park.
- Recruiting a new GP to the town.
- Responding to an injustice or wrong doing.

“Why do it?” is a good question – these projects are the ones that move people who may not normally get involved in community life to stand up and act. Even though they are running single-issue projects, if the groundswell of energy and commitment is there to make it happen, then these community members should be encouraged. Who knows, it may spark an interest in them to serve their community in other ways.

HOW IT WORKS

There are some in the community who do not have the time, resources or inclination to participate in regular community committees or progress associations, but a one-off project that is dear to their heart can sometimes mobilize them. If they have no previous experience in volunteering, they may want some advice about what to do and who to talk to. There will be a number of tools in the Transitioning Towns Toolbox that may be of assistance.

WHAT YOU NEED TO MAKE IT HAPPEN

- Passion and lots of drive.
- Encouragement – even if it seems a crazy idea at the time.



HANDY HINT

Think about which members of the community will benefit most from your project and approach them to be public advocates for your cause.





Tool 2.4 Special project delivery

STEPS TO GET YOU THERE

1. Suggest that the individual or group call a community meeting to seek out others who share this passionate cause. This may involve writing a media release to raise awareness of the issue through the local media, community website or social media, or simply posting a note on the community notice board.
2. Recruit a committee from those who respond to the initial promotion of your cause, ensuring a mix of skills is at the table.
3. Run a workshop session with the committee to develop an action plan and assign roles to each committee member. Nominate someone to be the chair of the session. At this workshop, establish how often you will meet to monitor progress.
4. Communicate the outcomes of this action plan to all who are following your cause. You may wish to set up a Facebook page or an email database to keep all followers in the loop.
5. If the special project requires fund raising, open an appropriate account or partner with an existing community organisation to act as your 'bank'. See the two fundraising tools in this toolbox ([Tools 2.7](#) & [2.8](#)) for some ideas about how to raise money.
6. It will be important to keep raising awareness of your project as you progress the delivery the action plan. Keep the story interesting by taking good quality photos of the project at every milestone and supply these with well-written text to the media or on social media as the story unfolds.
7. When you finally reach your goal, celebrate your success and share the results with the community. Don't forget to publicly thank those who have contributed time and/or funds to the cause.



THINGS TO LOOK OUT FOR:

1. Have a Plan B - if you're not able to reach the target then be sure your donors or backers will be happy with the fall back option.
2. Reality check your idea with trusted friends before forming your committee. It is easy to get carried away with an issue you feel passionately about, but that doesn't mean others in the community will feel the same way.
3. Make sure your whole community is united behind your project. This requires local marketing.





Tool 2.4 Special project delivery

CASE STUDY GISBORNE ADVENTURE PLAYGROUND PROJECT

A group of mothers in Gisborne in the Macedon Ranges Shire needed a safe outdoor play solution. There was a growing number of young families moving in and the current facility was unsafe and not accessible by a child with special needs child in the community. Although none of them had been particularly active community members in the past, they were not the types to sit around and wait for government to do something. They got organised! First they developed a committee and met with Macedon Ranges Council. Armed with information and feeling supported, they put in place a plan delegating a role to each committee member. They had a multi-pronged fundraising plan, targeting families with pre-school children who they knew would be users of the facility. Fundraising activity included everything from 'shaking the tin' at the football matches every weekend to BBQs, open days, petitions, business sponsorships and much more.

They raised round \$300,000 dollars and after five years of work, the playground dream was realised – including a wheelchair swing. Some of these women are now very active community members who advise other mothers groups on playgrounds and fundraising.



Need more information?

projectaustralia.org.au



Google your particular project's subject area for others who have tried the same thing, or talk to your local Council about putting you in touch with other government resources that may be able to help your specific cause.





Tool 2.5 Youth council

“Investing in our youth is investing in our future. The costs are considerable but the cost of not doing it is higher.”

WHY DO IT?

- Puts forward positive images of youth in the community.
- Develops the next generation of community leaders and volunteers.
- Provides opportunity for local youth to experience public governance and travel to participate in leadership conferences.
- Improves the public speaking skills of youth.
- Increases the understanding of youth issues among Councillors and the general community.
- Improves the chances of retaining youth in the town.

HOW IT WORKS

- Youth Council acts as a ‘junior’ version of the main Council.
- The Youth Councillors elect a Youth Mayor and Youth Deputy Mayor and run quarterly Youth Council meetings.
- The group acts as an advisory body or reference group to the councillors on issues in the community impacting younger people.

WHAT YOU NEED TO MAKE IT HAPPEN

- Council administrative resources to manage the activity.
- Sufficient operating budget to provide catering and transport if required.

STEPS TO GET YOU THERE

Rural City of Wangaratta formed one of the first youth Councils in Victoria. These are the steps they have perfected over time:

1. Positions for Youth Council are advertised in local forums (including social media) at local schools and on Council website. The positions are for 1 or 2 year terms and open to youth who are working or at school.
2. Youth nominate themselves to participate.
3. A screening process occurs such as an interview with a Council staff member.
4. Like senior Councillors, participants are given a formal induction in their role as Youth Councillors.
5. Youth Council meets twice a month, once for a formal youth council meeting and once for informal discussion of youth issues.
6. Youth Councillors engage regularly with the main Council putting forward proposals and reporting on youth issues.



HANDY HINT

Give the Youth Council a mission. They need to work towards a goal such as organising an annual event or other tangible outcome.

Provide food at all meetings to retain energy and focus.





Tool 2.5 Youth council



THINGS TO LOOK OUT FOR:

1. Youth Council requires a considerable amount of time and expense to administer. This can be a burden for cash-strapped shires.
2. Application for Youth Councillors should not just be open to high achievers. It should be a democratic process and representative of the wide spectrum of youth in the community.
3. In remote areas, transport challenges may need to be overcome. One solution may be to conduct the discussion meetings via video conferencing or Skype.

CASE STUDY GANNAWARRA SHIRE COUNCIL

Gannawarra Shire's Youth Council program has been running for over five years and has evolved considerably since its inception. The Youth Council now acts as an advisory group to the main Council on youth issues. Young people in years 9-12 who live in the Shire can self-nominate for selection by Council, or be nominated by their teachers.

The Youth Council is responsible for advocating for youth issues relevant to the Gannawarra Shire and maintaining a connection with the senior Council to ensure that messages and topics are communicated.

Since its inception, the Gannawarra Youth Council has partnered with organisations such as Lions Clubs, Rotary Clubs, YMCA, local RSLs and North Central CMA and advocated for a range of issues including:

- Implementing a Council Facebook page.
- Redeveloping the Kerang Skate Park, which resulted in obtaining \$250,000 State Government funding.
- Continuing a partnership with Skateboarding Australia to deliver free skate clinics to young people in the Shire.

With the assistance of FreeZa funding and Council support, Youth Council members are able to undertake training and run events throughout the year, including during National Youth Week. As part of this process the group is responsible for the organisation, budgeting and delivery of all events.

Other local organisations and service groups in the community often approach the Youth Council group for input and suggestions to local events such as Australia Day, Anzac Day and Carols by Candlelight.

The group meets once a term to discuss issues and topics arising. These meetings alternate between towns in the Shire. Just like regular Council, the general public can attend the Youth Council meeting which is chaired by the Youth Mayor or Youth Deputy Mayor. The Youth Council is supported by a Councillor who oversees the youth portfolio.

In 2013 a six-member team of Youth Council members participated in the YMCA Youth Parliament program.





Tool 2.5 Youth council



Need more information?

www.facebook.com (you will need to join facebook to view this page)

www.gannawarra.vic.gov.au

www.vicyouth.ymca.org.au



Katrina Thorne, Community Development Officer
Gannawarra Shire Council: 03 5450 9333





Tool 2.6 Community inclusiveness

“These days, we spend more and more time alone looking at our computers. I think people have forgotten how to connect.”

WHY DO IT?

A research study by the Victorian Government into what makes communities great, indicated that the following aspects of community are important to Victorians:

1. Ability to get help
2. Community participation
3. Local area amenity
4. Community attitudes (absence of ‘isms’)
5. Governance

Community connections and participation rated as being of extremely high importance in this study. As the incidence of single person households grow and family structures change, people find it harder to meet new friends and socialize. Historically, social interaction in small towns occurred at the Sunday church service, the pub, livestock sale or while shopping in the main street. These social forums have disappeared with on-line trading, closure of many country pubs and less participation in religion. Regional community members are at particular risk of isolation when they are new in the community; live or work on a remote property; do not drive (elderly and youth); are single; are single parent families; are disadvantaged economically; are not interested in sport; or do not have school-aged children. This list covers a lot of people in a transitioning town community who may feel isolated. Social isolation is a known cause of depression.

HOW IT WORKS

There is no hard and fast rule and many possible tools for increasing community inclusiveness. The key point is to recognise the need to proactively work at building inclusiveness as part of a healthy small town.

WHAT YOU NEED TO MAKE IT HAPPEN

A willingness to extend the hand of friendship.

STEPS TO GET YOU THERE

1. Take a look at the list on the following page and add a few more of your own ideas.
2. Continue to raise awareness in your community of the need to proactively work at community inclusiveness.



HANDY HINT

Making people feel useful is a great way to build social confidence.

There may be many undiscovered volunteers in your community who just need to be asked. Add their names to your skills register!



THINGS TO LOOK OUT FOR:

If people have been isolated for some years, it may take a few attempts to coax them along to an event or activity. Be patient and understanding. In the case of what you suspect may be serious depression, call in the experts.





Tool 2.6 Community inclusiveness

QUICK IDEAS LIST INCREASING COMMUNITY INCLUSIVENESS

The following are just a few thought starters:

1. The Sea Lake community host a morning tea for new residents in town to introduce them to a few new faces and pass on local survival tips.
2. Some Councils have a 'new residents welcome kit'. It provides a list of emergency phone numbers, amenity opening hours, maps and brochures about local businesses. It is a good idea for local businesses to offer free introductory gift vouchers in the kits so that new residents can try their products.
3. One of the Cohuna community groups arranges formal home visits to welcome new arrivals to the district.
4. Children from disadvantaged families may not be participating in sport, simply because they do not have the right gear or can't get a ride to the match. One Councillor in Loddon Shire made a point of arranging a lift for such a child every Saturday so they could participate. One of the Op Shops in Buloke Shire keeps a box of footy boots and jumpers for the local team, making it affordable for single parents to kit their children out for the match.
5. A group of single professional women in Macedon Ranges Shire have taken it upon themselves to address the isolation they felt in their small towns, where much of the social activity hinges around children's sport or school. The group meets once a month for drinks and have been able to extend introductions into each other's social and business networks, increasing community participation for all.
6. Farmers markets play an important social function as well as an economic function. In small town communities they are a great place for a quick catch up and a chat. Make sure your market has plenty of seating to facilitate this and for elderly residents to stop for a rest while shopping.
7. Participating in volunteerism is something that newcomers from city areas may not have had experience with before – understand that they may not know who to offer their services to. When completing your skills register ([See Tool 1.8](#)) you may find some surprising talents there that could be put to use in a volunteer organisation for mutual benefit.
8. A number of small towns surrounding Mildura Rural City Council have taken advantage of their warm summer evenings to run Moonlight Cinema events. Community members bring a deck chair and a plate and meet their neighbours. These are low cost events that everyone can participate in.



Need more information?

www.beyondblue.org.au



Beyond Blue 1300 22 46 36





Tool 2.7 Applying for grants

“What we have learned is that it is much better to be strategic and focus on getting a small number of critical projects adequately funded.”

WHY DO IT?

In a climate where funding is becoming more restrictive and more strongly contested it is important to be strategic in the selection of projects and put forward a well-argued business case in support of your application. With limits on rate income, it will become more difficult for Councils to fund activity and infrastructure. Communities can take the initiative to source funding for key projects, often in partnership with Council and/or local organisations. A starting point for many is identifying an appropriate grant.

HOW IT WORKS

The key to effective fundraising is to first identify priorities, based on the community plans or Council strategic plan and then investigate possible funding sources. There are a myriad of grants and funding schemes at a state and federal level, mostly relating to specific areas. Increasingly government grants require matching funding and are competitively contested.

WHAT YOU NEED TO MAKE IT HAPPEN

The critical element in attracting funding for projects is to be strategic, evidence based and add to economic and/or community outcomes. It is essential to have a good community plan that prioritizes pivotal projects and ranks them in order of importance. Equally, the community plans need to be aligned with the strategic priorities of Council. It will be far easier to attract funding for projects that are aligned with the Council Plan, compared with those that are not.

STEPS TO GET YOU THERE

1. Form a project funding task force. For large projects, this should involve community leaders as well as a Shire representative.
2. Review your community plan or Council strategic plan to identify priority projects.
3. Scope out the potential grants and identify those that are worth chasing.
4. Make contact personal with the funding source and get more detail on the decision criteria and advice.



HANDY HINT

Grant funding involves a large amount of work to source, manage and acquit. Because of the work involved, many of the small grants may not be worth the effort, especially if you have to pay for secretarial services to administer them.





Tool 2.7 Applying for grants

STEPS TO GET YOU THERE

5. Develop a well-argued business case to support your application.
The key elements in the business case include:
 - a. How this project will benefit your town and area.
 - b. Evidence to show that there is a large amount of support within the community for this project and that it is a strategic priority for the town or surroundings.
 - c. A strong case that there is an important need for the project and that it will benefit a large proportion of the community.
 - d. Evidence to show that the project has been carefully thought through with a clear plan of action to implement it.
 - e. Supporting evidence to show a fit within the relevant strategic planning frameworks including the LGA and regional strategic plans in Loddon Mallee.
 - f. Evidence that you can meet the funding requirements.
 - g. A statement of your credentials to manage the project.
6. Have the application professionally prepared, checked by an independent person with skills in this area and carefully proof read.
7. Regularly follow up on the progress of your application.
8. In cases where the application failed, find out why and learn from the experience.
9. When you are successful, remember to document the spending of the funds as you go. Keep records, take photographs of progress and record testimonial quotes from community members who have benefited from the grant. This will be invaluable when it comes time to write your grant acquittal which is a requirement of most large grants.



THINGS TO LOOK OUT FOR:

1. Don't fall for the trap of chasing every grant because it is there. There is no point in building a library just because there is funding available if it is not a high priority. Previous grants may eliminate you from a short list for another grant that you really want. Most grants require matching funding of some kind. There is a real danger you will waste scarce resources on low priority projects just for the sake of getting some grant funding.
2. Keep in mind when applying for grants to build new facilities that you need to be able to find on-going resources to operate and maintain the asset; you need to think of an asset in terms of its whole of life cost.



Need more information?

www.vic.gov.au/grants
www.fundingcentre.com.au
www.rdv.vic.gov.au





Tool 2.8 Fund raising without grants

“There’s got to be a grant out there somewhere that fits that idea!”

WHY DO IT?

Many regional organisations are highly reliant on government grants. This is concerning in an environment where government revenues are coming under increased pressure. Even organisations that have received recurrent grant funding for decades (such as major festivals and events) are having to competitively tender to secure grants for 2 or 3 year periods. This tool recognises the fact that community organisations will have to get more and more creative in their fundraising ideas and factor self-reliance into their business models. Having an independent source of funding can assist your project to be sustainable, and can be used for matching funds (if applicable).

HOW IT WORKS

There are a number of fundraising alternatives to grants, all of which require a slightly different approach and some of which are a lot simpler to manage. They include donations, sponsorships, bequests, fees, sales/event activities and crowd funding.

WHAT YOU NEED TO MAKE IT HAPPEN

A fundraising strategy that outlines an organized and systematic approach to raising revenue.

STEPS TO GET YOU THERE

1. Within an organisation that requires significant fundraising, it is worthwhile setting up a dedicated fundraising sub-committee.
2. The sub-committee should prepare a fundraising strategy so that they are not all approaching the same organisations for support or exhausting the same pool of donors every year.
3. Implement your fundraising strategy drawing upon a range of funding sources so that you are not too dependent on any one form of funding should it be withdrawn.
4. Remember to acknowledge and thank your supporters at every possible opportunity.



HANDY HINT

When seeking sponsors, ask yourself ‘what is in it for them?’ and present your business case accordingly. Ensure your pitch is in a well designed document and professionally presented.



THINGS TO LOOK OUT FOR:

1. Donor fatigue
2. Do what you say you will do – honor your end of the sponsorship deal.
3. Thank your donors/sponsors publically so that their contribution is widely acknowledged.





Tool 2.8 Fund raising without grants

OTHER FUND RAISING SOURCES

OTHER GRANT SOURCES

Aside from government grants, there are many foundations and charitable trusts that offer specific grants under a variety of categories. Subscribe to some of the free fundraising databases that regularly send out information about available grants. These alternative grant sources usually have the same requirements for acquittals and reporting as government grants.

DONATIONS

Donations may be requested for any amount at any time; however, to be eligible for tax-deductible donations you must apply for Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR) status from the Australian Tax Office. This comes with a number of reporting conditions and requirements. If you are planning a donation drive for a major activity (e.g. a respite centre), you may wish to set up a foundation where some of the capital is invested and the interest is used to fund the ongoing management and maintenance. Remember donors cannot receive financial or in-kind benefit from their gift (otherwise they are classed as a sponsor).

SPONSORSHIPS

What do you have in your organisation that can be sponsored? Prepare a list and add a likely sponsorship value to each item (e.g. club house). Then set about selling the sponsorship rights. Remember sponsors are different to donors. They are businesses investing in your organisation because they can leverage a marketing gain from the activity, so they will want good brand exposure and no conflicting sponsors. It is generally easier to get sponsorship for events and specific projects rather than for capital or asset development.

BEQUESTS

If you are a long term, established organisation, you can ask stakeholders to consider remembering your organisation in their will. Many local galleries and charities are supported by bequests.

FEES

If you are a registered association, an ongoing source of revenue can be membership fees. Members will want some value in turn for this fee. This could be a newsletter or a discount to club events. Carefully check the terms of your association's charter as membership may also entitle members to voting rights.

SALES/EVENTS ACTIVITIES

There is no limit to fundraising ideas for events and activities. Because community members get tired of being asked repeatedly for money to support various causes, try and keep your ideas fresh and imaginative, changing your approach every year or two. Remember if you are conducting competitions or raffles over a certain value you must secure a permit.

CROWD FUNDING

Crowd funding is a means of fundraising on a dedicated social media platform. The concept behind crowd funding is to use the power and reach of the internet to extract a large number of small donations. The Australian crowd funding platform Pozible is focused on arts and creative projects but there are many others appearing by the day. All operate on slightly different terms and some of them only accept funds when the total target amount of your fundraising goal has been realised. The approach is to post details of your crowd funding project on the site and then ask for pledges towards a target amount. Note that most crowd funding platforms take a percentage of the funds raised as a commission.



Need more information?

www.ourcommunity.com.au

www.fundingcentre.com.au

www.pozible.com.au

www.ato.gov.au/non-profit



Tool 2.9 Branding and identity

“In the USA, you know what a town is famous for within 10 minutes of arriving there.”

WHY DO IT?

Branding develops a sense of purpose and pride for a community and identifies its personality. Good branding articulates what makes a town different. As such, it serves to create a cohesive bond and build the confidence that comes from a defined sense of identity. Strong branding is the centrepiece for tourism and economic development activities. It should be expressed in the streetscaping, so you know what the town stands for when you drive in.

HOW IT WORKS

A brand is an expression of the personality and distinguishing features of a town. It goes to the heart of its values and its spirit. The name and symbols are merely an expression of the brand, but the essence of a community brand is what residents live and experience in their daily lives.

WHAT YOU NEED TO MAKE IT HAPPEN

The critical element in branding is to have community leaders that recognise its importance. The community also needs the confidence and skills to articulate what it stands for. Good branding needs specialised input from people skilled in design.

STEPS TO GET YOU THERE

1. Build your brand pyramid.
A brand pyramid is a hierarchical framework designed to help you analyse your brand architecture. The explanations are on the left and the right hand side is where you add the information about your town.





Tool 2.9 Branding and identity

The key elements of the brand pyramid are:

- a) **Features:** What differentiates your town from others? This could be its heritage, its geographic features, climate its people or its key industries.
 - b) **Benefits:** How do the different features translate into a benefit, be it a lifestyle, economic prosperity, or other?
 - c) **Rewards:** What are the physical, economic or societal rewards from living in or visiting your town?
 - d) **Values:** What are the principles that guide the community? Generic values for all communities include inclusiveness, a sense of community (in terms of looking out for and helping each other), honesty, transparency and egalitarianism. The strength of the brand can be improved by taking this to the next level of specificity, expressing these values in a more local way.
 - e) **Brand essence:** In one sentence or phrase what does your town stand for? What makes it unique?
2. The most effective way to develop your brand pyramid is through a professionally facilitated workshop. In the workshop, work through the brand pyramid and discuss.
 3. Based on the discussion, develop a positioning line which summarises the brand essence (e.g. New Zealand's brand is 100% Pure).
 4. Identify a unique icon that captures the essence of your brand. This could be a flora or fauna object, the landscape, heritage and some other form of symbolism.
 5. Commission a graphic designer to develop the visual expression of your brand.
 6. Develop a style manual which provides guidelines and descriptions as to how the brand should be used and applied in various situations.
 7. Appoint a brand patron and a number of ambassadors.
 8. Launch your brand with a community event.
 9. Encourage community organisations to use the brand.
 10. Enlist the support of brand sponsors from local businesses who represent the values inherent in the brand.

CASE STUDY BEECHWORTH HERITAGE TOWN

The community of Beechworth has consciously positioned their town brand around its heritage values. All street signage (including that of major chains and banks) has to be in keeping with the early pioneering style of architecture and colour schemes. The result is that Beechworth has built a thriving tourism industry because people know what the brand stands for and it is a pleasant place to spend time in, whether for a holiday or just passing through.



HANDY HINT

Everyone thinks they are a brand expert! Branding is a highly specialised field requiring a mix of analytical discipline and creativity. Investment in professional advice will pay off handsomely.





Tool 2.10 Digital connections

“The web and its technologies are digital representations of everything we did before in a more private, bigger, faster and more empowering format than ever before.”

WHY DO IT?

The internet today is what electricity was in the 19th century; it opens a whole new world of opportunities and makes our community bigger than ever before. The internet and computer connectivity has a wide range of applications the key ones being:

1. It provides timeless and seamless access to the best available information on any subject in a user-friendly means at minimal cost.
2. It allows people to communicate and stay in contact with each other. With local newspapers closing down and radio and TV becoming more national it provides a media for people to stay informed about what is going on locally.
3. It is a very powerful education tool at all levels, and for rural and regional communities, gives access to high-level education material available in capital and other cities.
4. Similarly, it has the potential to make sophisticated health and diagnostic services accessible in rural areas including monitoring for the aged.
5. It provides unlimited entertainment opportunities including music, movies, games and many derivatives of the above.
6. It enables commerce, opening up the whole world for shopping and provides market outlets for regional and rural businesses, particularly those too small to deal with the larger retailers.
7. It is a means of attracting people who can work remotely to live in regional areas.
8. WiFi connectivity can encourage residents to socialize more while they work in public spaces. Free WiFi spots are a draw card for attracting visitors.

Social media has the potential to be a very powerful community-building tool. It provides a way for communities to keep in touch with each other in a busy world, no matter where they are and at the same time connect across the region.

HOW IT WORKS

The critical element of internet connectivity is speed and band width. The NBN promises to exponentially improve speed and data capacity, although this may be some way off for some communities. The other dimension of internet connectivity is to make a community internet savvy. Most people only use a small proportion of the capacity of modern computers and internet power. In particular, social media is a potent tool to connect people in small towns. Building usage capability assists small towns in many ways such as building social capital by facilitating virtual networks, as well as economic benefits such as improving business capability and market access.





Tool 2.10 Digital connections

There is a lot that a small town community can do to leverage their profile online and here is how to do it:

Facebook is a free platform where you can network with other businesses. Here you can set up a Business profile page, browse and join networks and connect with other businesses.

LinkedIn is an online network created for business professionals for the purpose of all things related to business. Professionals can apply for jobs; create business profiles and network within their chosen field. Here you can also share and upload articles and files.

Twitter has been defined as a quick status update to deliver quickly and often, to clients, colleagues and friends. This usually consists of your current plans, articles or musings you have discovered and would like to share. It can be a short descriptive sentence that links the reader to the article, image, website or blog. It can be used very successfully as a micro business tool.

Blogs are like an 'online Journal' that presents ideas, stories, articles and images to the reader from your point of view and brings traffic back to your website.

WHAT YOU NEED TO MAKE IT HAPPEN

The crucial element is to make your community aware of the critical importance of being internet connected and having everyone in the community computer literate and web savvy. Having your own local IT expert also helps. You will need access to the internet and the know how to set up your profiles on social media. There are helpful tools on the internet to guide you through this.

STEPS TO GET YOU THERE

Obviously the foundation for internet connectivity is access to a fast broadband network. To take advantage of new social and economic opportunities that the internet provides, it is important to have reliable access. If you don't, identify people who are computer technology savvy in your community and work with the aim of developing improved access. A good case could be made for transitioning Loddon Mallee towns on the basis of remoteness and social disadvantage.

The following are just some examples of how the internet can be applied to benefit small communities and for community building:

1. Build a town website with history of the town, details of its identity and branding, directories of services and amenities, notice boards, buy, swap or sell classifieds, coming events etc, announcements etc.
2. Develop social media tools such as twitter, Facebook and blogs (see next tool).





Tool 2.10 Digital connections

STEPS TO GET YOU THERE

3. Develop a free WiFi connection within the town.
This will require funding both to develop and ongoing running costs.
4. Introduce a series of workshops to train older community members on navigating the web from beginners, intermediate, advanced and for businesses.
5. Make available free computer and internet services in libraries or community houses.
6. Use internet tools to run surveys. There are some powerful survey tools which can be purchased at a relatively low cost (e.g. SurveyMonkey) and used to canvas very specific issues or as a tool to get input into community planning.
7. Use Twitter to notify residents about events in the region this weekend
– a farmers market date or a change to the sporting fixture.



THINGS TO LOOK OUT FOR:

1. Although social media is a powerful tool it can equally be destructive and divisive.
2. Websites require time for management – make sure you have a nominated webmaster to regularly update your site.

CASE STUDY NEWSTEAD VICTORIA

Newstead is a good example of how the internet has been embraced and used as a tool for community building and economic development. As part of the community planning process the residents recognised the critical importance of the internet and computer literacy. Being close to Castlemaine and Bendigo, and accessible to Melbourne, the town has attracted professional people who can work remotely whilst enjoying the lifestyle. However, fast and reliable internet is critical in attracting these people.

The town has connected free WiFi within the CBD area for the benefit of locals and visitors. A person versed in the internet and with connections in the field happily drove this project. Funds were raised to buy the equipment and an internet provider now offers the service free. This has encouraged locals to work out of the local café, pub or library, which has added a social element to the town.

The town also actively uses the internet as an information source, to connect people and to engage the community in planning and project implementation. Various projects including the community garden have a website. It is a way of engaging special interest subsets of the community.



Need more information?

www.newstead.vic.au
www.bendigoadvertiser.com.au

Facebook: www.facebook.com/business/buildmashable.com/guidebook/facebook

Twitter: business.twitter.com

LinkedIn: mashable.com/2012/05/23/linkedin-beginners





3. Liveability Enhancement Tools

As highlighted in the previous categories of tools, community strength is produced through the inexorable link between economic activity and liveability. This section outlines a number of tools to enhance the liveability of a town.

Importantly, having a liveable town is a critical element in attracting and retaining people. Moreover, highly liveable towns are inviting places for visitors, which contributes to economic prosperity because they spend money in the town.

The canvas of liveability is the way the town looks. Included in this section is a tool on building townscapes. An attractive streetscape makes people feel good about themselves and encourages them to socialise and connect with each other, which itself is an important dimension of community strength.

Most towns in the Loddon Mallee have very strong sporting clubs which is the glue that holds these towns together. Unfortunately the downside of this is that there is not much to do for people that aren't sporting inclined. Accordingly we have included tools for developing festivals and events and community gardens. We've also included some hints on improving the viability of sporting facilities.

Critical to community building is motivating and retaining youth and capturing their energy and ideas, so a tool on this important area is included.





Tool 3.1 Townscapes

“When you drive into a town you can get a feel for the spirit of the place by the way that its main street looks. Some towns you feel like stopping in and others you just want to drive through fast.”

WHY DO IT

The strength of a community is to a large extent judged by the appearance of their town. An attractive and functional streetscape improves quality of life for residents and makes them feel good about the town. It also has an economic benefit by attracting visitors and passers-by. Travellers are more likely to stop in a town that looks attractive and welcoming, stay longer and therefore spend money.

HOW IT WORKS

- Responsibility for the built assets lies with the Council, however, the local community can have an input by in the first instance encouraging Council to invest in the assets (having identified what is really needed) and then influencing the values, design and style.
- It is important that the streetscape design is not only functional and attractive, but also reflects the values, personality and unique or defining characteristics of the town. The streetscape provides a stage on which the community can express who it is and what it stands for.

WHAT YOU NEED TO MAKE IT HAPPEN

The critical element is a group of passionate people who recognise the importance of an attractive streetscape in contributing to liveability and community spirit. It also requires an element of creativity, which ideally exists within a community, but if not can be brought in.

STEPS TO GET YOU THERE

1. Commonly the need for a streetscape project comes out of the community or council plan.
2. It is useful to form a task force to drive the streetscaping project. It is important have cross-section of community representatives, particularly those with some creative flair. Is strongly recommended that a Council representative be invited to be on the task force.
3. Because the streetscape is an expression of what the town stands for, it is important to involve people in the creative process. Creative workshops are a good way to collect ideas for themes and interpretative elements. Competitions and community ‘think tanks’ are also good idea generators.





Tool 3.1 Townscapes

STEPS TO GET YOU THERE

4. The theme should reflect the unique characteristics or defining features of a town. These may be built around such things as:
 - a. The history (e.g. the gold rush, Ned Kelly, Indigenous heritage).
 - b. The geography (e.g. a river, lake or mountain range).
 - c. The economy (a town may be known for particular product e.g. Batlow for apples, Young for cherries, Koondrook for timber, Rockhampton for beef).
 - d. Famous people from the town (e.g. Robert Menzies, Jeparit).
5. It is important that the agreed theme is reflected through strong and visually capturing interpretation including signage, street art, sculpture and landscaping. Interpretation is a skilled art form and its important to commission people with the right skills. These people often command large fees but having the right person is worth the investment. The old adage “you get what you pay for” applies here.
6. Where possible local artists, and trades should be employed as a further expression of the towns’ input.
7. It is critically important to get local businesses engaged in the process so they are empathetic in the way they present their own premises. Echuca is a good example of this.
8. Ideally, part of the development of the interpretive process should be the creation of the style manual that outlines suggested colour schemes, designs and expressions.
9. The ambience of the design is also important. Provision for alfresco dining facilities for example goes long way towards making a town feel vibrant.
10. The functionality is also critical. It must be accessible for disabled people and with adequate public toilet facilities. Seating and places for people to gather and talk also adds to ambience.
11. A town should also be visitor friendly and welcoming. Informational signage including details of local events and attractions and ideally visitor information centres are important. Parallel parking for caravans and Recreational Vehicles (RVs) should be provided in towns on major touring routes.
12. The town entry and exit will leave a lasting impression on people passing through, both positive and negative. (In France every market town has a standardized sign showing the days their farmers market operates, which can draw visitors back.)
13. The garden landscaping is also another critical element. The design needs to be appropriate to theme, respectful of the climate and easy to maintain. Again an investment in professional garden design will pay off.
14. Town beautification is a critical element in streetscaping. Local Tidy Town campaigns, clean up days and working bees are important. However, if it has been over five years since your town won the Tidy Town competition, remove the sign.



HANDY HINT

New arrivals to the town can add special flavor to the streetscape. St Kilda’s Russian community congregate at the giant chess set in the local gardens, making it an important meeting point and part of the local street character.





Tool 3.1 Townscapes



THINGS TO LOOK OUT FOR:

As with any creative process there are always differences of opinion.

Furthermore, the more creative the concept the greater potential there is for conflict.

An effective streetscape will invariably involve a degree of boldness and so it could be divisive. Iconic streetscapes such as the Opera House (Sydney), the Arts Centre spire and Federation Square (Melbourne) were controversial projects at the time but have proven to be very powerful expressions, which define an area. It is important to manage any potential conflicts carefully but especially important to invest in professional advice.

CASE STUDY BARWON HEADS PUBLIC ART

The late artist Jan Mitchell erected her first bollard sculptures in Barwon Heads in 1995 with the help of two other local artists as a part of the 'artist in schools' project. The bollards are recycled pier pylons that have been transformed into colourful and amusing characters. They are an important part of the Barwon Heads townscape as they stand over two metres high and have a strong presence throughout the town streetscape.

The bright bollards designate a route for the local children from the primary school, through the streets to the bike path, park and playground. The timber is from reclaimed pier pylons strengthening their connection and brand relevance to this coastal community. The bollards are a pivotal part of the town's personality and engender great pride in its residents. They add to the tourism experience of visitors as they walk through town examining them.

While the project started in Barwon Heads and is strongly associated with the town's brand, Jan created more than 111 bollards in Geelong which extend along the Eastern Beach water front. These bollards tell the stories of the Geelong community through characterisations of local identities throughout history.



Need more information?

www.heritageaustralia.com.au/search

kab.org.au/tidy-towns

www.rdv.vic.gov.au/community-programs/putting-locals-first





Tool 3.2 Festivals and Events

“We worked hard to get 10,000 people into town for our event, yet they couldn’t even buy a coffee when they got here.”

WHY DO IT

- Festivals and events serve a dual purpose of providing entertainment and acting as an economic driver.
- Both sporting events and cultural events present opportunities to showcase your town and the wider region to visitors.
- Events expose regional communities to the types of experiences that are not readily available in remote communities e.g. a music performance from a world class artist; the opportunity to meet a sporting star or a renowned writer; or the chance to participate in a culinary master class.
- Festivals and events are a great way to bridge the rural/urban divide, allowing us to engage with people from other parts of Australia or the world, hear their views on life, and be entertained.

HOW IT WORKS

This depends on the event, but put simply, think of your town as the stage on which a performance is held. You are essentially the venue, infrastructure, accommodation and catering for the activity.

WHAT YOU NEED TO MAKE IT HAPPEN

- A large pool of volunteers
- Adequate marketing budget to promote the event
- A unique concept that matches the brand identity of your town e.g. The Quambatook Tractor Pull fits with the reputation of the town for broad acre grain production.

STEPS TO GET YOU THERE

1. Develop your idea for a festival/event into a proper business case with fully costed business plan.
2. Refer to the tools on Community Advantage ([1.4](#)) and Branding and Identity ([2.9](#)).
3. Explore options for seed funding via appropriate government tourism, arts or health bodies.
4. Develop a committee of management or association.
5. Ensure the local retailers are ready to be taken on the journey with you. To gain any significant economic benefit, they will need to adjust their product/service offering during the event to match changed demand.



HANDY HINT

Select the time of year for your event carefully. The Clunes Booktown Festival runs when autumn leaves look most beautiful in the historic streetscape.





Tool 3.2 Festivals and Events



THINGS TO LOOK OUT FOR:

1. Events themselves are not generally large profit drivers. They can however be an economic driver for the town if the local business community is committed and willing to have a go and leverage the opportunity. All too often event organizers claim that local retailers are not prepared, which both limits their business growth and spoils the experience of the event patron.
2. Events incur a great deal of cost to deliver – do your calculations carefully to ensure you have adequate insurance, power, security and man power.
3. The larger the event, the more volunteers. Thank them and recognise their efforts so that they enjoy the experience and return next year.
4. Check the regional and state calendar to make sure your event does not clash with others nearby or if it could attract the same cohort to elsewhere in the state for another event.

CASE STUDY CLUNES BOOK TOWN FESTIVAL

The town of Clunes in Hepburn Shire hosts the Clunes Booktown Festival every May. It attracts over 18,000 people for a weekend of book sales, writers programs and street entertainment. The festival strongly cements Clunes' branding and identify which has grown around its status as a beautiful, historic book lovers destination. Clunes is one of only 17 international book towns in the world, as endorsed by the International Organisation of Book Towns.

The benefits of the festival flow beyond Clunes alone to neighbouring towns such as Newstead, which hosts its complementary Short Story Tattoo festival on the same weekend, and the Hepburn Springs Dayesford area which delivers accommodation overflow.

The festival has been the work of local progress group Clever Clunes who have been very clever indeed in leveraging their branding of the town around the book story for both social and economic benefit of residents. Leveraging its strong book brand identity, Clunes also hosts a bi-weekly writers event called Sunday Selection which draws regular visitors ensuring the brand imagery is sustained year round. The specialist book retailers that underpin the local retail economy remain viable thanks to this support.



Need more information?

www.booktown.clunes.org

www.tourism.vic.gov.au

www.jpmusicfestival.com (an American site with an excellent step-by-step guide to starting a music festival)





Tool 3.3 Community gardens

“They say gardening is good for the soul – it’s been good for the heart and soul of our whole community.”

WHY DO IT

Like many of these tools, community gardening has multiple social, liveability, economic and health benefits including:

- Healthy outdoor activity
- Connecting people in the community who otherwise would not meet
- Passing a great life skill onto children
- Creating a beautiful outdoor space for all residents to enjoy
- Producing affordable, healthy food
- Bridging cultures and ages
- Fostering community pride
- Reducing crime (by knowing your neighbours a little better and looking out for them).

HOW IT WORKS

- A common area of land is allocated for a garden that is maintained and managed by the community – it can be for productive vegetable gardening or simply a place of natural beauty for contemplation. In some towns it transforms vacant land that is neglected or unsightly.
- Local gardeners who do not have a home garden can apply to have their own plot or can simply participate by gardening in communal areas.
- Plot holders are usually charged an annual fee to cover water, power, insurance and other administration.
- Most community gardens have some kind of produce exchange or means of distributing the flowers and vegetables grown.

WHAT YOU NEED TO MAKE IT HAPPEN

- An affordable, convenient site with adequate water, drainage and sunlight (vegetables and some flowers require at least five hours sun per day).
- An agreed purpose for the garden e.g. is it to foster healthy eating by vegetable growing, or is it for town beautification?
- Some seed funding to develop the infrastructure
- An ongoing management structure.



HANDY HINT

Be sure to include a BBQ or pizza oven and seating in your design to encourage social activity.





Tool 3.3 Community gardens

STEPS TO GET YOU THERE

Just about everything you need to know about community gardens can be found on the internet with some very helpful step-by-step guides available (see following links). These guides explain the following steps in much more detail:

1. Promote the idea and canvass interest in the community.
2. Find a location with suitable sunlight, water and tenure.
3. Form a committee to agree the function and purpose of the garden (e.g. Will there be personal plots or will it all be communal?). This will determine the type of design elements you need.
4. Raise the funds for initial infrastructure to be constructed.
5. Plan the general layout and design.
6. Establish the 'codes of conduct' for participation.
7. Establish a committee of management for ongoing administration.



THINGS TO LOOK OUT FOR:

1. Choose a site with adequate water or a roof for collection of tank water – it is surprising how much water vegetable gardens consume.
2. To avoid conflict, establish clear policies at the outset about potentially divisive issues such as 'organic' or 'pesticide free' status.
3. Have all participants acknowledge a code of conduct.
4. Clarify policy around how the produce from shared areas of production will be distributed.

CASE STUDY NEWSTEAD COMMUNITY GARDEN

Newstead Community garden was a product of an idea generated at the Newstead 2021 Community Summit (inspired by Kevin Rudd's national summit). It is located on land donated by a church and designed around permaculture principles. The group started with eight community plots of herbs and decorative plants and 12 individual plots for local town gardeners to grow vegetables, with room to expand these as interest developed. Funding was secured for a professional landscape designer who devised the layout to maximise the views of the church and adjacent established trees. A local artist was commissioned to provide a feature sculpture.

A recreational area is part of the design and all community members are free to wander in and sit in the space. There is also a wood-fired pizza oven at which the keen gardeners meet for a monthly get together to socialise and share gardening tips. The gardening group maintains a website with seasonal tips and facilitates a community produce exchange in the main street over morning tea one Saturday each month. It is a great connecting forum for all those in the community with a common interest in food and the production of it.



Need more information?

www.cultivatingcommunity.org.au

www.communitygarden.org.au

www.sustainable.unimelb.edu.au

(This site has a wonderful step-by-step guide to starting a community garden.)

newsteadgarden.wordpress.com





Tool 3.4 Youth Activity

“The more we increase the active participation and partnership with young people, the better we serve them... And the more comprehensively we work with them as service partners, the more we increase our public value to the entire community.” **Carmen Martinez, Diplomat**

WHY DO IT

- Partaking in youth activities helps young people develop important social skills and increase levels of independence.
- As regional towns face issues associated with ageing populations, it is important that youth are not neglected. By engaging young people in local activities, towns are more likely to sustain a fresh and lively ambience.
- Youth who have nothing to do are more likely to get into trouble. By creating a more attractive environment, younger generations will have a greater incentive to remain working and living in their home towns.
- Small towns are driven by volunteers. It is important to create a culture of volunteerism in youth at an early age.

HOW IT WORKS

- Establishing organisations, such as youth groups, provides opportunities for teenagers, aged 14-18, to participate in age-appropriate, community recreational activities.
- Local government and community groups provide youth organisations with drug, alcohol and smoke-free venues that are supervised and safe.
- In the case of the Victorian funded youth development program, FReeZA, affordable and accessible music and cultural events are held in safe venues for young people. Through networking with FReeZA communities around the state, young people get the skills they need to organise their own live events. It also provides information, advice and training to young people who wish to develop their careers.
- The Charlton Driver Education Centre is another example of a youth program that offers young people pre-driver education in the Charlton area. They are provided with a 1.7km long road, complete with traffic lights, roundabout and signs, and four Toyota Corolla vehicles. The main aim of the program is to provide 15-16 year old students a “solid foundation” on which to build their driving experience.
- Youth Councils ([Tool 2.5](#)).





Tool 3.4 Youth Activity

WHAT YOU NEED TO MAKE IT HAPPEN

- Use of town facilities such as town hall, school or sporting club.
- Provision of the necessary tools required for skills development, such as vehicles or computers.
- Engaging, supportive and enthusiastic group leaders/volunteers.
- Provision of refreshments.

STEPS TO GET YOU THERE

1. Establish a local committee (made up of local young people where possible).
2. Identify the skill needs of the committee and organize training opportunities.
3. Oversee the delivery of music, cultural, educational and sporting events.
4. Identify options and pathways for future participation of young people within their community.



THINGS TO LOOK OUT FOR:

1. Activities need to be all inclusive.
2. Activities need to cater for different skills and interests.
3. Transport and food.



HANDY HINT

Young people need to be involved at every step of the organisation of events for their peers.

CASE STUDY MUSIC IN THE STICKS, MACEDON RANGES SHIRE COUNCIL

Music in the Sticks (MITS) is part of the FReeZA program. MITS works with 10-12 members each week to run a range of events for young people aged 13-18, living in the Macedon Ranges area. Music In the Sticks aims to provide a safe environment for the many local bands to show off their stuff and for local young people to have a non-sports based social outlet. Events include band nights, DJ events, skate competitions, open mic nights, outdoor pool events and festivals. They are always open to a wide range of music and styles and like to feature local acts at most of the events they host. They meet at the Woodend Community Centre once a week for two hours, and provide food and drinks.



Need more information?

www.freeza.vic.gov.au

www.charlton.vic.au/drivertraining





Tool 3.5 Viable Sporting Facilities

“Sport is the glue that holds small towns together.”

WHY DO IT

- Team sport is an important part of life in regional Australia. It contributes to community identity, sense of place, social interaction and good health.
- In a region that has suffered a combination of drought and low farm incomes, sport provides a relatively affordable form of recreation and social engagement.
- As small towns decline in size, it is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain sports clubs and facilities and find enough volunteers to run the committees.
- Economies of scale in facility provision could be a viable solution to the problem of supporting and maintaining existing local sports clubs.
- Integrated community facilities could be the solution to protecting these clubs that create healthy communities, support social inclusion and enhance the wellbeing of local residents.

HOW IT WORKS

- Where appropriate, two or more clubs can share a sport or recreation facility. The idea is to broaden access to the facility, maximise usage and apportion operating costs to get the best possible value from the facility.
- This could involve neighbouring communities too, to avoid regional duplication.
- Most city complexes are moving to this model too, e.g. Melbourne Sports & Aquatic Centre (MSAC).

WHAT YOU NEED TO MAKE IT HAPPEN

- Community involvement is required at all levels in planning, design and management of new facilities and/or sporting programs.
- Comprehensive management agreements for shared use facilities detailing all cost sharing, legal and access arrangements.
- The key elements of a successful partnership are flexibility, trust, and open communication and a spirit of co-operation.
- Strong leadership, commitment, skills and expertise, and diverse funding sources are required to achieve projects of this scale.





Tool 3.5 Viable Sporting Facilities

STEPS TO GET YOU THERE

1. Identify the potential partners for the sport and recreation facility (e.g. schools, sports associations, dance and exercise clubs, community health centres, etc.)
2. Integrate local area planning.
3. Collaborative resourcing.
4. Consolidate neighbourhood facilities and precincts.



THINGS TO LOOK OUT FOR:

1. Shared facilities should be centrally located to the catchment population.
2. Facilities need to provide safe and convenient access.
3. Facilities need to be flexible in design so as to accommodate a range of activities.
4. Facilities need to provide adequate administration and storage areas.

CASE STUDY SEA LAKE AND DISTRICT COMMUNITY CENTRE

The Sea Lake and District Community Centre was built in response to a decline in the number of local sporting activities in the district. It had become increasingly evident that the poor conditions of the community facilities in Sea Lake were beginning to impact the number of activities taking place in the town and participant numbers were declining. The facilities did not meet accessibility, health, safety, sustainability and building code regulations. Instead of addressing the issues facing each individual facility, it was decided that the development of a multi-purpose, multi-community centre would bring multi-benefits.

The resulting Sea Lake and District Community Centre consists of the following:

Sports ground – AFL & Cricket (turf wicket)	Indoor Stadium – 3 courts
Netball Facilities – 2 courts	Squash Facilities – 2 Courts
Tennis Courts – 2 Hard courts, 6 grass courts	

The centre is the home to a number of sporting organisations including the merged Sea Lake Nandaly Tigers Football Netball Club, the Sea Lake Tennis Club, the Sea Lake Squash Club and the Sea Lake Night Netball Association. The local high school also makes extensive use of the facility during school semester.

By achieving economies of scale in facility provision, the community of Sea Lake and its surrounds has been able to breathe new life into the local sporting community.



Need more information?

sealake.vic.au/sport/venues/complex



(03) 5070 2106





Tool 3.6 Arts & Culture

“Art washes away from the soul the dust of everyday life.”

Pablo Picasso, Artist

WHY DO IT

There is a wide body of literature that supports the many benefits of arts and culture in communities including social, economic and well-being benefits such as:

- Fostering creative thinking and entrepreneurship
- Attracting creative professionals to live in the region
- Expanding our horizons and opening us to new experiences
- Educating us about ourselves and where we fit in the world
- Being a catalyst for social inclusion
- Assisting in rebuilding communities after times of crisis
- Reducing youth delinquency
- Adding richness to our living environment.

HOW IT WORKS

Creating an atmosphere conducive to the arts can be challenging in communities where limited organized arts and culture activity currently exists. In towns where social activity revolves around sport, those who are more creatively inclined can feel quite alienated and may need encouragement to seek out others with such interests.

Quite often a new resident in town can bring with them an artistic interest that can be transferred and shared with others.

WHAT YOU NEED TO MAKE IT HAPPEN

An open mind!

STEPS TO GET YOU THERE

Effecting cultural change is not a prescriptive ‘step by step’ process. A culture of artistic appreciation is something that evolves organically, over time with the right stimulus and resources.

A good starting point would be a quick glance through your community skills register to identify community members with an interest or skill in the arts. The skills register may help connect individuals with common interests who may wish to form a visual or performing arts group to either create or appreciate art together and share ideas. A film appreciation group or book club costs very little to set up.

Another useful approach is to create a physical presence for artistic activity in your community (see case study below). This may be as simple as transforming an unused space into a communal art and craft space, artists studios or a gallery and music performance space.



HANDY HINT

Regional Arts Victoria is a great starting point for advice on enhancing community creativity or getting your arts and culture project started:

www.rav.net.au





Tool 3.6 Arts & Culture



THINGS TO LOOK OUT FOR:

1. Where there is art, there will always be differences of opinion. Good governance is particularly important in arts organisations including having a charter or constitution that outlines the artistic principles and the objectives of the organisation.
2. Certain types of artistic expression can be confronting. It is important to warn community members if an exhibition or performance contains confronting language or images.

CASE STUDY MALLEE UP IN LIGHTS, OUYEN

Ouyen's Roxy Theatre is undergoing a transformation into a creative hub of public art which is to be a local expression of community creativity. The project includes building a major light installation artwork and structure, landscaping and redesign, implementation of a functional outdoor room and community meeting and a creative space that will stimulate arts activity and events.

"The Mallee Up In Lights" project has two very clear objectives: to promote community wellbeing; and to transform an under-utilised space into an inspirational creative space that will help foster a greater appreciation of arts in the community.



Need more information?

www.arts.vic.gov.au

www.rav.net.au

www.princeton.edu



Regional Arts Victoria 1800 819 803





4. **Economic** Development Tools

Economic development is critical to transitioning towns.

Indeed one of the key change drivers for transitioning towns in the Loddon Mallee region is the structural adjustment of the agricultural sector and its flow-on impact on populations.

This section of the toolbox includes some ideas on new farming models which are not intended to be prescriptive, but rather stimulate fresh thinking to help farming communities to find models that could work for them.

The section also includes tools to reenergize and build resilience into the local economy, including farmers markets, buy-local programs, and community-owned enterprises, including community-owned banks.

The section also includes a tool on identifying and developing tourism collateral.





Tool 4.1 Farmers Market

“When they first talked about a farmers market I thought it would harm my retail business but the opposite happened. It has given the town a real buzz.”

WHY DO IT

- It provides an alternative outlet for small, local food and craft producers.
- Allows the community to enjoy local fare and develop pride in it.
- The economic multiplier effect is high as produce is value-added and consumed locally.
- Money spent at the market stays in the community.
- On market days more people visit town and spend in local shops.
- Creates a demand for local produce that can lead to it being stocked by local retailers.
- Provides a vehicle for fundraising for service groups (e.g. entry donation or sausage sizzle)
- It provides an important social touch point for the community to connect.

HOW IT WORKS

- It is usually a grassroots movement driven by local producers to sell excess produce.
- Markets tend to be held in show grounds, car parks, street malls or public parks on a specific day each month.
- Local farmers and artisan producers set up stalls to sell their goods directly to the public.
- With an accredited market, sellers need to prove various criteria e.g. that they produced the product within a 50km radius.
- Stallholders pay a fee for their site, which pays for the marketing, insurance and administration costs.

WHAT YOU NEED TO MAKE IT HAPPEN

- A group of local producers who are committed to make it work.
- An adequate supply of consumer-ready produce to make it an event.
- Catchment area of sufficient shoppers to make it worthwhile for the producers.
- A suitable site with toilets, parking, power and proximity to the town's retail offering.

STEPS TO GET YOU THERE

1. A group of people who have produce to sell, canvass the idea with council.
2. A feasibility study is done to ascertain if there are enough producers and consumers in the area to make it worthwhile.
3. A choice has to be made as to whether to be an accredited farmers market or a more general market.



HANDY HINT

Choose a location that is highly visible and accessible to passers-by.

A gold coin donation for entry can raise revenue for the administration or for community groups who provide volunteers to clean up.





Tool 4.1 Farmers Market

STEPS TO GET YOU THERE

4. A suitable site needs to be found.
5. The entity needs to be established (AFMA recommends a not-for-profit incorporated community association).
6. Seed funding is sourced (try government, agribusiness networks, or community organizations for cash or in-kind support).
7. Volunteers will be required to prepare each market. These could come from local service clubs.
8. Promotion of the event will be needed in all local media and with street and highway signs.



THINGS TO LOOK OUT FOR:

1. It is important to have a mix of produce, with no more than two stalls selling similar products.
2. It will take time to build up shoppers – it is important to manage the expectations of the stallholders in this regard.
3. Check the local calendar when choosing the dates in order to avoid clashes with other regular regional events.

CASE STUDY WILLUNGA FARMERS MARKET, SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Willunga is a small town situated in the McLaren Vale wine region one hour south of Adelaide. The market was established in 2001 by a group of boutique producers seeking to sell quality artisan food products to local consumers. A meeting was held with Zannie Flanagan (Adelaide food legend) to test the idea and explain how it worked. A workshop of interested parties was convened and a committee formed. After months of planning, a market manager was appointed and the first market was held in February 2002 in the local hotel car park with 18 stalls.

The market grew with increases in both stallholders and customers. During this time, the committee went through an enormous learning curve while trying new ideas. The market soon outgrew its original site and moved to a new site in the town square. A membership and sponsorship drive generated the resources to establish a permanent office, introduce an events calendar (including celebratory chef visits and cooking demonstrations), and an awards program.

The market has not only provided an outlet for local produce and an opportunity for locals to support them, it has had flow-on economic impacts to the community. Shopkeepers report that the market has reenergized their businesses - shops that were once empty are now busy. The market has also created a demand for local produce in the permanent retail outlets e.g. the local butcher now stocks local meat, prompted by shopper demand.



Need more information?

Victorian Farmers Markets Association www.vicfarmersmarkets.org.au
 Australian Farmers Market Association www.farmersmarkets.org.au



Victorian Farmers Markets Association 03 9416 2090
 Murrabit Country Market 03 5457 2205 (A Loddon Mallee success story).





Tool 4.2 Building a Tourism Culture

“One tourism attraction on its own doesn’t make a product. You have to create a total visitor experience where you guide the visitor through a whole regional itinerary with customer service levels appropriate to the situation.”

WHY DO IT

The benefits of tourism to small local communities are well understood. Tourism adds value in both an economic and social sense. Tourism is a means of bringing new money into the town, which has a multiplier effect as it is re-spent. This in turn creates jobs and spawns the development of new businesses including transport, construction and retail.

In many areas tourism has stemmed the drift of workers to cities and thereby maintained the critical mass of population required to support life services, which underpins liveability.

Tourism has the potential to support new and expanded community facilities and infrastructure which benefit the community and which could not be normally supported by smaller communities. Tourism also broadens the community outlook and worldliness and increases community pride.

Tourism increases awareness of the need for conservation of cultural heritage assets and creates economic resources and business case to invest in them. In the same vein, tourism can contribute to environmental sustainability by creating awareness of the need to conserve natural resources.

HOW IT WORKS

The starting point for building tourism collateral is to define the tourism offering and visitor experience. This requires various operators to work closely together to develop the product and market it to the prime target markets.

WHAT YOU NEED TO MAKE IT HAPPEN

The foundation for a healthy tourism industry is to have a complete tourist product offering. There has to be compelling reason for people to want to visit the area. There is a tendency by small towns to overestimate the appeal of their one hero product and under deliver on the customer service experience. The tourism offer does not need to be sophisticated but it does need to be well presented and marketed. As the following case study on Loddon tourism indicates, a highly effective tourist product can be built from very basic ingredients with a bit of imagination. Increasingly, tourists are seeking authenticity; they relish the opportunity to meet local people and hear about their lives.

The second critical element for an effective tourism product is a cohesive group of tourist operators who work closely together to cross-market their product and create a culture of continuous improvement.





Tool 4.2 Building a Tourism Culture

STEPS TO GET YOU THERE

1. **Form a tourism committee** or leadership group comprising the main tourist operators in the area. It is important that this group works closely with the regional tourism organisation.
2. **Conduct a tourism stocktake.** This involves auditing the amenities, services and natural attractions that can form a tourism product. Over the page there is a comprehensive product and infrastructure checklist which has been developed by Tourism Victoria and which can be accessed from its website. It is suggested that a task force be formed to conduct the audit and compile the findings.
3. **Define the visitor experience.** This involves reviewing the results of the stocktake to scope out how these elements can be put together to define a unique visitor experience that will give the area destination status.
4. **Develop an identity** and brand for the tourist product linked to the visitor experience. This should be based on the town's identity. ([See Tool Branding and Identity 2.9](#)).
5. **Conduct research** to profile the prime target audiences, their needs and expectations. The prime target audiences are defined by where visitors come from, the prime motivation for visiting and the demographic and their socio-economic profile. Tourism Victoria conducts detailed research covering most regions that can be a good starting point. If resources are available it is worthwhile to commission professional research, but in the absence of funding can be done locally by the tourism operators. For example a brief questionnaire can be circulated via each of the tourist outlets including the visitors centre. Exit interviews, visitors' books and focus groups are also effective research tools.
6. **Develop a marketing strategy** appropriate to the prime target audiences and the resources available. Logically they should be built on the back of, and in close cooperation the regional tourism marketing body.
7. **Implement a strategy to build capability and customer service culture.** In the environment where people travel regularly (and because of the influence of the internet) travellers have high expectations. Small country towns often let themselves down through poor product presentation and customer service. Sophisticated travellers judge a tourist product by the quality of the coffee and food and the level of customer service. Encouraging businesses to employ the right people and investing in ongoing training and capability building is essential. With social media good and bad news travels widely and quickly.



HANDY HINT

Annual awards for tourism excellence are a powerful way to encourage and celebrate excellence, build local pride and make locals effective ambassadors for the tourism product.





Tool 4.2 Building a Tourism Culture

PRODUCT AND INFRASTRUCTURE CHECKLIST

	Within my town	Within 30 min drive	Within 1 hr drive	Comment
Access & Transport Services	Air			
	Road			
	Rail			
	Sea & waterway			
	Type & location			
	Annual & peak patronage			
	Service routes/ frequency			
	Coach services/terminals			
	Rail services/ railway stations			
	Air services/ airports			
	Taxi services			
	Courtesy coaches			
Natural Attractions	Beaches			
	Rivers and creeks			
	Lakes and lagoons			
	National and State Parks, Forests and Reserves			
	Wilderness areas			
	Scenic lookouts			
	Walking trails			
	Mountains			
	Caves			
	Native fauna			
	Flora			
	Type of facility			
	Location & accessibility			
	Annual visitation			





Tool 4.2 Building a Tourism Culture

PRODUCT AND INFRASTRUCTURE CHECKLIST

	Within my town	Within 30 min drive	Within 1 hr drive	Comment
HERITAGE				
Museums				
Buildings				
Historic precincts & events				
WINERIES				
Manufacturing/processing				
Demonstrations/inspections/tours				
RECREATION FACILITIES				
Sports facilities				
Golf courses				
Swimming pools				
Walking/cycle trails				
Recreational fishing				
Off-road facilities				
TOURS AND CRUISES				
Half day tours				
Full day tours				
Extended tours				
Special interest				
Type of service and facility				
Tour route/area of operation				
Operational constraints				





Tool 4.2 Building a Tourism Culture

PRODUCT AND INFRASTRUCTURE CHECKLIST

	Within my town	Within 30 min drive	Within 1 hr drive	Comment
Accommodation	Resorts			
	Hotels			
	Motels			
	Units/Flats			
	Holiday homes			
	Guests houses			
	Hostels			
	Universities / colleges			
	Caravan parks			
	Camp grounds			
	Host farms			
	Bed & breakfast homestay			
	House boats			
	Hospitality Services	Conference venues		
Restaurants				
Coffee shops/Cafés				
Fast food outlets				
Bars				
Licensed clubs/Nightclubs				
Courtesy coaches				





Tool 4.2 Building a Tourism Culture

PRODUCT AND INFRASTRUCTURE CHECKLIST

	Within my town	Within 30 min drive	Within 1 hr drive	Comment
Entertainment	Live theatre			
	Cinemas			
	Club entertainment			
	Gaming			
	Bars			
	Licensed clubs/Nightclubs			
	Live theatre/music			
Youth clubs				
Special Events & Festivals	Sporting			
	Arts culture			
	Heritage			
	Ethnic			
Cultural Product	Art galleries			
	Exhibitions			
	Performing arts and music			
	Regional food and wine			
	Heritage			
	Botanical gardens			
	Aboriginal			
Special Interest	Bird watching			
	Wildflower tours			
	Photography			
	Educational study tours			
	Heritage			
	Botanical gardens			
	Aboriginal			





Tool 4.2 Building a Tourism Culture

PRODUCT AND INFRASTRUCTURE CHECKLIST

	Within my town	Within 30 min drive	Within 1 hr drive	Comment
Adventure Activities	Off road recreation			
	Climbing/abseiling			
	Bungee jumping			
	White water rafting/canoeing			
	Aerial			
	Horse riding			
Visitor Information Services	Exhibitions			
	Cottage industry			
	Markets			
	Accredited Visitor Information Centres (VICs)			
	Non-accredited V.I.C.s			
	Signage			
Support Services	Public toilets			
	Public showers			
	Laundromats			
	Newsagencies			
	Banks/ATMs			
	Eftpos			
	Medical services			
	Vehicle breakdown services			
	Mobile phone services			
	Post offices			
Education and Training	Hospitality skills			
	Customer service			
	Interpersonal skills			
	Communication			
	Small business management			
	Small business marketing			



Tool 4.2 Building a Tourism Culture



THINGS TO LOOK OUT FOR:

It is critical that skilled and knowledgeable people who can empathise with the tourists run the Visitor Information Centre. Good operators with a customer service outlook can contribute greatly to selling the local product. The wrong personality can do much damage.

CASE STUDY LODDON VALLEY TOURS

Great ideas for destination development don't always require huge investment. Some of the most innovative approaches grow out of adversity and the need to count the pennies.

Loddon Shire Council, about an hour from Bendigo in Victoria's north-west, is not a mainstream tourism area by normal measure, but the stories, the characters and the enterprise in some of the towns is the stuff that many city people love to hear.

The small towns of Wedderburn, Inglewood, Tarnagulla and Bridgewater have a gold heritage, while Pyramid Hill and Boort have grown-up on the prosperity that irrigation brought to rural Australia. There's also a significant Indigenous heritage.

Former tourism operator, Robyn Vella, began Loddon Valley Tours several years ago as a way to attract greater visitation to her family's Eucalyptus distillery in Wedderburn. She soon found that her groups were as much interested in the lifestyle of the local area as they were in gold and heritage. For urban-based people it was often their first real contact with small rural communities and they were fascinated to learn how the locals lived, worked and coped with trauma such as prolonged drought.

The simple tourism based tours grew into overnight visits, which included extended drives through the farming district. Guests arrange their own charter bus and stay at the town's only motel. With almost no marketing budget to spread the word, Robyn uses her best assets to promote the tours – her personality and unbounded enthusiasm. She regularly visits Melbourne's Probus clubs to provide their members with a free talk on 'surviving life in a country town'. The ability to grow this tourist initiative is limited by shortage of accommodation and tourist-friendly eating and entertainment facilities.



Need more information?

www.tourismexcellence.com.au

www.loddon.vic.gov.au

www.visitvictoria.com

www.tourism.vic.gov.au





Tool 4.3 Shop Local Programs

“You can’t buy happiness but you can buy local and that’s the same thing.”

WHY DO IT

One of the reasons why small transitioning towns are struggling is because of the loss of spending power to larger centres. With improved mobility, it is easy for people to drive or bus to larger towns (with the big chain stores) for shopping and services, or to shop online. At some point in time this leakage can threaten the viability of local retail businesses creating a domino effect with one closing after the other. It is important to towns to maintain these businesses not only because of the convenience of the local service, but also because they create jobs and contribute to the wider economy.

HOW IT WORKS

The most effective way to start a ‘shop local’ campaign is to form an alliance involving businesses and citizens who work together with the aim of preventing the displacement of local businesses. It involves businesses to promoting shopping in the area, as well as improving their product offering, service levels and capabilities. It also involves building awareness amongst residents of the importance of maintaining local businesses.

WHAT YOU NEED TO MAKE IT HAPPEN

An organized retail group such as a chamber of commerce or a willingness to collaborate.

STEPS TO GET YOU THERE

1. Form a steering committee.
Begin by talking with key business owners about the benefits of launching a shop local campaign. Identify those who would like to be involved and ask them to join a steering committee. The committee should include 6-12 people, mostly local business owners, community leaders and representatives from the Council.
2. Establish an appropriate legal entity. Options include an incorporated association or a company limited by guarantee (a not for profit company). Legal status is required to provide protection for members and office bearers. Legal advice needs to be sought as to the most appropriate type or entity.
3. Establish a funding model, which may include membership fees, sponsorships, grants and Council funding.



HANDY HINT

A great reference book for retailing is Paco Underhill ‘Why People Buy’. There are also many great resources on the internet.





Tool 4.3 Shop Local Programs

STEPS TO GET YOU THERE

4. Develop the value proposition for 'shop local'. The value proposition is the statement that explains the value of supporting local business.
Shop Local Victoria have developed the following list '7 Reasons to Shop Local'
 1. Put Your Money Where Your Heart Is
 2. What Goes Around Comes Around
 3. Community Sustainability
 4. Keep Our Community Unique
 5. Create Collective Prosperity
 6. Local Owners Care About Victoria
 7. Give Back and Take Care
5. Devise a name, slogan, and logo.
The program needs a catchy name and logo that is positive and proactive, and the logo professionally designed.
6. Run a recruitment drive to engage local businesses.
7. Launch the campaign.
8. Compile a list of the businesses in the program, the products, services and special offers to local.
9. Develop a shop local website, either as a freestanding site or linked to the town (if you have one) and the Council website.
10. Encourage Council to invest in a capability building program for participating businesses with subjects including, customer service, merchandising, internet marketing, etc.
11. Run an annual calendar of events including shop local catalogues.



THINGS TO LOOK OUT FOR:

1. There are companies that run such loyalty schemes but these are relatively costly.
2. Note a permit is required from the Victorian Commission for Gambling and Liquor Regulation when running competitions.
3. Take care when advising others about their own businesses, as it is easy to offend. Imagine someone was advising you about where to put the furniture in your home.



Need more information?

www.shoplocalvictoria.com

www.vecci.org.au

www.ruralcouncilsvictoria.org.au





Tool 4.4 New Agricultural Models

WHY DO IT?

The economies of virtually every town in the Loddon Mallee region are heavily underpinned by agriculture. Indeed, one of the main drivers of transition in small towns across the region is structural shifts in agriculture (explained in detail in [Part B](#)). The profitability of family farms is under pressure from a cost/price squeeze, the impact of scale economies, a high Australian dollar and high labour costs.

One of the biggest issues in today's global environment is that many of the farms in the area are too small to generate economies of scale and the productivity gains required to be competitive and earn a living wage. There are examples in Australia and around the world where our communities have responded to these challenges with new age farming models.

With less government resources available to support this type of work, it is up to communities to work together to help themselves.

HOW IT WORKS

Essentially the new-age models all involve farmers working together to emulate the benefits of scale while still maintaining their individual identities.

WHAT YOU NEED TO MAKE IT HAPPEN

The common element in the successful application of any of the above models is one or two people who are frustrated with the status quo and looking for a better way and who have the leadership skills to bring others with them on the journey.

STEPS TO GET YOU THERE

The central element of this tool is to encourage farmers to get together and have conversations about alternative farming models and ways to address the issues confronting their industry sector and then to see whether there is interest in taking any of these ideas forward.



THINGS TO LOOK OUT FOR:

1. The 'I've seen it all before syndrome' can be damaging and demotivating to those who are willing to be change-drivers. Support those who are trying to find ways to do things differently – no matter how mad their ideas seem at the time.





Tool 4.4 New Agricultural Models

SOME MODELS TO LOOK AT

The following are just some example models that McKINNA et al has experienced in our work in global agrifood around the world. These are intended as conversation starters on which other ideas can be built.

- 1. Collective R&D models:** The best example of this is the Birchip Cropping Group (BCG) where farmers took it upon themselves to initiate space research in their area. Previously, most of the research in cropping was conducted in other areas of Australia where, because of different conditions, the results did not necessarily translate. To get reliable information is necessary to run local field trials (see case study).
- 2. Collective marketing models:** This is where a number of farmers work together to market their products. Historically marketing of agricultural products in Australia was through statutory marketing authorities, e.g. Australian Wheat Board (AWB), or farmer-owned co-operatives. For different reasons these are but gone, yet the need to generate market power is even greater today. Under the new model, farmers form a company to market on their behalf. The range of services and the assets required vary. The underlying principle of marketing collectives is to use volume to negotiate better prices and be able to enter into long-term contracts to build more stability into returns. An example in the Loddon Mallee region is the Boort Grain Cooperative.
- 3. Machinery syndication:** Farming is extremely capital intensive. Furthermore, to remain competitive it is necessary to keep up with the latest technology which involves a large amount of capital. One of the issues is that each farm only uses large items such as harvesters, planters, spray units and large tractors for small part of the year, which is very inefficient use of capital and impacts on their cost competitiveness. Machinery syndication is common in Europe. For example in Belgium small potato farmers can get access to equipment which gives them the efficiency of larger farms for a fraction of the cost. Machinery syndicates work by a group of farmers forming a company to purchase specified high capital items. Shareholders then hire from the company at a fraction of the cost of a commercial hire. An extension of the syndication scheme is where the company itself insures its shareholders against any loss due to not being able to get the equipment when they need it (because many agricultural applications are weather and time sensitive).
- 4. Collective farming models:** These involve a group of farmers pooling their land to run as one operation. There are different variations on this including one operator running all farms (which works well for farmers wishing to retire) or farmers sharing the workload by specialising in some part, share farming models and so on. One example is in Canada where there is crop rotation on broadacre farmland. Under this model the syndicate members specialise in one operation of the rotation (e.g. potatoes, wheat, lucerne hay) with each having a specialised set of equipment therefore saving duplication.
- 5. Corporate farming models:** This is where farmers go into partnership with professional investors. Commonly the capital bought by the professional investor is used to buy adjoining properties that the farmer operates in partnership. The professional investor brings the capital required for scale and adoption of productivity improving technology, plus business know-how whereas the farmer brings agricultural expertise.





Tool 4.4 New Agricultural Models

CASE STUDY BIRCHIP CROPPING GROUP

A regional example of the power of collectivism in farming, which has received significant recognition, is the Birchip Cropping Group (BCG). The BCG is a not-for-profit agricultural research and extension organisation led by farmers from the Wimmera Mallee. It exists to improve the prosperity of farmers in the region through farmer driven innovation.

BCG was formed over 20 years ago by a group of six farmers who were frustrated that the research and development that they had access to was not relevant to the area and the local field trials were essential. A visit by the group to the Hart field days in South Australia convinced them of the power of local trials. They started off by running field trials on land made available for the members and run by the community. Later a full-time employee was hired to manage the organisation and since then it has grown to 20 full-time employees.

Most of the research is funded by contracts from the Research Development Committees such as the Grains Research and Development Council. The overheads to cover the administration come from membership fees, sponsorships (from supplier companies) and contract trial work for seed, fertiliser and agrochemical companies.

Although it was started in Birchip its coverage now spreads widely across the Wimmera Mallee region hence the change in brand to BCG.

It is an important case study in regional development because of the benefits it brings across the region. The BCG has significantly and tangibly improved the productivity and resilience of local farms which has contributed to their prosperity and had flow-on effects to the whole community. Most of the 20 or so staff live in the area and contribute to the local economy. The major events that it operates, including its annual expo held in July draws crowds from across Victoria (last year this event had 700 to 800 visitors) who all spent money in the town.



Need more information?

www.bcg.org.au



03 5492 2787





Tool 4.5 Community Owned Enterprises

“Our town was slowly dying; first the bank went, then the butcher, but the last straw was when the petrol station closed. Setting up a community business centre has brought new life to our town.”

WHY DO IT

Many towns in the Loddon Mallee region are reaching the point where they don't have the population to sustain basic services including the general store, bank, petrol station or hotel. A community owned enterprise is one solution for reviving these services and can even breathe new life into an otherwise dying town.

HOW IT WORKS

A community-owned enterprise involves a local group taking over the running of critical retail services that are threatening to close. The takeover is financed by fundraising and volunteerism.

WHAT YOU NEED TO MAKE IT HAPPEN

- Willing local investors.
- Community commitment to support as a shopper and a volunteer.

STEPS TO GET YOU THERE

1. A meeting of interested citizens is held to discuss the issue of 'at risk' services.
2. A leadership committee is formed to work through the issues and develop a plan to make it happen.
3. A business plan needs to be developed to validate the feasibility of the proposal. The critical questions that need to be asked are:
 - a. What services to offer? This could include a general store, post office, service station, transaction centre.
 - b. Which premises to use?
 - c. How to staff the enterprise, be it paid workers or volunteers? Can the business support paid workers or are there enough volunteers?
 - d. The capital required to fund the setup costs, refurbishment or improvement needs to be sourced. How much is required and who will it come from? Options include community members making a loan or taking shares in the business, local fundraising or grants.
 - e. Is the business enterprise financially viable? Even a not-for-profit organisation needs to cover their running costs. Typically start-up enterprises take a while to get going meaning that the business needs to be able to sustain losses for the first few months.
 - f. What is the most appropriate type of legal entity? Options include a company limited by shares (that is appropriate where locals provide the initial capital) or alternatively a company limited by guarantee (a registered not-for-profit organisation). Legal advice will be necessary in answering this question.





Tool 4.5 Community Owned Enterprises

STEPS TO GET YOU THERE

4. Once the business case is validated, appoint a Board of Directors and put the plan in place.
5. The entity will need a charter and/or code of conduct to clarify the understanding of its role in the community. If profits are to be distributed, the conditions of this distribution should be stated.



THINGS TO LOOK OUT FOR:

1. Any venture involving shareholdings and profits has the potential to end in tears. Ensure your paper work is in place. Don't rely on a handshake agreement.

CASE STUDY LOCKINGTON BUSINESS CENTRE

This small town of Lockington was progressively losing its retail businesses, mainly because of its close proximity to Echuca; one by one retail businesses were closing down. The crunch point came when the service station announced that it was closing. Eight local citizens made a loan to the community to purchase the service station. Through local fundraising and grants money, plus volunteer labour the service station building was refurbished with a new floor and roof. Later, grant funding was sourced to install a larger petrol tank. The centre was opened in 2003 and run by a roster of volunteer labour of two and half hour shift cycles.

At the same time there is action is to establish a community bank. It was decided that rather than establishing the bank in a separate building it should be located within the service station site. Over time other enterprises have been added including an op shop, a neighbourhood house, a men's shed and a laundromat, all of which are highly successful.

The surpluses generated by the enterprise, including the community bank have been invested in local projects. For example 12 aged care buildings have been developed. The various enterprises have generated over \$200,000 to community projects over the past two years. The loans made by the original funders have now been repaid in full with interest.

Importantly, the centre has re-energised the town. Other businesses have flourished as the initiative has encouraged locals to shop locally. The local general store has added a bakery, liquor store and meat department. A new café has opened serving quality coffee. Five other run-down shops have been repainted jointly through the owners plus volunteers. A heritage centre has since been developed which attracts visitors. These stores are now attracting new tenants. The neighbourhood house has an active youth program. Most of all the Business Centre has greatly improved the spirit of the town which a decade ago looked like it was dying.



Need more information?

lockingtondistrictbusinesscentre.webs.com





Tool 4.6 Community Banking

“If you’d told me the exit of the last big bank would be a positive for our town, I would never have believed it.”

WHY DO IT

- It provides local banking services to small towns when the big banks have left.
- It provides a potential source of capital to local businesses to fund their growth and provide business banking services.
- A share of the profits goes to community projects as determined by the community.
- It builds social capital by fostering a sense of community in small towns, which has flow-on effects to driver further community development projects.

HOW IT WORKS

For the purpose of unpacking community banking the authors have chosen to focus on Bendigo Bank Community Bank®

- A community bank is a locally owned and operated company that acts as a franchise.
- Bendigo Bank provides coverage of its bank license, a range of banking products, training of staff and ongoing support.
- The community bank shares revenue from the products and services sold on a 50/50 split basis with the community.
- 20% of the bank’s profit can be distributed to its shareholders and 80% used to fund further community development projects.

WHAT YOU NEED TO MAKE IT HAPPEN

- Willing local investors.
- Community commitment to support as a shopper and a volunteer.

STEPS TO GET YOU THERE

1. Form a committee to canvass local interest and support.
2. Undertake a community pledge process to raise shares. (This step requires a feasibility study to be conducted that costs around \$10,000 and must be paid for by the community). A key part of the feasibility is the indication of around \$180M of business transfer.
3. Launch a prospectus to collect the share revenue.
4. A limited company is formed with the committee members being the directors.
5. A franchise agreement is signed with Bendigo Bank.
6. Bendigo Bank provides the banking licence and the support services.
7. The board are actively involved in recruiting staff, finding premises and all the practical aspects of setting up a branch.



HANDY HINT

Pledges need to be in writing for as much as \$800,000 of \$1 shares, so allow plenty of time to collect these in your project planning. Pledges need to come from a broad base, say 300 people.





Tool 4.6 Community Banking



THINGS TO LOOK OUT FOR:

1. Any venture involving shareholdings and profits has the potential to end in tears. Ensure your paper work is in place.

CASE STUDY

MALDON & DISTRICT COMMUNITY BANK, MOUNT ALEXANDER

The idea of setting up a community bank in Maldon was first put forward in 1998, following the closure of the Commonwealth and National banks. A feasibility study was carried out, with the financial support of the Mount Alexander Shire Council and local supporters.

A total of 170 pledges committing \$250,000 resulted in the Maldon & District Community Bank® being established in 1999. The Community Bank®, which operates as a company limited by guarantee, recorded its first profits in 2001. By 2004 it had opened a second branch.

A board of volunteer directors oversees the day to day running of the Community Bank® and decides where charitable funds are allocated. After just six years of operation, the branch was able to award its first community grants, which totalled more than \$89,000. To date, more than \$1M has been returned to the communities of Maldon, Newstead and Dunolly.

The Maldon & District Community Bank® also funds ongoing community programs. A driver education program provides training for both probationary and learner drivers and a business mentoring program offers tutorials to local business owners.

The Maldon & District Community Bank® has experienced significant growth since it first opened its doors 11 years ago. The business started with 170 pledges, and now has 4,900 account holders. This has only served to further strengthen community bonds.



Need more information?

www.bendigobank.com.au/community_bank



Bendigo Bank Tel: 1300 BENDIGO (1300 236 344)





WHY DO IT

HOW IT WORKS

WHAT YOU NEED TO MAKE IT HAPPEN

STEPS TO GET YOU THERE





THINGS TO LOOK OUT FOR:

CASE STUDY



Need more information?

