

# Leading with vision, courage and support

An impact study of the  
Australian Rural Leadership Foundation programs



**The Australian Rural Leadership Foundation (ARLF) is a not-for-profit organisation delivering development programs for current and future leaders of rural, regional and remote Australia.**

Our programs are designed to develop leaders from the 'inside out' and use experiential learning and critical self-reflection as cornerstones for development.

We provide participants with experiences to:

- grow as an individual
- develop their leadership capabilities and broaden their perspectives
- learn from and mobilise a network of peers
- better serve the greater good of rural, regional and remote Australia.

Our alumni live across Australia and work in a wide range of industries, workplaces and communities, including NGOs, corporate and government organisations, family properties and businesses, professional organisations and local communities.

**93%**  
of alumni said  
ARLF significantly enhanced  
their leadership capacity

## Understanding our impact

In 2016, the ARLF commissioned Deakin University to undertake a study to determine the impact of its programs on developing individual leadership performance, and how the benefits flowed to workplaces, communities and industries. All ARLF programs were evaluated as part of the study, namely:

- **Australian Rural Leadership Program (ARLP)**
- **TRAIL: Emerging Leaders Program**
- **Agribusiness Leadership Program**
- **Tailored programs.**

Research built on previous program evaluations and included a mix of surveys, focus groups and face-to-face interviews with 255 alumni from programs run over the last 25 years. In addition, 29 sponsors shared their perspectives on our alumni's leadership journey and reflected on the contribution these leaders have made to rural and regional Australia.

The research found alumni benefited from their ARLF program over the long term, through:

- increased levels of self-confidence to lead
- desire and capacity to initiate and achieve change
- capacity to mobilise resources and networks to advocate for rural and regional Australia
- progression into leadership positions where influence can be exercised
- enacting the principles of values-based leadership.



## Growing successful leaders

Reflecting on their performance prior to undertaking an ARLF program, alumni recognised they had operated with limited personal leadership capabilities and a low understanding of the qualities of effective leadership. Many reported this lack of understanding had negatively affected their chances of success.

*"It led to a big change in that I saw leadership not from the front, but how to do it with others. Great leadership is where you empower groups of people to gain ownership, let them discover and act as a mentor...and this is what the ARLF did."*

*ARLP Participant, Course 8 (2001–02)*

**87%**  
of alumni feel  
more effective as leaders

ARLF program participants work in teams. We put them in different contexts with a diverse group of people with different life experiences, views and values and where the individual is just one of many used to assuming a leadership role. Alumni report they are more effective as problem solvers and conflict resolution mediators, and can be successful even when situations are surrounded by difficult issues.

*"If I look at everyone in my cohort, all of them now either have some board role or a significant leadership role."*

*TRAILBlazer 2013 alumni*

**86%**  
of sponsors said  
alumni perform better  
in the workplace

The ability to impact or influence outcomes is a key measure of effective leadership. A lack of understanding of how to positively influence and contribute to decision-making was a barrier for some participants' leadership aspirations prior to undertaking an ARLF program.

*"It's not only an investment in our industry but the agriculture sector, that when you invest in the agriculture sector, you're nation building."*

*Sponsor*

**86%**  
of sponsors strongly agreed  
ARLF programs benefited  
their organisation

We are not prescriptive about what constitutes good leadership, instead we believe good leadership is determined locally, where a range of factors influence opportunities and create barriers. Alumni say they feel empowered to address difficult problems and seek outcomes through mutual understanding and respect.

Most industry-leader alumni believe they have been instrumental in bringing about significant change within their industry. Over time, our alumni have applied influence within and across different sectors, including agribusinesses, public and private sectors, government and community.

*"I have since become head of a government agency and able to exert considerable influence for the benefit of rural and regional Australians. I have also been able to contribute in a meaningful way to reducing Indigenous disadvantage. I am sure that I would not be in the position I am in today if I had not undertaken the ARLF."*

*Leadership program graduate*

**84%**  
of alumni feel  
better equipped to  
facilitate change



## Generating connected leaders

Impact is often equated with having influence, but that's not the whole story. A large and diverse network that can be mobilised to support leaders make change will amplify their impact.

*"The outcome of this investment, in addition to significant personal skills development, is a committed network of leaders from across Australia that is a conduit and 'sounding board' for innovative ideas and potential solutions to problems."*

*Sponsor*

There is significant social cohesion within the groups created through our experiential approach to leadership development. Our alumni have developed connections and strong bonds with their peers that often last a lifetime and there is significant activity occurring through groups of alumni that has a flow on effect in rural and regional Australia.

*"I use my networks to promote and facilitate change in the industry that creates broad advantages. The effect is greater collaboration."*

*Leadership program graduate*

# 82%

of sponsors said

alumni now have a capacity to influence through extended networks

Alumni return to their organisations, industries and communities better connected and supported. They feel renewed with a new sense of purpose and commitment to leadership and to the rural sector.



## Developing intuitive leaders

After completing an ARLF program, many alumni realised a lack of understanding of their own personal strengths and weaknesses had contributed to their previous ineffectiveness as a leader.

*"I lacked courage, and was afraid of being my true self. This made it difficult to make real change in case I rocked the boat."*

*Leadership program graduate*

*"I'm not the same person — my understanding, my application to business and people has altered for the better due to the leadership program. It also enabled me to be the leader that was always inside of me."*

*Leadership program graduate*

Our programs place people and groups in challenging situations. Participants learn about leading by better understanding themselves, their behaviours and their attitudes in relation to others. They are given time and space to make sense of the experience and how they and others respond.

Through a process of reflection and self-awareness we can change peoples' behaviours to develop an intuitive leader who can work with other people, organisations and communities in complex environments.

# 91%

of sponsors said

alumni are better at addressing pressing issues in their organisation

# 85%

of alumni said

they can effectively respond to complexity



## The value for sponsors

*"The stakeholders including government sponsors consider there is significant personal return on investment, but there is also evidence indicating return on investment in agribusinesses, and rural, regional and remote communities through the dispersed leadership of ARLF alumni."*

*Deakin University*

# 91%

of sponsors consider  
ARLF as building rural and  
regional Australia's capacity

The research found the following benefits flowed to sponsors and their stakeholders from individuals undertaking ARLF programs:

- high levels of retention and career development within the rural and regional sector
- alumni pursued leadership roles in peak rural organisations
- alumni joined key policy and decision-making committees and boards
- alumni assumed membership and leadership roles of community organisations
- increased community capacity building through intergenerational mentoring
- use of alumni networks to promote and advocate for rural and regional Australia
- high levels of volunteerism in rural and isolated communities.

# 87%

of sponsors say  
ARLF enhances leadership capacity  
in rural and regional Australia

Organisations can sponsor a scholarship for a participant to undertake one of our leadership programs or commission a program; options include:

- **Australian Rural Leadership Program (ARLP)**  
Our iconic 15-month program for individuals wanting to build their leadership capabilities
- **TRAIL: Emerging Leaders Program**  
A cross-sector eight-day program for emerging rural leaders
- **Agribusiness Leadership Program**  
A tailored program for leaders in the agribusiness sector
- **National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leaders Program**  
Develops and prepares Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people to engage in powerful and significant conversations
- **Tailored programs**  
Our client-specific programs are designed to address the leadership development needs of your organisation, business, sector, region or community.

*"There is demonstrable evidence...of a significant impact on individuals in key positions in communities, government and NGO organisations and in rural, regional and remote Australia. The impact of their leadership is evident not merely because many have been and continue to be in key positional leadership, but leaders have influence and impact on practice through professional and voluntary networks and policy activism."*

*Deakin University*



## Contact

For more information on how to get involved as a sponsor or participant, contact:

**The Australian Rural Leadership Foundation**

3/24 Napier Close, Deakin ACT 2600

(PO Box 298, Deakin West ACT 2600)

**W** [rural-leaders.org.au](http://rural-leaders.org.au)

**P** 02 6281 0680

**F** 02 6285 4676

**E** [info@rural-leaders.org.au](mailto:info@rural-leaders.org.au)



@ARLFNews



[https://au.linkedin.com/  
company/australian-rural-  
leadership-foundation](https://au.linkedin.com/company/australian-rural-leadership-foundation)



Australian Rural Leadership Foundation