Economic Development Australia; Regional and Remote Economic Development Training Program

Report and Recommendations to Board of Economic Development Australia following Pilot Program

Prepared By: Trevor Ayers
September 2010
I would like to thank fellow EDA Director Simon Millcock and EDA Members Cassandra Stipanicev and William Barry for their participation in this trial. Without their assistance and involvement it would not have been possible and their enthusiasm certainly had a large bearing on its success.

Following the pilot program conducted in Mukinbudin, WA it is recommended that this program be adopted by Economic Development Australia.

- Calls from registrations of interest from EDA members to participate in the Local Economic Development Workshops should be broadcast on a bi-annual or annual basis. These lists should then be used to select appropriate people for each planned workshop.
- Workshops should be coordinated and promoted at the SPN level.
- Call for communities to register their interest in being involved also needs to be sent out on a regular (annual) basis. The most appropriate mechanism for this to occur still needs to be decided upon. At the national level using the Regional Development Australia network and/or Australian Local Government Association may be the most appropriate. State-based development authorities and SPN’s are also an option.
- Each program needs to be tailored to the individual community being targeted and the skills and knowledge of the practitioners delivering the program, however an updated Economic Development Toolbox should always be involved.

While this was initially envisaged as a week long program, a three-day window appears more practical in most cases. Often this will allow delivery to occur over a weekend, resulting in more community members being able to attend, while also making it easier for practitioners to be involved without adversely affecting the own jobs. Obviously timing needs to be flexible however as this will not always be the case. When programs are being delivered in more remote locations transport options will largely govern timing, while weekends will not always suit either the practitioners delivering the program or the community being targeted.

Working on approximately 450 EDA members nationally, each prepared to give 3 days to this program; EDA could effectively provide 1350 days pro-bono assistance to rural and remote Australia. When costed at a realistic notional consulting rate of $300 per day, this translates into over $400,000 worth of value able to be provided.
Background
The intention of this program is to provide additional professional development opportunities for EDA members whilst providing a positive impact for remote motivated communities. The initial EDA Rural and Remote program proposal was as follows:

**EDA regional and remote economic development training program:**

*Background:* Regional and remote areas of Australia are currently missing some of the expertise or current progress available in the area of economic development. This includes a number of our indigenous communities.

*Concept:* That a group of 3 EDA members donate a week of their time (either annual leave or with employers permission) to travel to remote and small regional communities and undertake economic development workshops. This could be undertaken in consultation with Regional Development Australia or Regional Local Govt Associations. This may allow 2-3 workshops during the week and also some 1 on 1 sessions with local economic development practitioners. Would envisage 1 regional 1 city and 1 interstate EDA member to be part of the team.

*Target:* Local Govt elected and staff, State and Commonwealth Regional offices, Regional Development Australia staff and committee members, tourism and community development organisations.

*Funding:* Would be needed to assist with travel, accommodation and meals and the in-kind assistance of their time could be used as matching funding. There may need to be an allocation in a funding application for administrative costs to cover someone's time in co-coordinating.

- **Results:** Increased awareness in regional and remote areas of Australia of economic development and EDA. Increased capacity for regional areas to progress their economies, promote the synergies between regional/remote Australian and major centres. There is also the increased skill level for those who undertake the workshops. It may also show more value to our regional members and help alleviate the issues around EDA conference and master classes being held in major cities? This came via discussions with fellow EDA Directors Trevor and Ling when I was in Perth and fits with our goals to take EDA to all of Australia. We have also discussed previously the development generic type workshop material

It was decided at the EDA board meeting of 15/7/2007 to trial this program in Western Australia, with a proposal to be considered by the EDA board following this trial. Trevor Ayers and Simon Millcock to conduct the trial and prepare the subsequent report.

**Trial Program**
The trial was conducted with the community of Mukinbudin in Western Australia. Mukinbudin is located 300km North-East of Perth, in the North-Eastern Wheatbelt and has a shire population of around 800. This community
was identified by Keith McQueen, WA Community Enterprise Manager with
the Bendigo Bank (and EDA member) as being ideal for the trial.

The Mukinbudin Shire Chief Executive Officer, Trevor Smith, was the contact
point for setting up the trial and providing direction regarding the current
needs and aspirations of the community with regards to the proposed
economic development sessions.

Calls for interest in delivering the Mukinbudin program were sent out through
the EDA membership, with the final team being Simon Millcock, Trevor Ayers,
Cassandra Stipanicev and William Barry. It was decided to undertake the
program over a weekend so as to minimise the time away from work for the
people involved, with the 23-25 of July chosen. The presenters organised their
travel to Mukinbudin with the Shire picking up the accommodation costs and
the majority of meals.

The program was built around Jay Hardison’s Economic Development
Toolbox presentation, originally developed for SEGRA 2009. The full program
consisted of:

- Friday evening - introduction and overview of background of EDA
  presenters.
- Saturday morning – Economic Development Toolbox
  presentation.
- Saturday afternoon – informal community interaction. This was
  built around all Mukinbudin sporting teams (football, netball and
  hockey) having ‘home’ games and the majority of the community
  being committed to these sports either through playing or
  assisting.
- Sunday morning – facilitated community discussion regarding
  opportunities for progression.

Following the weekend an overview of the outcomes (primarily drawn from the
Sunday morning session) was prepared and provided to Trevor Smith for
dissemination back through the community. This overview is attached as
Appendix 1.

**Outcomes**

Overall the trial was seen as a success by the practitioners involved in the
delivery and appears to have also provided value to the community of
Mukinbudin from the comments received from participants.

The toolbox presentation was a very valuable resource, although some
rewrites are required to better reflect its delivery to a local community rather
than ED specialists. The team believed its current focus was a little too local
government focused.

The initial introductory panel session gave a good starting point, however
requires a level of structure that the team should work on prior to arriving.
Rather than everyone talking off-the-cuff, a minimalistic PowerPoint
presentation by each of the ED practitioners would improve the focus.
The facilitated workshop on the final morning was an integral part of the weekend and provided the opportunity for community members to open dialogue amongst themselves, in a structured manner. Providing a report of these discussions resulted in a concrete outcome that the community can then work from, as well as allowing all members of the community to have input rather than one or more designated to capture the information themselves.

The mix of the EDA members involved in this program was excellent. No two members had similar backgrounds and experiences, so everybody added significant value.

**Recommendations**

It is recommended that this program be adopted by Economic Development Australia.

- Calls from registrations of interest from EDA members to participate in the Local Economic Development Workshops should be broadcast on a bi-annual or annual basis. These lists should then be used to select appropriate people for each planned workshop.
- Workshops should be coordinated and promoted at the SPN level.
- Call for communities to register their interest in being involved also needs to be sent out on a regular (annual) basis. The most appropriate mechanism for this to occur still needs to be decided upon. At the national level using the Regional Development Australia network of Australian Local Government Association may be the most appropriate. State-based development authorities and SPN’s are also an option.
- Each program needs to be tailored to the individual community being targeted and the skills and knowledge of the practitioners delivering the program, however an updated Economic Development Toolbox should always be involved.
- A suggested program that should be used as the basis for each module (based on three days):
  - Day One (evening) – Introduction to presenting team:
    - 5-10 minute overview of Economic Development Australia by the Leader of the EDA team,
    - 5-10 minute background from each ED practitioner.
    - Overview of the current position of the community by the Shire President, CEO or other relevant person.
    - 30-40 minute panel session
    - Informal networking between presenters and local community.
  - Day Two:
• Economic Development Toolbox Presentation
• Site visits to specific places of interest within community
• Further informal networking opportunities throughout day

○ Day Three:
• Facilitated workshops allowing the community to utilise the information from the first two days to identify opportunities they would like to progress and investigate. ED team to facilitate, provide direction and ideas when appropriate and pull the information from this workshop together in the following week culminating in a report being delivered back to the community.
• ED team to provide an overview of the advantages EDA membership could have to the community based on the outcomes and experience from the weekend.

**Pro-forma documents** need to be produced to ensure that a professional face is maintained by EDA. These include:

1. PowerPoint slides pre-set with EDA logos etc to allow each presenter to prepare their introduction.
3. A standard form report layout, including professional branding as well as appropriate topics. This would also allow appropriate information about EDA to be included.
4. A standard form participant’s feedback process. It would make sense that each community participant at the workshops filled out one of these, but would also be good to get a more detailed report back from the community liaison person following delivery of the final report to help continually improve the delivery of these sessions.
5. Feedback on 2 & 3 should be provided to a board committee tasked with undertaking an annual update of the resources. This feedback would be utilised along with the feedback coming from the communities themselves as part of a continuous improvement program.

• The ideal team should contain four people:

1. A team leader who is ACEcD accredited and is also able to confidently discuss and promote Economic Development Australia.
2. An experienced practitioner able to back-up the team leader.
3. A practitioner able to provide insightful information and gaining the experience necessary to take on one of the two leading positions in the future.
4. A relatively new practitioner who is able to gain significant knowledge from the time spent in the community and around the
more experienced peers. This person should still be prepared to have input throughout the weekend.

- An overview of this trial program and calls for involvement for the full national rollout should be launched during the NEDC.
Appendix 1

Mukinbudin Economic Development Workshop
Notes
23 – 25 July 2010

Develop a 5 year Corporate Strategy - with indicative costing to key projects. Develop a Vision - The vision should have a dream, be aspirational.

Concerns
• Local economy highly dependent on agriculture. Too much reliance on agriculture limits the options for the future.
• Ageing Infrastructure
• Access to power & water
• Land ownership
• Ageing population & retaining the younger population

When discussing all of these concerns the ideas that were mentioned are grouped under three main topics. They are
• examining land ownership and cost of getting onto the land, addressing affordability in agriculture.
• creating better living conditions and
• diversifying on the uses of assets and infrastructure in the town originally built for the locals so that they can be used for new and innovative purposes.

A need for research and data was seen as essential for making sound decisions which could be measured and that the use of people with expertise in fields that the local community didn't have would be of assistance (e.g. tourism).

Ideas under these topics were as follows

1. Examine land ownership, cost of getting onto the land, addressing affordability & viability in agriculture
   a. Value Adding – getting greater return on your product before it is sold, utilising your current infrastructure, skills and knowledge to generate greater income.

   The quality of wheat is above the average. Potential to promote and market as a premium product. Package and sell separately.

   New Norcia Products

   b. Straw recycling. Utilise straw for a clean fuel to replace fire wood. Develop a process to form briquettes and sell to Perth residents

   Strategic Waste Initiative Scheme (SWIS)
c. Examine Goulburn Valley model of transfer of land ownership to cooperative and management of land returned to Farmer under the cooperative.

   W.Barry to examine

d. Business angels
   Investors that offer guidance, expertise as well as finance to ensure the success and sustainability of a program/business operation.

   T Ayers

2. Create better living conditions.
   a. Establish a retirement village – this will service residents for neighbouring towns who don’t want to move to Perth.

       Uniting Church example provided by Simon Millcock
   b. Provide better facilities for gofers
   c. Promote lifestyle to fly in/fly out families they don’t have to go all the way back to Perth – establish an airstrip
   d. Vacant houses on farms – adapt and offer for transient workers
   e. Celebrate who you are, what you have and what has been done. While this doesn’t appear to be ‘creating better living conditions’, it is adapting a new attitude to where you live, Seeing your living conditions from an external perspective and it needs to be publicised and marketed. This is something to incorporate into other activities that you do rather than on its own.

       Tourism Australia Marketing assistance
   f. Utilise technology to improve medical facilities
   g. Improve Health services - Nurses station

3. Diversify/ Grasp new ideas - diversifying on the uses of assets and infrastructure in the town originally built for the locals can be used for new and innovative purposes. See what you have and use in a new way.

   a. Self generation of power – wind turbines
   b. Install an air strip with accommodation
   c. Develop a 40 – 50 room motel
   d. Create a name for the alternate route off the Gt Eastern Hwy & team up with neighbouring towns
   e. Caravan Park promote as RV friendly. Location for people to store RV’s for extended periods (while owners return home)
   f. Create trails for visitors give them options on what to do, Give them a reason to visit.

       Tourism Australia Marketing ideas.
       “A Practical Guide for Working with the Media”
   g. Train/Prepare locals as guides – celebrate your history, create videos, create maps
   h. Seek out school camps to visit farms
   i. Embrace technology
   j. Identify events that fit with your community
   k. Promote the natural features unique to the area – wave rock, butterflies…
   l. Learn all the newest ways to utilise the internet

       Lets Get on line Fed program
       www.letsgo.org.au
Tips
Communicate with Community
Focus on simple things
Have CEO become a member of EDA

Help and Assistance
• Regional Development Australia (Wheatbelt RDC): Rebekah Burges, EO. Meckering /Gingin Rebekah.burges@rdawheatbelt.com.au 9625 1504
• Dept of Agriculture
  Renee Manning, PO Box 432 Merredin WA 6415
  renee.manning@agric.wa.gov.au 9081 3116
• Royalties for Regions
• Small Business Development Corporation
• Consideration could also be made of partnering with other Shires and employing an Economic Development Officer

These notes are provided by members of Economic Development Australia (EDA) who undertook a pro-bono workshop on Economic Development over the period Fri 23 – Sun 25 July 2010. These notes are being provided by those members of EDA to the community of Mukinbudin through the CEO of the Shire and are provided for their use as they may see fit. EDA Members who attended are:
Trevor Ayers City of Bunbury
William Barry Town of Bassendean
Cassandra Stipanicev Shire of Cranbrook
Simon Millcock Australia’s Indian Ocean Territories

All EDA members were impressed with the proactive leadership that the members of the community had taken. It was reinforced that for Economic Development to progress it needs to be driven by the community and this workshop was a great first step.