



FRRR

Foundation for Rural
Regional Renewal

Leeton

Data Collection # 5

November 2022

Investing in Rural Community Futures

Overview

By November 2022 all eleven Leeton funding participants had completed or were in the process of completing a number of their grants. A new round (Round 3 Partnership Grants) of successful grants was announced for three Leeton organisations in November 2022. For all organisations, they were able to articulate the impact of their IRCF grants at a more detailed and considered level, whilst also considering how the level of organisational collaboration which has emerged can be maintained beyond December 2023 when IRCF concludes.

In Leeton there is a strong sense that **organisations are trying out different ways of solving old problems**. Some of this was motivated by managing service delivery during Covid such as putting community events online and then maintaining this after Covid or attracting volunteers by engaging them only in the activities that interest them and being more strategic before approaching a potential partner. Another point of difference is how Leeton has approached the Community Grants Officer role, saying they are taking more of a relationship building/ capacity building approach. For example the officer says,

We have found better ways to find and apply for grants. We look for 'low hanging fruit' (ie. small and easy to access grants) and ways to build relationships with funders. NFPs have been able to apply for smaller grants as well as bigger infrastructure funding. The level of skill and confidence in NFPs has increased in relation to applying for grants. Some are now independently working on their applications.

The **employment of a key human resource** whether it is a Coordinator, Grants Officer or Admin/Marketing role has had a profound effect in Leeton. For the Multicultural Support Group their Coordinator role has elevated the organisation from a group of volunteers to a functional organisation which has community profile and authority to engage with other organisations. For the community as a whole the Grants Officer role has enabled the submission of \$839,000 in grants with \$150,000 successful to date while also carrying out a capacity building role. At the Leeton Business Chamber, the employment of a part-time contractor to carry out administration, marketing, document creation etc has freed up the Committee to focus on strategy and building partnerships. Leeton Connect's capacity to grow its hub and information sharing functions is of course made possible through the employment of a part-time Coordinator.

Connection and collaboration and breaking down of organisational silos is also a strong current outcome in Leeton. Much of this has been through the increasing capacity and profile building of Leeton Connect but others are independent of Leeton Connect.





Leeton Community Care and Development, the 'Op Shop' has reconnected with Rotary, *"they invited us to speak and donated \$2k to us and a freezer. They also bring us leftover food from their catering, which we then distribute."*

The Leeton Show Society reached out to all non-profits and invited them to have a free stand at the show to promote their agencies. They noted that in 2021 the Yanco CWA attracted 10 new members from this activity.

The significant changes identified by the participating organisations to date range from the impact of a hub style facility in a community (Whitton P+C, Leeton Connect) increased visibility of what Leeton community organisations can offer, increased networking and collaboration and improved organisation business infrastructure. These are captured in the below selected comments.

- *The funding that has supported hubs; that benefits whole communities, like the Whitton hub and Leeton Connect. It's helped with the social fabric of our community.*
- *Visibility of the NFPs in the community. Between the funded NFPs the relationship building and sharing resources, knowledge and understanding of what the community wants and how we can achieve those collectively as a community.*
- *The networks are significant and multi-layered. There has been media coverage about the town which has raised interest in the town. Organisational confidence has measurably increased. At first, we asked if we would get enough engagement, now we are looking at how people can collaborate. There has been a maturing in NFPs; organisations are more aware of activities and can mobilise resources.*
- *It's just given us, it's hard to explain... it's given us a modern office without having to pack things away. So many people put their heads in and people have noticed it. It has allowed us to hold our monthly meetings there; before we had to find a venue. It's heated and fits us all in.*
- *IRCF has given a sense of structure and order, the largest area is advocacy. The brand of Leeton has made it a place for settlement for newcomers. That transactional value has been the main outcome, the ability to project voice and standing.*

Significant changes from IRCF across Leeton have been captured well in this video clip from an interview with Leeton Connect: <https://vimeo.com/user112240275/lc>

Like many non-profits, change and action often happens because of key individuals. In Leeton, as in other communities there are individuals who are not only developing and strengthening community organisations but they are also mentoring the next generation of leaders. Ensuring there are opportunities for this knowledge transfer and investment in the next generation of leaders will be central to the continuity of the non-profit sector, in particular the volunteering base which is core to sustainable non-profits.

It is noted that the Stakeholder Breakfasts were not held in any of the three communities or data collection # 5. It was considered not essential to hold this for this round of data collection, but will resume for data collection in# 6 planned for May 2022.



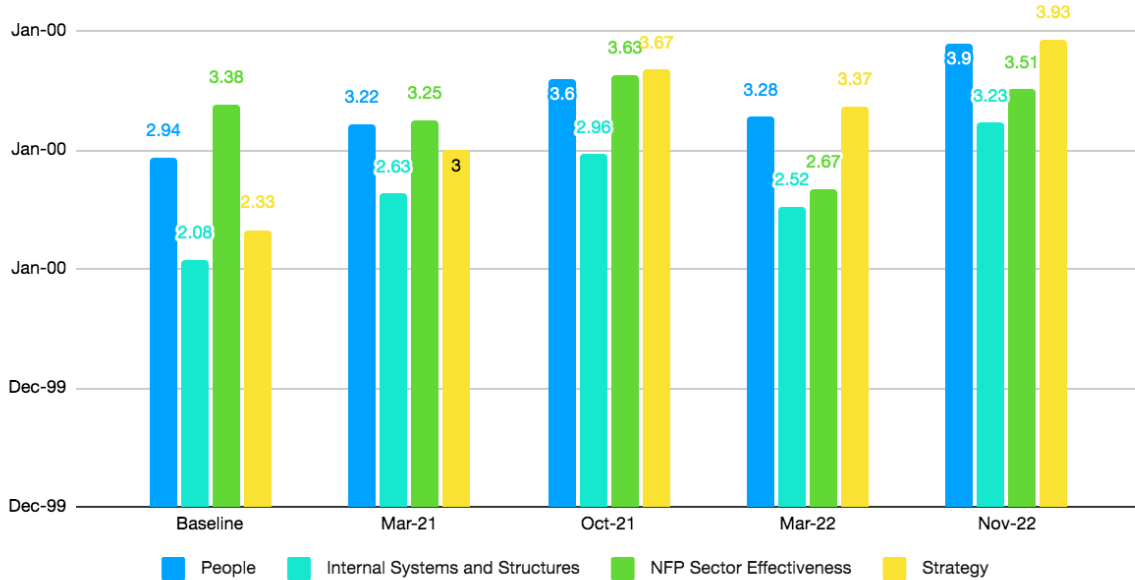


Progress Against Pillars compared to baseline

October 2020 (Baseline) – November 2022

Average of responses from self-assessment survey completed by all participating NFPs in Leeton

LEETON PROGRESS AGAINST IRCF PILLARS
Nov 22



As part of this evaluation, the change and impact on the capacity and sustainability of the individual NFP organisations involved in the program is being measured by using a series of tools. One of these tools is an organisational self-assessment for committees to collectively discuss the current health of their organisation. It was designed specifically for the program looking at the four pillars of People, Systems, Efficiencies, Strategy.

The assessment measures each pillar using a five-point scale out of 12 areas of organisational competency, giving organisations a score out of 60. We use an average of this score across the funded organisations to monitor the overall health of these organisations and to track any impacts the program may have. All funded organisations take part in the self-assessment.

Areas of greatest capacity building need:

While in most cases governance practices appear strong there was still identification by a few organisations that they would like to ‘upskill’ their volunteers in foundational governance skills and knowledge as well as provide the skill to enable effective board member succession. Leeton Business Chamber was also keen for general training for volunteers and for them, key stakeholders in maintaining a website.

In the lead up to the exit of IRCF from Leeton, the strongest message was about preparing Leeton Connect to be financially sustainable so it can maintain its hub, connector and information sharing role. One NFP said,

We need to make Leeton Connect financially sustainable, I don't think the board is equipped to do this on their own. I am anxious about time going by.. They need to develop a subscription package... and reconcile with the other organisations. Needs to have a paid position, otherwise it won't exist.





There is a strong sense amongst the participating organisations that Leeton Connect should take the baton from FRRR in terms of providing a paid role (Coordinator) who carries out Community Facilitator type activities, information sharing, facilitation of key meetings and collaborations and hosting a community wide annual planning/ Roadmap type process. The grants officer role currently hosted via a partnership between Leeton Connect and Leeton Council is the obvious addition to move fully into the service offering of Leeton Connect. A strength of Leeton is that the local Council is actively involved in several IRCF projects. They provide venue support for Leeton Connect, Multicultural Support Group (and auspice their grants), the Grants Officer role and Western Riverina Arts.

In moving towards the exit of IRCF the level of support to be provided by Leeton Council going forward to both support Leeton Connect either in-kind or financially should be canvassed.

There is also an opportunity for Leeton Connect to facilitate and lead the transition away from IRCF. This approach both cements Leeton Connect as a lead community agency but also ensures that all organisations know what's happening. There is a risk post IRCF that siloing may return if there aren't consistent mechanisms for people together. There is a role here for the current FRRR Community Facilitator to support Leeton connect in this facilitation process.



It will also be important that the current work taking place on financial sustainability (Leeton Connect and Leeton Jump Start) continues to be supported until December to ensure continuity of these organisations and their processes shared with others.





Results at November 2022

This section reports on the evaluation Theory of Change against the four strategic pillars - People, Systems, Efficiencies and Strategy.

<p style="text-align: center;">People</p>  <p style="text-align: center;">PEOPLE</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Systems</p>  <p style="text-align: center;">SYSTEMS</p>
<p>Governance</p> <p>Of all three communities, Leeton appears to have the strongest governance capacity. Five NFP's said their board knows their role and responsibilities with four discussing succession planning. Three said they do no Board training.</p> <p>Stakeholder Engagement/ Collaboration</p> <p>Four NFP's said they are actively collaborating with other organisations and have active partnerships in place. One organisation noted that their volunteers are involved in multiple organisations and that this helps with the partnerships they form.</p> <p>Confidence with using computers/ internet</p> <p>High levels of IT confidence across the staff and Board was noted by the majority of organisations, with others noting mixed to very low levels of confidence.</p> <p>Use of volunteers</p> <p>The level of volunteering is quite high, with two NFP's saying they have informal mentoring in place, two with PD's for volunteers and others saying 'the volunteers' just do what's required. One said their volunteering needed improvement.</p>	<p>Policy and Procedures</p> <p>The level of policies in place (four) or in development (2) indicated that NFPs either had what they needed or knew what needed development. Three said they have social media or technology use policies. Two NFPs said they were part of a parent organization or federated body and therefore used their policies (Whitton P+C and Rotary).</p> <p>Equipment, machinery, tools to deliver on the organisation's vision</p> <p>Most organisations said they have the equipment they need to deliver on their mission and three said they loan out their equipment.</p> <p>Financial Management</p> <p>Xero is the most common financial software used with one NFP using Excel to manage their financials. About half of the NFPs have more professional systems in place to manage their finances and the remainder on a smaller scale. Three NFPs have volunteers managing their financials and three others have paid finance staff. Three noted they have formal delegation documents and four say they are regularly presenting P+L and Balance Sheets. One NFP has their finances auspiced through Council.</p>





Efficiencies



Partnerships with other organisations or programs

There are multiple partnerships and MOU's across the organisations.

Shared Business Systems

There is a mix of NFPs who are sharing equipment (four) admin support (two), sharing venues (three). One noted that Council is their key relationship whom they rely on for space and equipment.

Strategy



Mission and Goals

All organisations knew what their goals were and if they didn't have their own mission, they were using that of their parent organisation.

Organisational Planning Tools and Processes

There is a mix of formal and informal planning processes in place. Three said they have multiyear strategic plans, one initiated a sponsorship program and two said they don't have a strategic plan. One said the plans for the year in her (the secretary's) head.

Grassroots problem solving in new and different ways and creativity

The program-driven NFP said that their service delivery evolves to meet the community's needs.

