



THE

★ RURAL ★ CHALLENGE

A GENDER EQUALITY
LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

The Pilot Program (Summary Guide)



Acknowledgements

The Rural Challenge: A Gender Equality Leadership Program – The Pilot Program Guide

Authors: Dr Jessica Crofts and Stephen Hiley

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Acknowledgements

This executive summary is the result of a pilot gender equality leadership program (called The Rural Challenge) undertaken by Macedon Ranges Shire Council, City of Greater Bendigo, Women's Health Loddon Mallee, AFL Goldfields, AFL Central Victoria, CFA District 2, Sports Focus and the Centre for Non-Violence.

In 2016-17, the initial phase of the pilot was called "The Rural Challenge project", while a second phase, called the "Rural Challenge Partnership", ran from 2017 onwards. The first year of the pilot was managed by the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV). The two pilot phases were funded by the State Government's Community Partnership for Primary Prevention Grants (2017-2018).

We would like to wholeheartedly thank all the CFA members and football netball club members who participated in The Rural Challenge, as they assisted greatly in the development of this program. These include: Junortoun CFA Brigade, Kangaroo Flat CFA Brigade, Kyneton Football Netball Club, Lancefield CFA Brigade, Lancefield Football Netball Club, Macedon CFA Brigade, Maiden Gully CFA Brigade, Malmsbury CFA Brigade, Mt Macedon CFA Brigade, Maldon CFA Brigade, Taradale CFA Brigade, South Bendigo Football Netball Club, and Strathfieldsaye CFA Brigade.

Awards and recognitions

The Rural Challenge was nominated for a range of awards including:

- Highly commended in the 2018 National Awards for Local Government (Community Safety category). This commendation recognised the Partnership and Leadership Program led by the Macedon Ranges Shire Council between 2017-18.
- Finalist in the 2018 VicHealth Awards in the Promoting Gender Equality category.

WHAT WAS THE RURAL CHALLENGE PILOT GENDER EQUALITY LEADERSHIP PROGRAM?

The Rural Challenge was a pilot Gender Equality Leadership Program that empowered leaders in Country Fire Authority (CFA) brigades and community sporting clubs to make organisational change to promote gender equality and a respectful culture.

Each week in Australia an average of one woman is killed by a former or current partner. Violence against women in Australia is a prevalent and serious issue.

The Rural Challenge Pilot Gender Equality Leadership Program was developed using the evidence based on the first edition of Our Watch's national framework for the prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia: *Change the Story*. *Change the Story* (due to be updated in 2021) uses the most recent national and international research and evidence to show that violence against women and their children is preventable. Countries with higher rates of gender equality have been shown to have lower rates of violence against women.

The Rural Challenge was a primary prevention program in that its aim was to contribute to the elimination of violence against women in rural and regional areas. Research has shown there is a proven link between gender equality, building respectful relationships and preventing violence against women. Therefore, while violence against women was briefly discussed in the program, the primary focus throughout was on *gender equality*.

The Rural Challenge pilot took a community development approach by building the capacity of community leaders through a series of discussion-based workshops and mentored action planning with an aim to develop Gender Equality Action Plans that change norms, structures and practices to prevent violence against women. These Action Plans were also a tool to support the sustainability of change processes.

The Rural Challenge pilot had two key aims:

1. To assist sporting clubs and CFA brigades to develop Gender Equality Action Plans that support gender equality. The action plans were focused on practical activities to embed the principles of gender equality through lasting organisational and cultural change, supporting women's empowerment, and engaging the community.
2. To activate individual transformational change of community leaders around gender equality. As previous research has stated, working with leaders to educate and train them is not enough, they need to experience this transformation to commit to ongoing personal and organisational change¹.

Sports clubs and CFA brigades are not places where violence against women is more likely to occur however they are traditionally male-dominated institutions and women, gender diverse people (and some men) can face barriers to participating fully. The pilot sought to engage men to actively support gender equality and practise positive healthy masculinities while creating actions that also empower women. This was about more than just increasing numbers of women in clubs and brigades; it was also about promoting a culture of gender inclusiveness.

Sport and the CFA have integral roles in Australian culture, particularly in rural and regional areas and can play a key role in shaping positive community attitudes and behaviour. The pilot not only supported clubs and brigades to create a respectful and inclusive culture for all their members, but by doing so, sought to model and promote gender equality and respectful relationships to the broader community.

Both sports clubs and the CFA are traditionally male-dominated, and gender inequality is a local and state-wide problem. For example, at the time of the pilot, there were 21 senior football-netball clubs in Macedon Ranges and Greater Bendigo with only one female president. Similarly, there were 49 CFA brigades with only one female captain.

However, the Program did not just focus on numbers – it focused on inclusive cultures. While a Football-Netball Club may have equal numbers of men and women, their practices may not be fair and equal. For instance, the men's senior football team may get automatic use of the only club change rooms over the senior women's football team or women's netball team, without a discussion about how these facilities can be shared fairly between men and women.

The Rural Challenge Pilot Gender Equality Leadership program was externally evaluated in 2018 by Springtech Services in the Macedon Ranges and Bendigo regions.

Documentation relating to The Rural Challenge pilot program is housed on the Women's Health Loddon Mallee [website](#).

THE RURAL CHALLENGE PILOT GENDER EQUALITY LEADERSHIP PROGRAM MODEL

Partnership Group

A strong partnership group was crucial for the success of The Rural Challenge.

A partnership was encouraged to include key members of partner organisations, with support sought in writing from the senior leadership of these organisations. The partnership supported the governance of the pilot rollout. Partners could support the program by providing expertise, advocacy, financial or 'in-kind' support, and assistance with recruiting clubs and brigades as well as facilitators and mentors.

It was also recommended that partner organisations be supported to develop and build their capacity for gender equity and sustain community organisational change. Examples included running gender equity workshops with all staff, as well as developing their own Gender Equality Action Plans.

Gender Equality Expert Panel

To ensure more accountability to women and gender diverse people, the partnership group was encouraged to establish a Gender Equality Expert Panel made up of experts in gender equality, sport, community development or the CFA². Their role was to provide critical input on key developments of the Program as well as a critique of the draft Gender Equality Action Plans.

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- 1 Sheridan, K., Castelino, T. & Boulet, J. (2015). *Challenge Family Violence: preventing violence against women at the local level. Evaluation report*. Melbourne: Borderlands Cooperative
- 2 Sheridan, K., Castelino, T. & Boulet, J. (2015). *Challenge Family Violence: preventing violence against women at the local level. Evaluation report*. Melbourne: Borderlands Cooperative.

The Rural Challenge Pilot Gender Equality Leadership Program Overview

The program was structured around three workshops, member engagement, gender audits and an expert panel review of action plans. To the participants, the program ran as follows:

Information session held at the club or brigade

Workshop 1 (Inclusive cultures and gender equality) delivered

Gender Checklist – as supported by the program’s partnership group – conducted

Member survey undertaken

Workshop 2 (Action planning) delivered

Gender Equality Expert Panel reviewed and provided feedback on draft Action Plans

Groups finalised their Gender Equality Action Plans

Workshop 3 (Managing push-back and advocating for gender equality in clubs and brigades) delivered

Celebration event held

Organisations began implementing Action Plans with the support of their partnership group

Facilitators

The pilot version of the Rural Challenge recommended having both a male and female facilitator in all workshops (with gender diverse facilitators also appropriate). The benefits of having a male facilitator when working with men include demonstrating a respectful, equal relationship and modelling women and men's shared interest in gender equality.

For Rural Challenge participants, male facilitators can embody the recognition that men must take responsibility for helping to end men's violence against women and that this is not a "women's issue".

If possible, it was recommended that the same facilitators conduct all workshops for continuity of material and to be able to understand the context of the local brigades and clubs.

Participants

The Rural Challenge Pilot Gender Equality Leadership Program was aimed at the leaders of the organisations involved. The club's president or brigade's captain attended the workshops as top-down leadership and commitment was essential to the success of the program. Leaders in clubs and brigades did not necessarily sit on the club committee or brigade management team – influential, well-respected members could also attend in their place.

It was recommended that at least six members from each organisation participate in the workshops. Ideally, a minimum of three men and three women from each organisation's leadership team were encouraged to be part of the program.

If other general members were interested in attending the program, they were welcome as additional participants, however the pilot focused specifically on leaders and the leadership group as much as possible.

The pilot also focused on having more than one type of organisation (i.e. CFA and AFL) to allow groups to learn from different organisational cultures.

The Rural Challenge Pilot Gender Equality Leadership Program was designed to be run with clubs, brigades or community groups who self-selected to participate. It was for groups that already had strong leadership and processes, rather than those who had governance problems or challenges. This was due to the firm belief that if the program was to succeed, there needed to be leadership support and commitment to change.

Workshop 1

The first workshop covered the topics of gender inequality, unconscious bias, gender stereotypes and benefits of gender equality for clubs and brigades. Workshop 1 was four hours in length.

The pilot provided a couple of different options for running workshop 1 – either delivered separately, segregated by gender (with gender diverse people opting in to either group) or with a mix of genders. The strategy chosen depended on the groups each partnership worked with. Both options have been evaluated to work well.

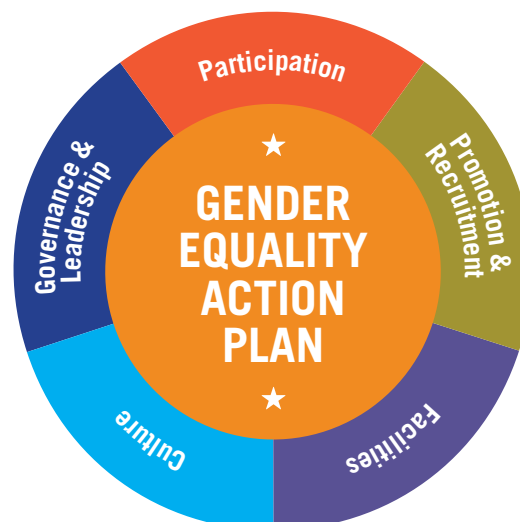
Member survey and gender checklist

Following Workshop 1, clubs and brigades were supported to run a member survey and conduct a gender checklist to gather information to inform their action planning. All members of the club/brigade were invited to participate in the gender checklist process.

Workshop 2

The second workshop involved action planning to develop Gender Equality Action Plans supported by specialist mentors. These mentors could be people from the steering committee, Gender Equality Expert Panel, local women's health organisation or local council.

Workshop 2 was four hours long and allowed people of all genders from Workshop 1 to attend. During these four hours, a mentor worked with a brigade or club and helped them analyse the data they collected through the survey and gender audit. The mentor then helped the organisation develop a Gender Equality Action Plan using the Gender Equality Action Plan template.



The action plan template was designed to help the participating groups highlight areas of inequality, conscious or unconscious bias, and identify areas that may need to be strengthened. The generic Gender Equality Action Plan template had several different areas to focus on – Governance and Leadership, Facilities, Culture, Participation and Facilities.

Workshop 3

Workshop 3 was an optional workshop to discuss how to manage backlash and how to talk about gender equality to other members. Workshop 3 was three hours long and people of all genders attended this workshop.

Clubs and brigades from previous iterations of the pilot were on some occasions invited to participate in Workshop 3 to share their experience and challenges with others.

All the workshops had a focus on participatory activities and discussion, to support critical group engagement and individual reflection.

The timing of the workshops depended on the group. However, ideally the first and second workshops were ran six weeks apart. Between Workshops 1 and 2, participants were asked to survey and consult with their club/brigade. Workshop 3 could run anywhere between 1 to 6 weeks after participants had finalised their action plans.

WHAT PARTICIPANTS SAID ABOUT PHASE ONE OF THE PILOT PROGRAM:

“It was really good to have the brigades there and the sports clubs. There was a point of difference as well as similarities and this was better for conversations.”

“Some of the men were being defiant about an issue, but we could give examples where we have not felt safe or where we felt ignored. When we gave these examples, this was really positive and was a catalyst to make the group more cohesive. We identified the barriers within the club and this was positive.”

“[Name redacted] is now coaching the boys, which is the first time a woman has coached them. This is having a positive impact on the boys and the parents are surprised and pleased. This is leadership from within and works well with the leadership from the President and from other women in leadership roles.”

Dealing with push back and resistance in clubs and brigades

“The workshops created space for the conversations and gave the group a mandate for the work. It also provided the tools to have these conversations. There are still pockets of resistance that remain, but they are now ‘hidden’, and we do not expect them to change.”

“The real challenge is about the ‘push back’ and the entrenched resistance. We need to have a workshop for leaders in how to have these difficult conversations. It gives others a chance to ‘reset’ or ‘redefine’ their views including how to deal with it, and generally they make the right decision. Others can influence this conversation if they have the skills.”

“We had the full support of Brigade Management Team, knowing that some members would ‘drop off’ from the brigade. It is now much less tense here without this negative influence.”

Consulting with members: the gender checklist and member survey

“The gender checklist highlighted things that we hadn’t thought about before and where we hadn’t realised there was an issue. We can now look at it and accommodate it.”

“The gender checklist was the most useful thing. When people said there wasn’t a problem and that it was all equal, then the question was “how come we are a Football Netball Club and there are no netball pictures on the walls?”. It has been very useful to educate people about the problem.”

“The member survey was very useful to show us what we are up against. This helps us know the challenges and where there is ‘push back’ and we can manage it better.”

The Gender Equality Action Plan

“The whole process was simple and easy, and it was good to have external people who reviewed our Gender Equality Action Plan and suggested different wording. This was not a strength for our group, so it was good to have the experts involved.”

“The action planning process identified that there is a bigger problem than we thought, and it will take more work than we thought.”



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