

Search Criteria

Model	Model A: Facilitation and Empowerment
Industry	Wool Industry
Focus/Level	Industry
Outcomes	Building individual confidence Building management skills
Special Interest Groups	Other

1. Project Title:

look @ Wool - fast tracking business development

2. Funders:

Primary Industries and Resources South Australia (PIRSA)
Australian Wool Innovation Limited (AWI)

3. Providers:

Primary Industries and Resources South Australia (PIRSA)

4. Key Contacts:

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5. Industry/Issue/Geography:

The program services South Australia sheep producers who operate their businesses below Goyder's line (this excludes the pastoral region, which is serviced by Bestprac).

PIRSA identified an opportunity to improve the sustainability and profitability of the South Australian sheep industry.

6. Project Context:

Research by Rabobank recognised that:

- wool producers have low levels of adoption of new technologies
- there is a need to improve the average rate of sustainable profitability across the on-farm sector of the industry.
- there is an identifiable link with the aspirations and motivations of the farm family, farm business objectives and strategies, and the adoption of new practices.

Based on this information and the overall decline of the wool industry PIRSA made the decision to develop an innovative program that targeted the aspirations and motivations of South Australian woolgrowers.

7. Project Niche (Specific Objectives):

look @ Wool will

- Utilise the action learning cycle to promote a culture of continuous improvement and innovation within the management and production systems.
- Support between 10 and 25 teams and up to 250 sheep producers;
- Deliver a producer owned and driven extension program;
- Assist in the adoption of innovation, sustainable and appropriate management practices leading to an increase in profitability and sustainability of *look @ Wool* businesses over a five year period;
- Achieve an on-farm productivity growth of 3% per annum by 2007;
- Foster the development of a strong sheep producer network across South Australia; and
- Establish productive partnerships between *look @ Wool* participants and the wool industry supply chain.

8. Philosophy/Approach:

To utilise a framework that:

- Is a social process
- Concentrates on generative learning
- Learner centred
- Supports individuals to choose their own projects to work on
- Utilises the group dynamics to share information and support each other
- Stimulates a proactive and sound networking culture
- Encourages measurement of progress
- Provides mentoring and coaching
- Uses facilitators as process guides
- Adheres to the principles of adult and action learning

9. Resources, Management and Staffing Structures:

The program is managed by Rural Solutions SA and utilises various human resources:

- Consultants from the private sector
- Consultants from Rural Solutions SA and PIRSA
- Communications specialists
- Consultant from AWI

- PhD student from Adelaide University (name to announced)
- Spatial geographer from Adelaide University
- Project Advisory Panel of Woolgrowers
- Evaluation specialist from Victorian Department of Primary Industries

The program is jointly funded by PIRSA and AWI with a budget of \$685,000 over three years. FarmBis and membership fees also contribute to the cost of operation. AWI is funding the PhD scholarship.

Consultants with strong facilitation skills have been contracted to work with producer teams.

10. Process/Methods Used:

A Project Advisory Panel has been established to set strategic direction. It consists of five woolgrowers and one representative from AWI and one representative from PIRSA.

Facilitators are contracted through an open selection process, which requires an application and interview.

The **look @ Wool** program has adopted a decision making and implementation process called Continuous Improvement and Innovation (CI&I) developed by Richard Clarke and Janice Timms of the Queensland Department of Primary Industries in 1998. In developing the process the authors have drawn from approaches such as Action research, Action Learning, Benchmarking, Innovation, Total Quality Management, Systems Dynamics and Experiential Learning.

The CI&I process will be used as a guiding process only and not a rigid recipe for supporting sheep producer teams and individuals to achieve sustainable profitability. It is intended that facilitators be as flexible as possible to allow producers to address their individual learning needs. It is also expected that all teams, including the Project Advisory Panel and Management, adopt this process in principle.

The basic tenure of the CI&I model is a 180-day, 6 step cyclic process that results in continuous improvement. One of the critical success factors of this model is the use of language as a catalyst for new thinking and new action. Thus there is strong emphasis on words such as Team, Partnership, Focus, Measurement, Network and Purpose.

For the purpose of the **look @ Wool program**, the facilitator is the person who guides the process for the producer teams, but is not directly involved in the content.

The specific sessions of the cycle are:

- Start-up Workshop which focuses individuals and teams on taking action on high impact opportunities
- 30-day Support Sessions in which team members meet or teleconference to report on the actions they have implemented over the past 30 days and to support each; Two 30 day support sessions are generally held between the workshops.
- 90 day Workshop in which teams meet to report and assess the results of the actions they have taken over the past 90 days;

- 180 day Workshops in which teams meet to report on their achievements over that past 180 days, develop new questions and ideas about further improvement and innovation, and synthesise new opportunities to focus

Each cycle takes six to eight months to complete. It is recognised that many groups disband due to lack of support and momentum. To maintain momentum and keep participants focused between workshops, facilitators are required to provide coaching to the teams collectively or to the individual every as required.

11. Impacts to date (and evaluation approaches used):

Six groups consisting of 45 businesses are currently operating. We have a 50/50 female / male ratio with three all male groups and three all female groups. Three of these groups have completed one cycle, with all participants achieving their aim for this period.

Facilitators have received training in the Continuous Improvement and Innovation model by Clarke & Timms.

Producers are asked to report their achievement and leanings in the last workshop of each cycle. An independent survey by Currie Communications recently identified that 85% of participants believe their participation in *look @ Wool* will benefit their business.

12. Effectiveness:

Too early to say.

13. Project Documentation available:

Nil to date

14. Issues:

Difficulties promoting how the program differs from others in SA. Anecdotal feedback suggests producers are not familiar with the concept of addressing a topic of their choice within a group environment.

The program strongly encourages more than one member of a business to participate but this has not been widely adopted. Currently exploring ways to stimulate an uptake from other family members at the beginning of a cycle.

Many existing groups have alliances with a co-coordinator/consultant. *look @ Wool* has been exploring ways of accommodating this situation when the coordinator or consultant does not want to or feels unable to apply for a facilitator position with the program.

The name has put a number of people off as they see their income from wool declining and look to other enterprises to remain viable. Also, anecdotal feedback suggests that

prime lamb producers do not see themselves as wool producers and thus do not relate to the title. We are currently reviewing the program name and promotional activities with a communications specialist.

Finding suitable funding from agencies that truly support the producer driven concept rather than predetermined outcomes that focus on one area of the business.

15. Comments/conclusions:

look @ Wool is showing early signs of a genuine producer driven, capacity building program producing excellent and empowering results for the individual participants and thus the broader industry. The program provides a strong supportive framework through facilitation, coaching and mentoring that motivates participants to address their individual business needs and support their peers to do the same.

As this is a small budget extension program, early trends suggest this may be a very cost effective approach to stimulating a continuous improvement culture among primary producers.

16. Review Methods:

look @ Wool uses an ORID process to solicit feedback from producers and facilitators about the process at workshop. This information is reviewed at facilitator and Advisory Panel meetings and improvements implemented.

Our PhD student commences in September they will be assigned a producer team in each region to monitor and evaluate the facilitation process and individual progress. This information will be presented quarterly to the *look @ Wool* Advisory Panel to assist with informed strategic direction. Operational issues will also be discussed with the facilitators at their six monthly meetings.

The doctorate is through the University of Adelaide.