

SEARCH CRITERIA

Model	Model A: Empowerment Model
Industry	Community
Focus/Level	Community
Outcomes	Building individual confidence, Building community
Special Interest Groups	Women

1. PROJECT TITLE:

Rural, Remote and Regional Women's Network

Reviewer Dr Fionnuala Frost

2. FUNDERS:

The State Government of Western Australia funds the RRR network. The investment is about \$150,000 per year. There is additional support from the Department of Agriculture to pay salaries and provide office space and support for the Executive Officer of the Network.

3. PROVIDERS:

There are two state agencies who deliver the programme. They are:

1. Department of Agriculture; and
2. Department of Local Government and Regional Development.

4. KEY CONTACTS:

Ms Christine Thompson. Programme Coordinator for the Network.

Department of Agriculture, Katanning. 9821 3333.

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5. INDUSTRY/ISSUE/GEOGRAPHY

This programme extends across the entire of Western Australia, While its principal regions are the rural, regional and remote areas of the state, membership to the network also features women who live and work in Perth. All women are eligible to be part of this network. The main issue and indeed purpose of the organisation is to encourage the developing of a network of communication and information exchange among all women, but particularly those who have relatively limited time and access to talk with a range of women about aspects of life and living in rural, regional and remote parts of the state.

6. PROJECT CONTEXT

The RRR Network was established in 1996. Its original intent of bringing together women from rural, remote and regional Western Australia remains current in 2002. It was hoped that emerging from this network would be scope and opportunity for women to recognise, promote and expand the contributions they make within their local communities and industry. It was also recognised that women needed to have the opportunity to exchange and learn from other women, their achievements, their challenges and ways of coping with remoteness and isolation. In providing this support it was anticipated that women would both continue to develop and look after themselves as well as have the courage to contribute in a community, many found themselves married into, having relatively little connection with the people and the landscape.

The charter of the RRR network is to:

Bring together women from rural, remote and regional Western Australia to recognise, promote and expand the contribution they make to their communities.

The Network has five objectives.

1. To provide a mechanism for rural, remote and regional women's organisation and individuals to link with each other to disseminate and share information relevant to the development of rural and regional communities.
2. To provide rural, remote and regional women with easy access to government information and programmes relevant to regional development and agriculture.
3. To provide government agencies and other service providers with information on education and training needs for rural, remote and regional women.
4. To provide a resource for government departments, industry associations, decision-making bodies and local authorities to access rural, remote and regional women.
5. To provide a link between organisations for the exchange of information and the cooperative development of programmes relevant to rural, remote and regional women.

7. PROJECT NICHE

There is no particular niche with this project. All women are invited to be involved, the aim of the project is to inform and encourage women, particularly those who are somewhat isolated or removed from female support and company. There are no expectations as such, all women are welcome to hear other stories, learn from others and contribute to the content.

8. PHILOSOPHY/APPROACH:

Awareness, network development, where network is defined as a people being connected by the exchange of information and ideas.

This project was essentially instigated by one woman, Marg Agnew who lived in a remote agricultural region of the state near Esperance. While Marg, on one hand enjoyed living in the area she missed the company of her family, particularly her sisters and mother and her female friends. Rather than lamenting this loss of company, Marg considered ways in which she could become connected with other women in similar situations and their environments. After much lobbying and networking, the concept of the network became a reality and in 1996, the RRR Network as it is known today was established. The philosophy is such that if the isolation and feelings of uncertainty are, if not removed, are diluted, then women will gain confidence to become more involved in both their own development and the development of their community.

9. RESOURCES, MANAGEMENT AND STAFFING STRUCTURES

The RRR Network is managed by a Programme Coordinator, based in Katanning and Management Committee. Members of the Management Committee represent the range of women most likely to be part of the Network. Representation is based on geography and professional background. The Committee meets four times a year to discuss a range of issues particularly related to the services, support and direction of the Network. Funding and programme support are also addressed by the committee.

10. PROCESS/METHODS USED

The overall approach of the RRR Network is to build the capacity of women in order to develop their skills in a range of areas including communication, leadership and self-confidence. The Network does not conduct workshops as such but works to develop ways in which all women, regardless of their location may be part of the network. There are four main ways in which this is done.

1. The flagship of the network is the RRR Network magazine. Now boasting an extensive readership. The magazine aims to inform women about the lives of other women, on areas of personal and organisational development and inform women to major events in the state. The magazine is published quarterly and reaches all women. Its content is designed to have general appeal. Eighty per cent of the content is provided by the readers and 20 per cent is information that is provided to women on special interest topics, and how further information may be accessed. The Magazine is highly regarded and often attracts letters of support. There is no cost to receive the magazine.
2. The RRR Network has an interactive website. More specifically, the website has five key features.
 - a. Chat room – where people can contribute their thoughts on topics of interest.
 - b. Bulletin Board – Here general queries, requests for information and important issues are posted for awareness and interest and/or to receive advice.
 - c. Electronic copies of the Magazine are made available on the website.
 - d. Hotlinks to key information sites, eg health; farm safety; personal development are listed.
 - e. Other events, including those of other women's organisations are advertised.
3. On-line chats are a regular feature of the Network. Women are invited to participate to chat with invited guests and ask questions they were always keen to ask.
4. The email group provides daily updates on 'whats-on' as well as provides a useful means to share information about any aspect of living where women live.

The aim of this approach is to find a range of ways whereby women may be connected to other women, find out what is going around them and identify areas for development, both personally and socially.

11. IMPACTS TO DATE.

The impacts of this programme are difficult to determine for two reasons. The first is that the Network does not aim to achieve any particular 'thing' as such, rather, the network is about connecting people to overcome a sense of isolation and loneliness and to encourage people to participate in their environment. The second limitation in determining effectiveness is that there has yet to be any formal evaluation of the programme. As such, determination of effectiveness is quite arbitrary.

However, the impact may be regarded as being very significant simply on a measure of membership. There are currently more than 5,500 members of the network, and this number is steadily increasing. Since the Network began in 1996, membership has increased exponentially. Assessment of impact is also made by the number of contacts on the website and the fact that the magazine receives a considerable contribution of articles from members for the magazine. The network regularly receives letters of support.

12. EFFECTIVENESS:

Very high.

In terms of establishing networks and forms by which women can not only read about what other women are doing, but may also contribute to the content and conversations, the effectiveness of this programme is very high. The programme is also very high in terms of its effectiveness simply because it always set out to develop this network. However, this effectiveness must also be challenged in that the charter of the Network aimed to contribute to government policy and encourage women to contribute to local development. While various anecdotes suggest that this does indeed occur, there is little firm evidence that this is the case.

13. PROJECT DOCUMENTATION AVAILABLE:

RRR Magazines from 1996;

RRR Website

RRR Network Charter.

14. ISSUES:

There are three issues regarded as being significant to the Network. These are:

1. Maintaining relevance. The magazine must appeal to a range of women and so must cater with articles reflecting a range of topics, including health, regular book reviews and the achievements of others.
2. Maintain funding – programmes where the benefits may be difficult to perceive are always under some threat of funding cutbacks. The RRR Network is no exception. The programme will need in the future demonstrate its relevance and impact to secure further public funds.
3. That funding is stable and survives electoral cycles and policy shifts. The network sees that if it is to continue to invest in website technologies particularly, then it is necessary to ensure that the programme is also secure.

15. COMMENTS/CONCLUSIONS:

This programme is highly regarded and valued by women across WA. The fact that membership is growing and that women are participating in the electronic discussions reflects this success. The programme may well benefit however from a broad review of its achievements and direction.

16. REVIEW METHODS:

Personal interview with Ms Christine Thompson. Discussions with Ms Cathy Broad; Ms Liz Guidera and Ms Lynnley McGrath. Reading relevant material.