

# The Community Builders Program - Overview

## Preamble:

The Community Builders Program represents a grassroots leadership program that seeks to support local community builders within a defined cluster of communities to better understand and build their local and regional community and economy. The earliest version originated in the early 1990's in the US state of Nebraska, based on five observations by a rural historian called Professor Robert Manley; namely-

- ❑ The key to economic success in rural communities is tied directly to investment in community leadership;
- ❑ While agriculture is, and will remain an important part of Nebraska's economy, it no longer holds life and death power over a community's economy;
- ❑ There are two types of leadership exist in every community – formal identified leaders who usually represent a constituency and have position; and community 'mover and shakers' – community builders who usually work from passion rather than position;
- ❑ There is a need to bring together community residents who are excited about making things happen in their community; and
- ❑ The importance of community cooperation, of communities beginning to interact, discover each other and work together to achieve social and economic goals.

***'It isn't enough for a town to have good leadership. Communities also must have people – Community Builders – who vigorously encourage and support a wide range of activities which benefit the community. These builders aren't self-serving. They're interested in improving and perpetuating their communities. Find a community with both leaders and builders and you'll find a community that works' - Prof Robert Manley***

The first Australian Community Builder Program occurred in Western Australia in 1997 following a 'Small Town Study Tour' to Nebraska, and by 2000 there were cluster programs happening in most WA regions. In 2000, a state-wide program was introduced in South Australia. Subsequently versions of the Community Builder Program have occurred in a diverse range of regions across Australia.

## Program Goals:

- ❑ Provide the necessary information, skills, tools, motivation, confidence and passion to positively manage community change.
- ❑ Encourage new thinking about ways to better support and nurture social and economic development at local and regional levels.

- Stimulate collaboration between communities and create peer support networks and friendship links across a region.

### **Typical Program Elements:**

- 6 to 8-month action learning model.
- A cluster of communities constitute the geographical regional basis.
- Between 6 – 10 communities create a cluster.
- Each community is represented by a 3 to 6-member team.
- A trained part time local facilitator coordinates each cluster.

### **Typical Learning Program Components:**

- A residential 24-hour workshop retreat to bond group and determine program dynamics and learning priorities.
- Monthly workshops days
- Community mapping experiences.
- Individual community team meetings
- Community project.
- Additional skills development opportunities.
- Final celebration event.

### **Typical Monthly Workshop Day:**

- 'First Impressions' tour of host community – feedback to hosts.
- Informal sharing over refreshment breaks.
- Resource information session.
- Interactive workshop experience focusing on an identified learning priority. Examples have included the following themes-
  - Getting a community working together and excited about change.
  - Working with local media.
  - Establishing a community 'Business Expansion and Retention Program'.

- Developing a local tourism strategy.
- Plugging spending leaks in the local community.
- Fostering economic development through heritage.
- Building positive community mindset.
- Asset mapping a local community.
- Understanding my strengths.
- Developing public speaking skills.....

### **Program Strengths:**

- Action learning nature of program structure and processes.
- Program flexibility.
- Grassroots ethos – driven and designed by participants themselves to achieve their priority learning requirements.
- Strong Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) emphasis – focus on *‘inside out’* development.
- Peer networking and monitoring.
- Program expectation to learn about one’s community and become involved in building its future.
- Low cost.
- Demonstration over a long period of participant and community positive change action following Community Builder involvement.

### **Personal Benefits of Participation:**

- Gaining a better understanding of one’s community and region, and what is needed to build a more positive rural future.
- Developing the knowledge base, skills and mindset to be more effective in community and economic development.
- Discovering the wide range of strategies and resources which other communities are utilising to achieve healthy and vibrant futures.
- Learning how to identify, map, connect and mobilise the diverse range of community assets and capacities; access appropriate development resources; build collective partnerships; and involve other residents and groups in community and economic development initiatives.

- ❑ Working and networking collaboratively with neighbouring communities in regional development activities.
- ❑ Having fun in a wide range of team building experiences and activities.

*'I'm involved with Community Builders because the fading history of our town is too great to be ignored and the future too exciting. The camaraderie and participation with other communities makes this program so vitally stimulating' - Salli Vaughan, Kendenup, WA.*

*'I have met and made friends with an awesome group of people whom I know that I ordinarily would never have met. The six months that made up the Community Builders Program was a blast and it was a shame that it had to come to an end. Or did it?' -Heidi Hotka.*

### **For Further Details:**

Peter Kenyon OAM, Director, Bank of I.D.E.A.S.

Ph: 0417183719      Email: [pk@bankofideas.com.au](mailto:pk@bankofideas.com.au)

For copy of a Community Builders program Handbook see – <https://boifiles.s3-ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/2019/SA+CB+PROGRAM+HANDBOOK+June.pdf>

*'Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world – indeed it is the only thing that ever has' -Margaret Mead.*



***'If you want a year of prosperity, grow grass.***

***If you want ten years of prosperity, grow trees.***

***If you want 100 years of prosperity, grow people. '***

**(Scott's Bluff Leadership)**