



Living Communities™ - A Snapshot.

What is it?

Living Communities™ is a community economic development program, developed by the not-for-profit, Living Towns Corporation. It focuses on working with the community to find where the money is leaking out of the local economy and then identify new enterprises and enhance existing ones to plug those leaks.

Why should towns consider Living Communities™?

Regional towns import the majority of their food, energy, services and many other needed commodities causing vital capital to simply leak out of the economy. Many towns are fighting a constant battle to keep people and businesses from leaving. Many have simply run out of ideas to attract new residents.

Without a strong local economy, towns usually find it difficult to implement their visions without government assistance. They constantly lose people to the city, can't attract new people to live there and find it hard to recover from disruptions like economic downturn, natural disasters or changing government policy. So delicate is the balance for some, that the failure of one vital service or business in town can be a disaster for all the others.

Even outwardly successful regional towns have enormous economic leaks. For example, mining town's local economies suffer because many workers are 'fly-in, fly-out' and don't add to the social fabric. They also tend to spend their wages when they're in the city not with local businesses.

For seemingly economically stable towns, Living Communities™ represents an enormous opportunity to retain more wealth in the local economy, build social capital and become more resilient for the time when economic circumstances driving the current stability, change.

As such, Living Communities™ isn't just for towns with a problem now, it helps to make sure that future problems won't be as debilitating when they arise.

In essence, Living Communities™ builds resilience in the local economy and when implemented enthusiastically by the community, can act like an insurance policy against changing circumstances.

How does it work?

The program is facilitated by the experts from Living Towns Corporation but is driven by the local community. We recognise that it is the local people who have the answers for their community; we can help identify some of the obstacles and help make the pathway clearer. We do this through community engagement and putting the tools and mechanisms in place for all sectors of the community to become involved, for example; business, residents, local government, community groups, schools, indigenous etc.

The community engagement can take the form of workshops, surveys and think tanks or events, websites and activities amongst others. It is always tailored to the community's needs.

We provide experts only when needed so the community has complete control over which direction it wants to take.

Who are the people involved?

Living Towns Corporation has a small board of directors and an advisory board of expert practitioners, business people, academics and researchers. A full list of the team and short biographies can be found on our website: www.livingcommunities.com.au

How long does it take?

We estimate most projects will take between 3 and 6 months, depending on the population and complexity of issues in a given community.

How can a community become a Living Community™?

Starting is easy. Just two or three committed locals can form a local Living Communities™ Group. This group can then set about, with the assistance of Living Towns, to raise awareness in the town and money from sponsors to fund the project.

What are the benefits of becoming a Living Community™?

Short Term: Greater energy in the community working toward a common goal is the most obvious early benefit. For instance, some ideas for plugging the leaks can be started very quickly. A buy local campaign for residents or developing networks for businesses to co-operate are two examples.

Communicating the progress of the engagement to the wider community is also important – where a leak has been found, how much money the town could save if 10% of the residents changed their spending patterns etc.

Residents and businesses notice the activity and are more likely to want to get involved once they see some real energy around the project.

Medium Term: The multiplier effect of a dollar staying longer in the local economy means local businesses do better. Studies indicate nearly half of a dollar spent locally stays local but less than 15 cents stays local if that dollar is spent in a non-local business operating in town.

An improved environment for local business means more new businesses can start-up and residents can afford better local services.

Some leak plugging enterprises not only help financially but they provide opportunities for all sectors of the community. For example, a community may choose to run a community market garden that helps plug a food leak, as a not-for-profit, putting the money made back into a community fund. The people who work the garden may come from the town's seniors or even the youth – providing a healthy activity and a sense of belonging for the former and a learning opportunity for the latter. The benefits of both groups working on the enterprise together would be enormous.

Longer Term: Your community may also find it can implement some of the ideas it has had for some time but not had the capacity to do so previously. You may be able to attract more people to town and stop some from leaving, to stabilize your population.

If the right funding structures are set-up, longer-term benefits of having more capital held in an economy can mean larger, more expensive projects can be started.

These can range from main street enhancement or perhaps major infrastructure investments like renewable energy or waste treatment.

Of course, re-building your local economy with major projects like renewable energy is not an overnight task. However the process needn't be one without exciting small wins being obtained along the way to the bigger wins. In fact, every small win is a vital step to the more visionary projects all communities aspire to.

What are the Pilot Projects?

The Living Communities™ pilot projects are the first steps in establishing the program as an important tool for regional economies across Australia. We have chosen to run three pilots to test our program. One in a large regional town, one in a mid-sized regional town and one in a small regional town.

Benefits of being a pilot town

While being a pilot town means that we cannot be certain of exactly how the project will evolve (by their very nature, pilots involve much testing and measuring), pilot towns get advantages that towns who do the program later will not;

- Reduced cost – our consultants have agreed to reduce their fees for the pilots.
- Promotional benefits by being one of the first towns in Australia – we have a highly credentialed PR expert on our board and good networks in the WA media so we expect the first towns to generate positive interest.

How are the pilots funded?

As a start-up not-for-profit enterprise we are open to many sources of funding including; Local government & business support and state & federal grant schemes.

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