



COURSE 21 FINAL REPORT

BY

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Introduction

I come to the end of the ARLP experience with a mixture of relief that the time commitment is almost over, thankfulness that I have been provided this fantastic opportunity, sadness that I will no longer have the dedicated time for learning and for the interaction with the entire C21 cohort and excitement for all the opportunities that the ARLP has provided me with.

My roles in both work and the community remain the similar to when I commenced the course however I believe that, thanks to the ARLP experience, I can now undertake them more effectively, with more maturity and grace.

I have been able to focus on my own strengths of organisation, focus and communication and concentrate on areas requiring improvement such as delegation and people management.

Attaining a more thorough understanding of my own attributes and their potential will benefit me greatly as I endeavour to further develop my leadership roles to the benefit of rural, remote and regional communities.

Highlights of and lessons from the program

Leading from the mob

The key highlight of the ARLP was a complete overhaul of my understanding of leadership. I have attained leadership positions through being the one who has the knowledge of the issue and the confidence to speak up. Whilst these positions usually bring with them a willing team, it has not been a conscious decision to bring people along with me. My future roles will include the knowledge that for sustainable success you need to undertake strategies to ensure that your team members are fully engaged on the journey with you.

Empowerment

One of my weaknesses is the unwillingness or inability to delegate – I like things done my way and to be sure of the quality and outcome of activities. The ARLP, commencing in the Kimberly and continuing through the 18 months, really brought home the need to ensure that all on the journey need to feel valued and need to be able to contribute.

Know Thy Self

My ARLP experience highlighted that effective leadership requires a comprehensive knowledge of one's own attributes, strengths and weaknesses. The ARLP has increased my own knowledge of self and the implications for my leadership style and opportunities. The Kimberly session was, of course, the most profound for self-acknowledgement however the entire eighteen months has provided opportunities for solidification of these initial insights and development of strategies to capitalise on this knowledge.

Ethics

The ARLP has highlighted the flexible line of ethics and each person's own moral compass and the effect this can have on leadership styles and outcomes. The past 18 months has highlighted where my own ethical and honesty line lies and has illustrated how one's own perceptions and belief systems directly affect it. I would like to think that I am more aware of the scope of what may or may not be considered an ethical or honest course of action. This was illustrated in the Kimberley with the discussion of the acceptability of not paying entry fees to a national park when only entering the park for five minutes – it sounds simple but raised many issues and perspectives and has given much cause for reflection on current decisions.

Inter-Industry Relationships

The importance of relationships between different industries, both agricultural and non-agricultural and the opportunities that those networks can deliver to your core industry was a highlight of the program for me. I look forward to capitalising on those networks made through the ARLP as well as the potential future ones thanks to the opportunities provided by the ARLP.

Fierce Conversations

It was a light bulb moment. The need to be in the moment and really concentrate on conversations as well as to prepare for and consider the potential outcomes of those fierce conversations sounds obvious. It should have been logical however the busyness of life and multi-tasking had reduced my 'in the moment' participation in conversations. I now give greater respect to those I am conversing with. In addition, strategic conversations are no longer allowed to take their own direction but are undertaken with a thorough knowledge of outcomes desired and a potential fall-back position.

Lobbying

As a campaigner for many issues over the years I found the exposure to negotiation tactics and lobbying strategies very informative and valuable to sculpt my future actions for more amenable and endorsed outcomes. I realise that whilst past campaigns have been successful, we have tended towards a bull at a gate or a 'Current Affair' type mentality, rather than a collaborative and negotiated outcome.

Collaboration

The emphasis on collaboration and consensus through all stages of the ARLP certainly led to an improvement in my listening techniques and the necessity to consider an issue from all perspectives. However the focus on collaboration highlighted not only the need for discussions and active listening but also the necessity to have an end-point where a decision must be made despite opposing opinions.

Leadership Contributions – now and in the future

My initial catalyst for applying for the ARLP was having a few tears in a high level meeting when negotiating to retain what I considered to be an exceptionally vital health service. It was an emotive issue however the tears undermined every argument made previously and the motion was lost. I determined then that I would undertake personal development to ensure that I could be a more effective representative of my community and the ARLP has been a key factor in this development.

I know that I now approach issues with a broader perspective and put more effort into ensuring that I am conversant with all alternative views prior to entering a negotiation. Whilst emotional issues still cross my desk, there are no tears, just reasoned arguments and a more collected and graceful presentation.

I have not only developed a more in-depth understanding of leadership through my own experiences but have found motivation and guidance through the experiences and advice of fellow C21 participants to be invaluable. The sharing of their personal stories still resonates and I often reflect on how many have overcome adversity or capitalised on a situation and use this reflection in determining my own course of action. The exposure to such a range of skills, experiences and industries is priceless and will be a resource I will continue to draw on throughout my leadership journey.

Since commencing the ARLP I can acknowledge increased leadership ability and have been requested to chair higher level meetings and have been confident to take on additional leadership roles in controversial situations. I believe I am more aware of my own ethical and governance expectations and am empowered to speak out to ensure the organisations and causes I am involved with fall within these expectations.

The cross-fertilisation of ideas from across the industry groups and with people of different ethnicity and backgrounds has consciously broadened my awareness of potential opportunities for rural, remote and regional Australian and more specifically, within my community. I can envisage my local community benefiting from my ARLP experience through the utilisation of the networks and relationships made over the past 18 months to assist with addressing issues or opportunities. Indeed the breadth of exposure will hopefully, result in the ability to identify more far reaching opportunities for our community.

These connections and exposure to other industries has also piqued my interest and confidence to become more involved in organisations and opportunities outside my existing scope and becoming more involved in industry organisations over the coming years is being considered.

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I also have a much better appreciation of the time commitment of others in bringing their outcomes to fruition and it has fostered a mindset change – instead of undertaking challenges and then begrudging the time, I am more selective in the challenges I champion to ensure I can gift the time willingly and to better effect. Indeed, the Indonesian experience reinforced just how easy we have it and how my busiest day is undoubtedly less exhausting than many in developing countries. When you have dinner with an Indonesian woman who lives on three to four hours sleep per night in order to support her family, it puts your own luxury of time into perspective.

For me personally, the ARLP has provided me with the skills and the confidence to potentially enter into a more public domain, with entry into local politics being considered in the near future.

The ARLP, and particularly the JCU Associate Certificate of Rural Leadership has awakened my enjoyment of formal study and I plan to continue with my leadership and industry development through formal education.

I am so thankful for the opportunity to participate in the Australian Rural Leadership Program. Thank you to the Australian Rural Leadership Foundation and all involved in running the ARLP, to my ARLP C21 cohort and particularly to my sponsors Cotton Australia and the Cotton Research and Development Corporation (CRDC). It has been life changing!



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Graduates of ARLP Course 21, 2015