



**REGIONAL
AUSTRALIA**
INSTITUTE

Corporate Plan 2015-2018

Purpose

This plan provides a strategic framework for the activities of the Regional Australia Institute (RAI) from June 2015 to the June 2018.

Corporate Profile

The RAI is an Australian policy think tank and research organisation established as an independent not-for-profit company limited by guarantee.

The objects of the RAI as described in our constitution are:

- To conduct research into priority policy issues impacting on regional Australia, with the aim of identifying solutions that enhance the prosperity, and sustainability of regional Australia.
- To promote the results of policy research to governments and the wider community.
- To foster debate on policy issues impacting regional Australia.
- To engage in other such activities of a like nature as may be identified as contributing to regional Australia.

Operating Environment

Regional Australia is generally considered to include the non-metropolitan areas of the nation that lie beyond the major capital cities and their immediate surrounding suburbs. Regional Australia is home for 36% of Australians who live and work in a variety of coastal, inland and remote communities.ⁱ

Regional Australia is a crucial part of the economic and social fabric of Australia. Its resources and its people underpin much of the economy and the on-going prosperity of the nation. Industries such as mining, agriculture and tourism and are mostly based in or derive their income from operations in regional Australia. Regional Australians are also the custodians of the vast majority of Australia's natural environments and resources.

Similar to the rest of Australia, regional Australia is home to many diverse and vibrant communities. Measures of social capital suggest that regional communities have stronger relationships and networks than those found in capital cities.ⁱⁱ The majority of indigenous Australians live in regional Australia as do many people from culturally diverse backgrounds. Some of Australia's most distinct sub-cultures are found in regional areas, associated with the identities of the country and the coast.

In 2011, Australia's regions face a diverse set of challenges. A lack of socio-economic scale and diversity compared to urban areas means that regions are more vulnerable to global economic shifts. Long term changes in the prosperity of traditional regional industries such as agriculture mean that they require fewer people and create less economic activity. Regional Australia has a greater dependence on welfare payments and higher unemployment than capital cities. Regional Australia is also aging faster, exhibits higher levels of health risk factors and has relatively fewer health professionals.ⁱⁱⁱ

Regions differ in size, scale and opportunity to major urban centres. This diversity and difference means that regional issues require unique thinking and tailored policy approaches. The scope of policy relevant to regional Australia is wide, spanning economic and industry policy, social services, education, transport and infrastructure and the environment. New approaches and better information are needed to spur innovation in policy and stronger partnerships between governments, industry and regional communities.

The Big Picture

"Enabling regions to achieve their potential for the benefit of all Australians"

While acknowledging and celebrating the on-going success of regional Australia, we don't believe that regional Australia has reached its potential or that current approaches can be relied upon for the future. We can and will do better.

To achieve this will require a better informed discussion about the status of regional Australia and where we want it to be in the future. It will require new policy approaches, different thinking amongst government and industry leaders and the empowerment and engagement of regional communities so they can better shape their own futures. This process of positive change is something that will benefit all Australians and contribute significantly to developing national prosperity and the Australian way of life.

The aspiration of the Regional Australia Institute is to enable all regions to recognise and reach their potential.

Our Mission

"To be Australia's pre-eminent, authoritative source of independent information and policy advice on issues impacting regional Australia"

The RAI delivers independent, research, data and advice to support policy positions and inform decision making. Our research and datasets contain the most comprehensive and detailed view of regional Australia.

The RAI is unique in Australia, providing cost effective, independent, extensive and actionable research and data on regional issues in a way no other organisation can match.

Our role as a 'think tank' is to build the quality of thinking about regional Australia and to support quality decision making for issues impacting on regional Australia.

We will do this by building the evidence base and an informed public debate, by developing new ideas, by harvesting the best approaches used around the country and internationally and by working to help regional leaders, governments and others to take action to secure the future of regional Australia.

Our mission is to continue to build this knowledge be an authoritative and trusted source of independent information and policy advice on regional Australia.

- This information can help you make critical internal and external business decisions
- Our data and insights can also help you to take thought leadership positions to raise your corporate profile.

The insights of the RAI are unique – they focus on, and understand regional issues in a way that no other organisation can.

- The RAI can help your community shape its future

Supporting the RAI supports regional communities. The work of the RAI is critical to the future direction of regional areas,

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Our Philosophy

Practical

Our focus is on developing knowledge and ideas that can be readily implemented by decision makers and others involved in regional issues.

Apolitical

We will participate in policy discussion and debate as an apolitical voice, engaging with all sides of the political spectrum and basing our advice on the evidence, our philosophy and our mission.

Informed

We will be evidence driven. We will connect with regional communities, government, industry and academia to understand their perspectives and bring their insights into our work.

Constructive

We will make a positive contribution to the debate and avoid simply describing problems or promoting negative perspectives. Our focus is on a positive future for regional Australia and what can be done now to make things better.

Collaborative

We recognize that not all the good ideas can come from one place and that there are a range of people and organisations contributing important work on regional issues. Our goal is to collaborate with others and help to build the quality and influence of relevant research and advice.

Challenge the status quo

We believe that the economy, society and environment in regional Australia can and should be better than it is right now. We aim to bring forward new ideas and substantial changes that will create a stronger future for regional Australians.

Goals

Ultimate success for RAI is the extent that our work can be linked to an improved situation in regional Australia.

This is a long term aspiration. It involves working consistently over time to improve the way people think about the potential of regional Australia and its role in the identity and prosperity of the nation. It also involves catalyzing decisions that lead to positive change.

To build towards this ultimate goal, RAI has set itself four goals which relate to the objects of the company and the requirements for a sustainable organisation.

1. Authoritative research resulting in widely used information products

RAI will continue to develop a program of research and information products that are widely used and recognized by our stakeholders as authoritative sources of knowledge on regional issues.

The foundation for achieving this goal will be *[In]Sight – Australia’s regional competitiveness index* an iconic product looking at the status of regional Australia and trends in the key indicators of its success. Updated regularly and supported by the best available data, this product provides the foundation of knowledge and insight for regions and policy makers.

Building on this foundation of knowledge will be a small, focused set of long term research initiatives targeting the issues that matter most to progress in regional Australia. These initiatives will collect and integrate existing knowledge, foster new ideas and develop substantial new policy proposals for government and industry.

In addition, RAI will invest in smaller, shorter term research projects to provide timely input to topical policy debates or explore new concepts and issues that have the potential to be important for regional policy in the future.

A refreshed Research Agenda will establish detailed strategic priorities and approaches for achieving this goal. The Agenda will be published on the RAI website and shape communication, project development and investment over the period of the plan.

A Research Advisory Committee including experienced academics with relevant expertise will continue to assist the Board in developing and implementing projects under the Research Agenda.

This goal will be measured against the following indicators of success:

- Implementation of RAI research findings by regions and policy makers in government or industry
- Feedback on the quality and influence of RAI work from regions, policy makers, parliamentarians and others
- The number and quality of policy proposals, publications and ideas generated

2. Influential policy advice and promotion of an informed debate on regional issues

The RAI will provide influential policy advice that has practical applications for decision makers.

This advice will be presented in a range of formats including via products on our website, during formal briefings and other meetings with policy makers and through informal interactions by RAI across our networks.

RAI will also actively promote an informed debate on regional issues by making data and research available for use by anybody working on regional policy issues, by actively engaging in public debate through comments and opinion pieces in the traditional and new media and by attendance and presentations at conferences and forums.

A communications and stakeholder engagement plan will continue to provide detailed and practical strategies and targets for this goal.

This goal will be measured against the following indicators of success:

- Success in challenging the conventional wisdom and standard operating procedures of regions, governments and industry
- Implementation of recommendations by regions and policy makers in government or industry
- Feedback on the quality and influence of RAI work from regions, policy makers, parliamentarians and others
- Quantity and quality of media appearances and citations, web hits, references made to research and analysis in other publications

3. Financial sustainability underpinned by a diversity of services and partnerships with regions, government, corporations and philanthropists

Best practice benchmarking indicates that sustainable NFP organisations have 'commercialised' their product and service offer to attract and embed government and corporate support as well as individual donations over time.

RAI will transition from being an emergent organization with seed funding from government to a financially stable and thriving institution founded on a valuable set of services to regions and others and on-going partnerships with government, corporate, or philanthropic organisations.

A commercialisation strategy will be developed to guide work against this goal. This strategy will identify how the RAI will translate its data, knowledge of regional areas and team capabilities to seek funding from Government, corporate and philanthropic sources (including individual donations).

Success for this goal will be measured against the following indicators:

- Feedback from partners and others on the value of RAI work and services
- Diversity and growth in partnerships and revenue
- The level, quality, and stability of revenue

4. Operational and governance structures that are efficient and meet stakeholder expectations

RAI will operate in a way that is efficient and minimize the resource requirements of administration.

Operational expenditure as a proportion of total costs will peak during the establishment phase and decline as the investment in research increases. To retain flexibility and minimize costs over time, RAI will, wherever possible, outsource services unless there is a compelling need to have dedicated in-house resources.

Governance structures that reinforce RAI's position as an independent, apolitical contributor to policy will be established. Internal policies and procedures to ensure appropriate transparency and manage potential conflicts that may arise in raising funds or engaging actively in public and political debates will be put in place.

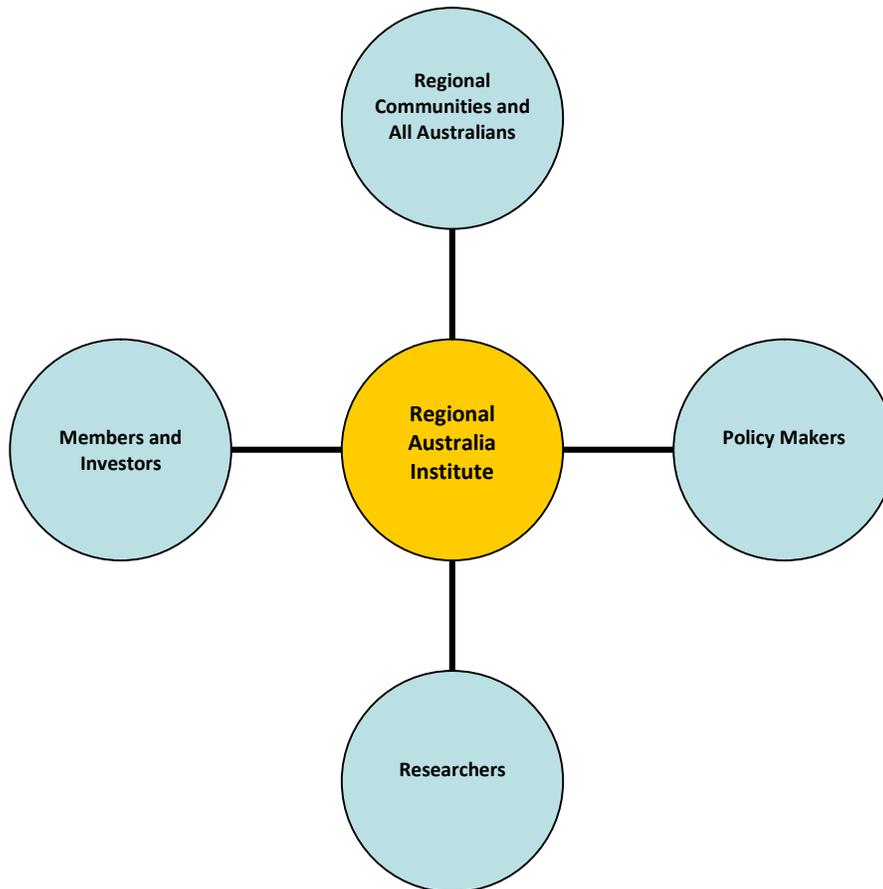
The Board Charter, delegations and policies will provide a foundation for achieving this goal.

Success for this goal will be measured against the following indicators:

- Extent to which the RAI is recognized as a trusted source of advice
- Meeting regulatory requirements
- Proportion of RAI's resources invested in research and policy advice

Commitments to Stakeholders

Developing strong relationships with stakeholders is essential to RAI achieving its goals and mission. The diagram below identifies these groups.



All Australians are the ultimate beneficiaries of RAI’s work with regional communities being the direct beneficiaries. We will provide opportunities for regional people to be involved in the work of the RAI and to help to shape its directions. We will also keep regional Australians informed of our work and the results we achieve.

Only by enabling better decision making by **policy makers** can we create tangible impact for regional Australians. We will engage with policy makers at the national, state and regional levels regularly and develop tailored advice and information designed to assist them in their role.

Researchers within and outside of RAI will enable us to develop new knowledge and information. We will support work by a range of researchers and provide opportunities for them to assist in shaping and delivering on our mission.

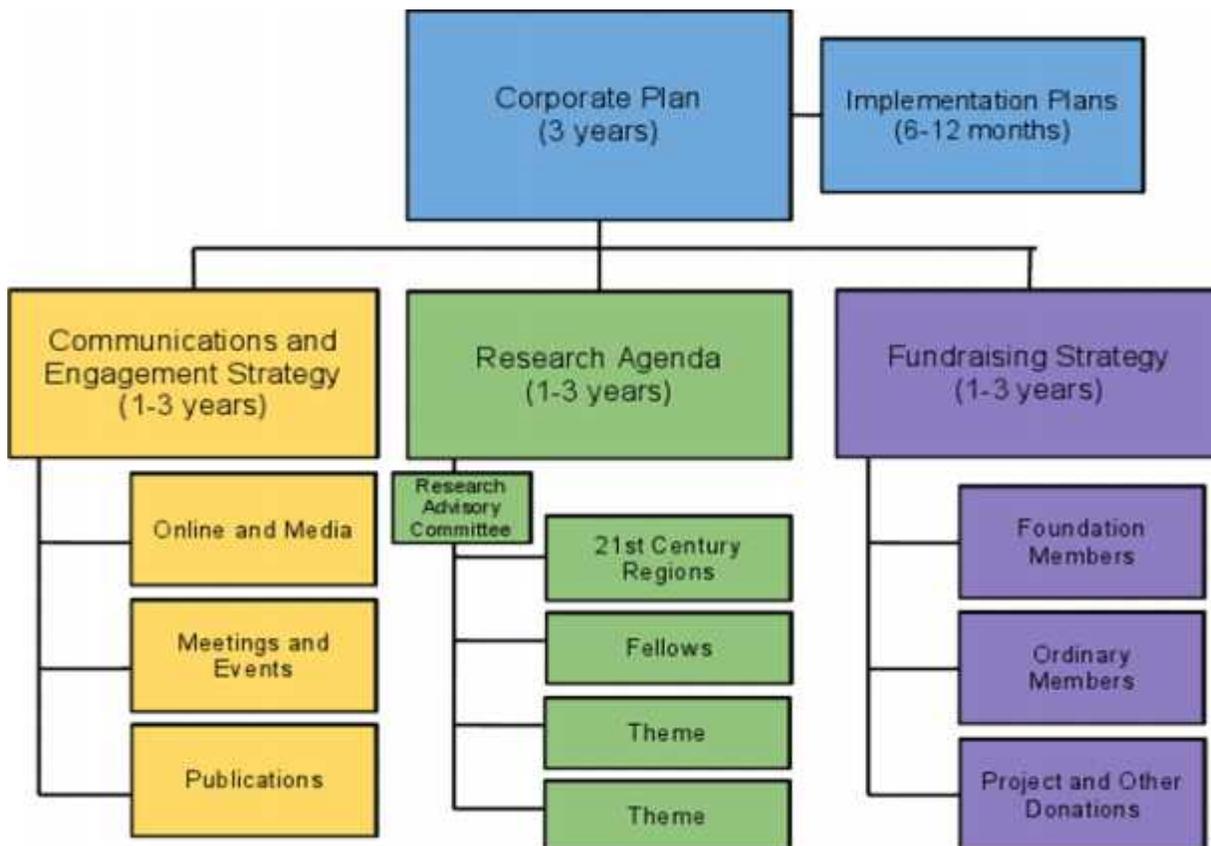
Members and other investors will provide the means for the RAI to achieve its mission. We are accountable to them for delivering upon the objects of the RAI. We will keep them informed about the work of the RAI through regular meetings and our annual report.

Implementing the Corporate Plan

The Corporate Plan provides the overarching strategic framework for the RAI. The diagram below provides a framework for the practical implementation of the strategy.

Key elements of the implementation approach include:

- The Research Agenda which guides implementation against Goal 1
- The Communications and Engagement Strategy that guides implementation against Goal 2
- The Fundraising Strategy that guides implementation against Goal 3
- Rolling implementation plans that describe key goals for 6-12 months periods and the development of operational and governance procedures.



Performance Review

The Board will consider the performance of the RAI against the Corporate Plan and other strategies on an annual basis. A six monthly update will also be provided by the CEO.

This review will include examining performance against the operational plan put in place for the period and the indicators identified against each of the Goals of the Corporate Plan.

Systems and processes will be established to collect information about the performance of the RAI over time.

References

ⁱ Australian Bureau of Statistics, Regional Population Growth, Australia, 2008-09.

ⁱⁱ Bureau of Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Economics, About Australia's Regions 2008

ⁱⁱⁱ Bureau of Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Economics, About Australia's Regions 2008