



2014 Strategic Research Priorities

Guiding the work of the Regional Australia Institute

The Regional Australia Institute (RAI) is committed to empowering regional communities through the development of relevant and topical research and policy.

This document outlines the major research and policy focus of the RAI for 2014.

Overview

The Regional Australia Institute (RAI) is guided by its Research Agenda, a three year set of priorities that guide the work of the RAI. The four themes of the Research Agenda are;

- Theme 1: Position and potential
- Theme 2: Realising opportunity
- Theme 3: Successful transitions
- Theme 4: Better services and engagement

Following engagement with a wide range of stakeholders, the RAI has determined its Strategic Research Priorities for 2014 in accordance with the Research Agenda (Figure 1). The priorities provide for three new research topics as well as the update of [In]Sight and [In]Form.

Major new priorities in 2014:

- Understanding the potential of Australia's regions
- Regions leading their own development: Australian case study library

Updates to major products

- Update of [In]Sight – Australia's regional competitiveness index
- Update of [In]Form – Australia's online library of regional research

Additional priority options:

The RAI will undertake a third research project on one of the following topics:

- Developing human capital
- Entrepreneurial ecosystems
- Optimising outcomes of governance, and
- Infrastructure investment

The focus of this third priority will be determined during the year in consultation with stakeholders.

RAI Research Agenda and Priorities



Figure 1: The RAI Research Agenda and the 2014 Strategic Research Priorities



New Priorities

1. Understanding the potential of Australia's regions

Research Theme: Position and potential

Each region has its own unique potential based on a combination of internal and external assets and forces that shape regional economies. This project will explore the potential of a range of regions across Australia using the concept of Regional Potential outlined in Figure 2.

This major project will combine evidence about regional economies, their global operating environment and local knowledge to assess the range of potential futures for each region (positive and negative).

The aim of the work is to develop an evidence based narrative about regional futures and a strategic framework from which they can better mobilise their resources in the most important areas of risk and opportunity.

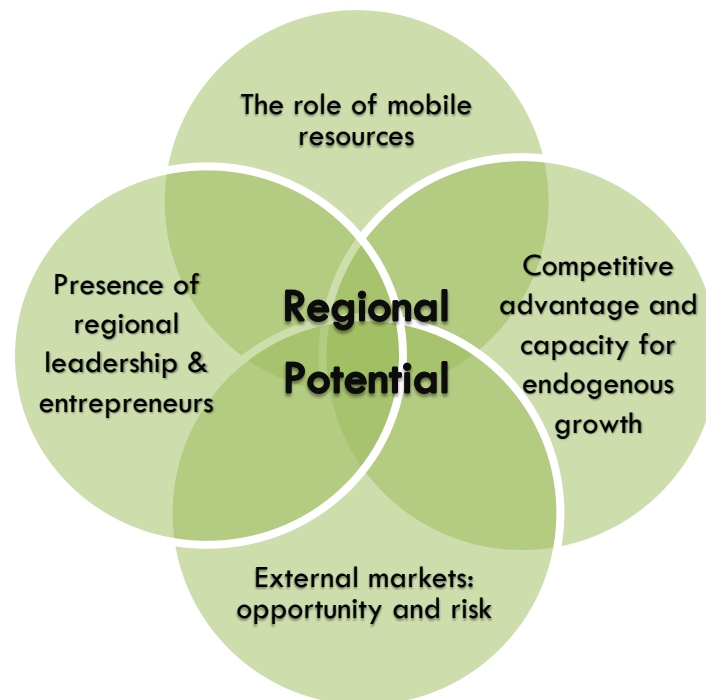


Figure 2: The Draft Potential Model (draft in concept)

2. Regions leading their own development: Australian case study library

Research theme: All themes

A case study library will be developed to bring together practical examples from around Australia of regions leading their own development.

The RAI will add to this body of work through its major projects and compile existing published and unpublished examples of how positive change is being created in regions, by regional people.

This will form a public resource for other regions and policy makers to understand innovations that are emerging in regions and how different challenges and opportunities are being engaged in regions.

The development of the case study library will complement the literature compiled in [In]Form and data in [In]Sight to position the RAI as the authoritative organisation for regional information.

Updates to Major Products

1. [In]Sight – Australia’s regional competitiveness index

Research theme: All themes

[In]Sight will be updated in 2014. The [In]Sight database will be refreshed with newly available information and the RAI will further develop the approach to measuring regional competitiveness.

The Survey of Business Conditions and Business Perspectives on Regional Development will also be revised and repeated to support the update of [In]Sight and monitoring of the regional business environment.

The RAI will continue to develop the online interactive map and consider developing other online products.

The RAI will also develop new research papers exploring the implications of the [In]Sight data for future regional development and policy.

2. [In]Form – Australia’s online library of regional research

Research theme: All themes

[In]Form will be updated to include the latest publications relevant to this research theme.

Additional priority options

1. Entrepreneurial ecosystems (optional project)

Research theme: Realising opportunity

The ability for entrepreneurs to translate opportunities into jobs, new economic activity or a better quality of life is central to realising and developing potential in regional Australia. Regions can play a crucial role in fostering the emergence and success of entrepreneurs.

A project under this priority would focus on understanding entrepreneurial ecosystems in regional Australia and the extent to which these ecosystems are supporting successful entrepreneurialism in regional Australia.

This research would also contribute to the 'potential' model, in particular the entrepreneurial and leadership sphere.

2. Developing human capital in regional Australia to achieve prosperity (optional project)

Research theme: Realising opportunity

[In]Sight's major findings identified high levels of human capital as a key characteristic of highly successful regions.

A project under this priority would explore what can be done through better policy or local action to strengthen human capital in regional areas. This includes the successful interactions between education, health and social services, as well as other service and policy mechanisms to improve overall human capital. Potential areas for further investigation include leveraging workforce strengths, skill shortages and regional 'returners'.

This research would also contribute to the 'potential' model in the mobile resources and comparative advantage spheres.



3. Optimising the outcomes of governance for regional Australia (optional project)

Research theme: Better services and engagement

According to the OECD's recent work *Investing Together: Working Effectively Across Levels of Government*, the regional variation in quality of governance may explain up to 60 percent of regional human development outcomes, including a population's health and education indicators. It also appears to be related to the effectiveness of public investment.

A project under this priority would explore and analyse current governance systems and institutions in regional Australia. The work would then consider the case for reform and pathways for changes to existing regional governance structures focussing on the entities established by States and the Commonwealth Government to support regional level policy implementation.

4. Infrastructure investment (optional project)

Research theme: Better services and engagement

Infrastructure investment is a major lever for government in regional development and an on-going focus of regional policy.

A project under this priority would look at innovative approaches to prioritising funding and delivering infrastructure investment to regions in a constrained fiscal environment.

Where appropriate, the project would build on the issues and ideas raised in previous work on infrastructure completed by the RAI in 2012 and 2013.

Papers, briefings and analysis that respond to regional policy issues

In addition to large research initiatives, it is important that the RAI is a regular contributor to the debate surrounding national and regional issues.

In 2014, the RAI will undertake smaller pieces of research and policy analysis that respond to emerging policy issues and key stakeholder interests, alongside its major research initiatives.

Projects developed under this approach will be consistent with the Research Agenda.

During the development of additional projects, the Research Advisory Committee will provide advice on each project's quality and potential contribution to the development of regional Australia.

About the Regional Australia Institute

Independent and informed by both research and ongoing dialogue with the community, the Regional Australia Institute develops policy and advocates for change to build a stronger economy and better quality of life in regional Australia – for the benefit of all Australians. The Regional Australia Institute was established with support from the Australian Government.

Enquiries

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