



REGIONAL  
AUSTRALIA  
INSTITUTE



# STRENGTHENING LIVEABILITY

A TOOLKIT FOR RURAL AND REGIONAL  
COMMUNITIES LOOKING TO GROW

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## ABOUT THE REGIONAL AUSTRALIA INSTITUTE

Independent and informed by both research and ongoing dialogue with the community, the Regional Australia Institute (RAI) 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 RAI was established with support from the Australian Government.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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## REFERENCE

This toolkit can be referenced as:

Houghton K. and Vohra S. (2021), *Strengthening Liveability: A Toolkit for Rural and Regional Communities Looking to Grow*, The Regional Australia Institute, Canberra.

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## ABOUT THIS TOOLKIT

This Toolkit has been developed in response to the growing need in regional communities to attract and retain populations.

It builds on the Regional Australia Institute’s research across rural and regional Australia on population mobility, regional jobs and liveability. It draws together insights from this work to create a practical guide for regional leaders who are seeking to attract and retain populations in their town. The Toolkit recognises that Australia has a highly mobile population and that regional “liveability” has a strong role to play in influencing people’s decisions about where to live.

This Toolkit is a guide to help regional leaders gather and analyse the data that can help them develop a tailored action plan to improve their town’s liveability. By developing a place-based Liveability Action Plan, regional towns can become more successful in attracting the people that they need for a strong and prosperous future. A deep understanding by regional leaders of the liveability factors of their town will also ensure that any future “marketing” of the town to attract new residents can be well-targeted.

The way the Toolkit has been designed allows regional leaders to address this issue in a manner which reflects the unique strengths, challenges and vision of their particular town.

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## INTRODUCTION

Many regional communities in Australia are seeking to grow their populations, and to do so in a strategic and sustainable way. They are looking for people to fill workforce needs, counter a declining or ageing population and to contribute to economic and social growth. At the same time, there is growing evidence that city-dwellers in Australia are re-thinking their lifestyle choices. In its 2020 report, *The Big Movers: Understanding Population Mobility in Regional Australia*, the Regional Australia Institute (RAI) unpacks population data showing that people are ‘voting with their feet’ and that many are choosing to move to regional Australia.<sup>i</sup>

The COVID-19 pandemic has seen a further surge in interest in regional living. The notion of how we work has dramatically changed and location is no longer seen as a barrier to choosing where to live. Regional areas, with their open spaces, low-density living, lower cost of housing and minimal commute are all increasingly attractive lifestyle options. The RAI’s research conducted in late 2020 shows that around one in five metro dwellers in Sydney, Melbourne, Perth and Brisbane are now considering a move to regional Australia.

People looking for a sea change or tree change can choose from a wealth of diverse regional towns and

communities across Australia. As access to remote working improves and physical infrastructure better connects towns with regional centres and metropolitan areas, Australians can afford to be selective about where they choose to live. This is especially so as there is significant demand for skilled and professional workers across much of regional Australia.

This era presents specific opportunities to communities that are trying to attract and retain residents. To be able to do so effectively, it helps to have a good understanding of the various factors at play, each region’s particular strengths and weaknesses, and how this matches with the preferences of the kinds of people the community wants to attract. Regional “liveability” plays an important role in influencing people’s decisions to move to, stay in or move from a regional town. To improve the liveability of your town and its appeal to new residents, it is important to understand what people are looking for when they move, objectively assess your town’s liveability and develop targeted actions.

Developing a community-led, local Liveability Action Plan will ensure that your town is best placed to benefit from the increasing interest in regional living. The RAI, through its research, has identified the

key steps needed to develop such a plan. It involves gathering data on the mobility trends in your region and understanding what people are looking for in a regional lifestyle. It also involves identifying the particular strengths as well as challenges of your town.

The critical point about the Liveability Action Plan is doing the assessment through the eyes of potential newcomers, so that you can tailor your population attraction and retention efforts to hit the right touch points. Across Australia many regions are getting active in seeking new workers and new residents, so it is a competitive landscape and your city, town or village will need to stand out. This Toolkit provides seven key steps to help you build on your unique selling points, so that your place can move beyond promoting the general benefits of regional living, to positioning itself strategically to attract and retain the people it needs.

The time is right. The RAI’s National Awareness Campaign, Move to More, will highlight the benefits of regional living and showcase the opportunities that exist in regional Australia. It aims to create a societal shift to help drive people to regions. By undertaking the work in this Toolkit, you will ensure that your town’s liveability is strengthened and it is ready to appeal to new residents.

**Australians are increasingly  
subscribing to the mottos of  
“work where you want to live”  
and “live where you love”.**

## THE SEVEN STEPS

### **Step 1: Gather your local champions**

Identify and gather your local champions. Who needs to be involved to design, develop and implement a Liveability Action Plan?

### **Step 2: Know your neighbours**

Identify whether you should be coordinating more widely. Ask whether your town is interdependent with a neighbouring town or towns. Are you stronger together?

### **Step 3: Map out mobility**

Understanding the way that population moves into and out of your region is an important first step in identifying who you may need to attract in order to stay strong into the future.

### **Step 4: Predict jobs and skills needs**

Understand how the regional workforce is changing and build populations which will help fill current as well as future workforce needs.

### **Step 5: Know your target market**

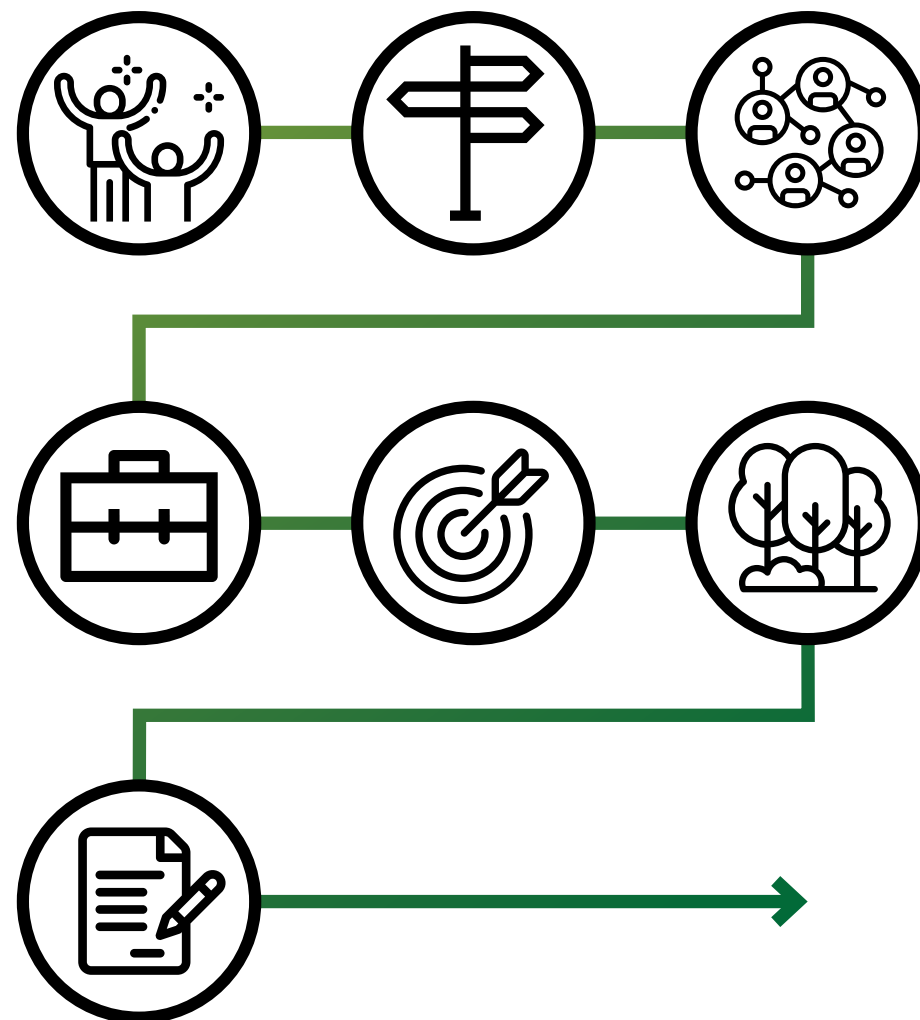
Consider what your target market is looking for in terms of lifestyle. Different demographic groups value different aspects of liveability.

### **Step 6: Assess local liveability**

Candidly take stock of the liveability factors in your town and community, assess areas of strength and identify gaps.

### **Step 7: Activate**

Develop and implement a targeted, place-based Liveability Action Plan for your town to improve aspects of liveability.



## THE EVIDENCE

This Toolkit has been developed from research that seeks to understand what Australians are looking for in their choice of home and lifestyle.<sup>ii</sup> The team at the RAI has spoken with people who have made the move to regional Australia to understand their motivations and what they value about their new home. We have also surveyed metro-dwellers to find out who is considering moving and what their decision process involves.

The RAI research was collected in late 2020, post-COVID, and recent work includes:

- A survey of over 1,000 metro-dwellers conducted in late 2020;
- A “deep dive” with interviews of 60 people considering the move;
- A survey of almost 400 metro-based employees from among Australia’s largest corporations.

Other data which forms the evidence-base for the Toolkit includes surveys which show what people in the regions value about their place and their lifestyle. These include:

- Regional Wellbeing Surveys of 2013 and 2015, conducted by the University of Canberra<sup>iii</sup>;
- Living in the Regions Surveys of 2013 and 2016, conducted by the Western Australian Department of Regional Development.<sup>iv</sup>

The RAI also worked with universities to undertake a deeper analysis of regional liveability in 2019.

- RMIT interviewed 1,215 residents from three sets of regional towns in Victoria, Western Australia and Queensland. It conducted “choice modelling” requiring each respondent to evaluate a series of hypothetical scenarios to determine the “ideal town”. The modelling revealed the relative importance of the town’s liveability attributes and their impact on intentions of living in the town. This allowed us to develop an understanding of what drives choice.

## HOW DO PEOPLE MAKE THE DECISION TO MOVE TO REGIONAL AUSTRALIA?

Our research shows that moving to a place in regional Australia is a two-stage process:

First is the decision to move to or within regional Australia per se. Having employment, whether moving to an area for a specific job or finding a job while already living in an area is usually a critical factor in making that decision. A certain standard of infrastructure services is also needed, including access to water, good roads, and digital connectivity. Generally, the presence of these things in a regional area acts as a ‘hard gate’ in people’s decision making. Without these factors in place, a person will not seriously consider making the move.

Second, once the decision to make the move is made, people then consider where in regional Australia they would like to live. They decide where, specifically, they want to call home. This is a much more personal and nuanced decision that is subject to a ‘liveability assessment’. Put simply, a liveability assessment involves the questions: “What will this place be like for me (and my family) to live in? What will our lifestyle look like?” In other words, there is a distinction between what needs to be in place for people to first consider moving on the one hand, and the aspects of a community that people like or enjoy (its ‘liveability’) on the other.

The first decision narrows down possible regions for people considering a move. They then choose what they consider the most liveable place within these options. This means that once the initial decision to move has been made, the issue of liveability will be a major driver of population flows.

## DIFFERENT APPROACHES FOR DIFFERENT PLACES

In this Toolkit we use the word “towns” to refer to regional cities, towns and villages. We do this in recognition of the common use of the word “town” to refer to the centre of a regional city as well as to a main business centre of a town or village.

Australia has hundreds of regional communities and each one is unique. While there may be some similarities between towns, no two towns are quite the same. Each varies not only in its size and location but also in the roles that it plays for its residents and even for surrounding communities. This means that, when looking to grow, solutions and approaches need to be place based and locally led.

### Size

Some Australian towns are in fact more aptly called “regional cities” with a population of over 50,000 people. Others are small rural communities of a few hundred people or less. The vast majority of regional towns in Australia are mid-sized towns with a population size somewhere between 5,000 and 50,000. Differently sized towns will face vastly different issues and challenges when considering liveability.

### Location

Another defining characteristic is a town’s proximity to a capital city. Those within one or two hours commute to a capital can be distinguished from Australia’s remote towns which are several hours’ drive from a capital. Proximity to natural resources and significant infrastructure will also shape liveability in many places.



## Role

The way that a town serves its community can also vary. Understanding a town's role can also be useful for designing effective population attraction strategies. The roles can be considered as akin to a personality trait for a town. For example:

- **Industry Towns** – These are the long-standing, primary producing and manufacturing towns.
- **Service Towns** – These towns act as hubs for their own residents and the residents of nearby communities, offering health, education, and other key services.
- **Connected Towns** – These towns are located close to a regional city or metro centre and are attractive destinations for residents who may choose to commute to nearby larger centres for employment.
- **Coastal Lifestyle Towns** – Located near the coastline, these towns have a high proportion of residents aged over 65 years or a high proportion of families and children.
- **Mixed Function towns** – towns which do not appear to fulfil any of the above roles in a predominant way, rather exhibit a range of functions.

## WHAT IS LIVEABILITY?

There is much discussion about the definition of 'liveability'. Academics, policy makers, and practitioners have various ways to conceptualise liveability and its relationship to other ideas such as quality of life, wellbeing and community wellbeing. Yet much of the work on liveability has been focused on larger cities. While this is useful, it does not necessarily help regional communities in their current attempts to attract and sustain populations. One reason for this is that most metrics of liveability in metropolitan areas - such as the quality of international infrastructure links, the level of national security threat in a community, or the level of censorship are not necessarily appropriate measures for regional Australia. To understand regional liveability, we need to understand what matters to different kinds of people who are moving to, from or staying in towns in regional Australia.

The RAI has built an understanding of liveability based on what people in regions have themselves said matters to them and what people considering the move are looking for. We have dissected the broader discussion of population attraction in regional Australia so that we can focus on understanding the concept of liveability and what it means to different

people. We found that, while concepts of liveability vary from person to person, there are key indicators of liveability that are common to most people.

These are:

- Health Services
- Education Services
- Cost of Living
- Amenity
- Connection to Community
- Lifestyle and Opportunity

The RAI has helped to reveal how the importance of these indicators varies across different demographic groups: families, millennials (under 35 years old), professionals and boomers (over 65 years old). Families, millennials, professional workers and boomers all place different value on the various aspects of liveability. There is also variation between individuals. What makes a place liveable for one person might not exactly match what makes it liveable for another. For example, while access to childcare or quality education may make a place liveable for a young family, schooling will not necessarily feature in the liveability assessments of retirees, or young career professionals. This highlights the nuances of what people consider to be important at different stages of life.



Understanding your town's unique characteristics in terms of size, proximity and roles is useful in understanding its attraction potential.



The RAI looked at a range of well-known liveability indices and found that most liveability indices focus on the relative liveability of large urban centres or cities across the world. While some characteristics of liveability are objectively measurable and common across metropolitan and regional places, there are also a number of more subtle variations or different contexts. For instance, a lack of road congestion, while welcome in regions, doesn't appear to be as important as good roads to connect regional communities with major centres. Some regional communities do not factor things like public transport into liveability assessments at all, and 'affordable decent housing' can mean something different between regions and cities, and even between sections of regional communities themselves. Simply, regional liveability cannot be viewed through the same lens as liveability in cities and when it is, regions tend to come off as less liveable as the indices are skewed towards larger metropolitan settings.

### WHO IS MOVING AND WHY?

The RAI's December 2020 survey of 1,000 metro-based respondents in Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane and Perth showed that one in five people in cities are considering relocating to a regional area within the next 1-3 years. Around half of these were already considering moving before the pandemic, but COVID-19 significantly increased interest for around 20 percent. This is driven by the positive appeal of regional Australia, notably the sense of space, the natural environment and overall wellbeing. Common "push factors" were a desire to escape the traffic and long commutes, to lessen stress as well as the high price of housing and general cost of living.

### WHO IS MOVING AND WHY?

#### *Family*

Australian physiotherapists Kieran O'Donovan and Naomi Gill moved to Bordertown in South Australia with their two young children after living and working in London and Manchester for a few years. They loved big-city living but wouldn't go back to it now. "Our kids love their new lives and the freedom it gives them to roam and ride their bikes and we love the town's 50-metre pool that's never too busy," says Kieran. "We quickly realised that we would never have the same amount of free time, stress-free commutes and disposable income if we moved back to the city."



Kieran O'Donovan, Naomi Gill, and their children enjoying the new life that Bordertown, SA has given them. Photo: Gavin Blacker



## STEP 1: GATHER YOUR LOCAL CHAMPIONS

The first step in developing a place-based Liveability Action Plan to drive population growth is to identify individuals who will take responsibility for its development and contribute to its design and implementation. To do so, identify the key regional leaders who may include members of local Council, the Regional Development Association (RDA) and community stakeholders. Consider who most needs population growth (key employers) and who may be the most affected by population growth (schools, health, housing services). Also consider those involved in liveability aspects such as sport, culture, clubs and volunteer groups.

These key local champions can be invited to be part of a working group or consultation forum. Ensuring a workable size and a realistic schedule and timeframe for meetings is important, as well as identifying a key focal point to drive the work of the group.

It can reasonably be assumed that the local council has completed in-depth reviews and planning for its community and may have both an economic

and community plan in place. The work of the group designing the Liveability Action Plan is not intended to replicate or replace such work, but it's possible that it will draw from elements of both.

The Liveability Action Plan envisaged in this toolkit identifies those aspects of liveability which can be strengthened to ensure that your town appeals particularly to the demographic that you have identified as a target group to attract.

In some places, a local committee may already exist which is suited to take on this project. The Committees for Cities and Regions network, for example, comprises a number of member-based regional committees across Australia which are actively looking at ways to improve their towns and communities. If such a committee does exist, it may be the right forum to work through the steps in this toolkit and drive the development of a Liveability Action Plan.



The group driving the project should facilitate ample community consultation when developing the Liveability Action Plan. It is the local residents who know their town best, its strengths and weaknesses. Understanding local stories, and what local residents value about the liveability of their town, will be an important part of the process. Try to include the views of people who have recently moved or returned to your town.

Getting regular external input into the work of the group or committee is also important, particularly from people who represent your target demographic. Use existing links with metro-based community organisations, friends, family or the RAI to identify people who can provide a regular "sense check" to the liveability work and Action Plan.



## STEP 2: KNOW YOUR NEIGHBOURS

In many parts of regional Australia, neighbouring towns are connected and interdependent. Residents may live in one town and work in another, or live in one town but access services and facilities in another. Commonly in regional Australia, a strong and growing regional centre or regional capital will serve as a hub for the wider region, supporting smaller surrounding communities with a range of services. Where this is the case, efforts to enhance liveability should be coordinated, so that it is the collection of towns which, together, appeal to new residents.

The proximity and interdependence of neighbouring towns may also influence the decision as to whether a Liveability Action Plan should be developed for a single town, a collection of towns, or at the regional or Local Government Area (LGA) level. Particularly when the residents of one town rely on a neighbouring town for essential services, a Liveability Action Plan covering both places may have a higher chance of being effective.

While the individual towns in these kinds of inter-dependent relationships can and do market themselves with fierce independence, from an outsider's perspective it makes sense to present the liveability attributes of the whole package. In other words, enhancing liveability may best be done in coordination with your neighbours, so that it is the collection of towns which, together, appeal to new residents.

To assess whether this is the right way forward, it helps to build a regional picture of the liveability strengths.

Assets to consider are:

- The mix of public and private health services in your town as well as near neighbours – it is likely that some specialist services will be located in some places rather than all places, but will be available to all in the general area.
- The mix of public and private schools in neighbouring places.
- The pattern of major retailers and other services.
- Is there an airport in the wider region with regular passenger services?

Sometimes there is resistance to thinking regionally, and it may be helpful to be able to demonstrate the extent of inter-connectivity. A good way to do this is to use Census data to show the places where people both live and work. In interdependent groups of towns it is usually the case that this data shows high rates of flows between the places people choose to live and the places they choose to work.



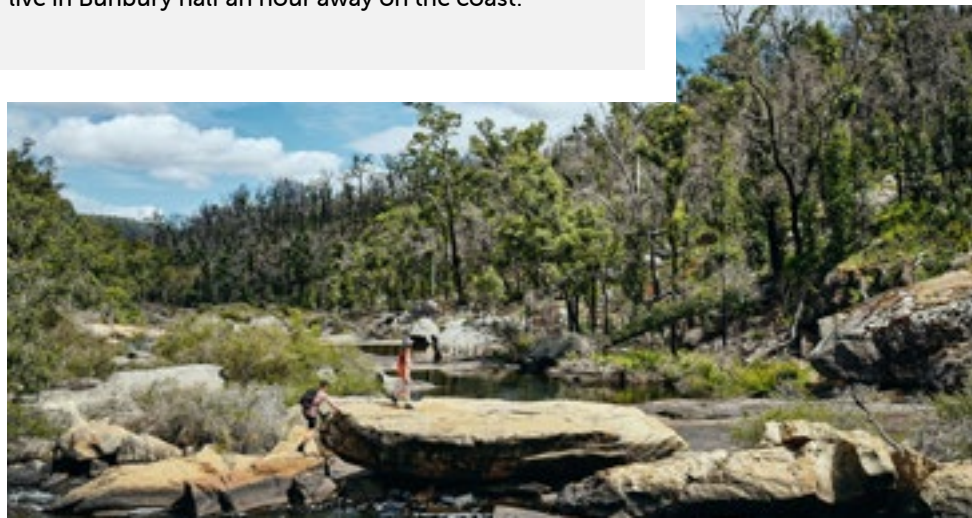
**Moe, Morwell and Traralgon** lie along a corridor of 30 km in the Latrobe Valley in Victoria. They are very distinctive towns, with different facilities and strengths. For example, major retailers are mainly found in Traralgon while Morwell has emerged as a government service centre. These towns exist together in an inter-dependent relationship. Many people live in one town and work in another or shop in another.



Consider whether your town is closely connected to, or interdependent with, a neighbouring town. Does it make sense to join forces to create a Liveability Action Plan?



In the south-west of Western Australia, **Manjimup** and **Collie** both service a variety of smaller communities in health, education and retail services. They also exist within a matrix of towns which offer larger or more diverse services across the region. For example, Collie's labour market depends on 'drive in, drive out' (DIDO) workers who prefer to live in Bunbury half an hour away on the coast.



Collie and the surrounding area, WA. Photos: Collie River Valley Marketing / Russell Ord Photography



## STEP 3: MAP OUT MOBILITY

To be able to effectively attract new residents, it is important that regional leaders have a deep and evidence-based understanding of their own community – its past and its future.

Analysing the demographic, economic and employment trends occurring in your town along with the level of human capital and cultural diversity will help to better understand the current makeup of your community, what actually underpins your local economy and how this has changed over time. It will also help to reveal any particular areas of economic strength or specialisation, and any mismatch between areas of local workforce shortage and the skills/ qualifications available in your local community.

### UNDERSTANDING WHERE PEOPLE MOVE TO, AND FROM

Australians are some of the most mobile people on the planet. We change addresses more often than the populations of most other developed nations and move homes at approximately twice the rate of people in most OECD countries.<sup>v</sup>

For regional communities trying to attract new residents, this high level of mobility among the Australian population presents an opportunity. Understanding the way that population moves around regional Australia, and into and out of your

region, is an important first step in identifying who you may need to attract in order to stay strong into the future. These underlying ‘organic flows’ that your place has been experiencing will tell you something about which kinds of people your place appeals to.

#### *Look at the Demographic Trends*

Identifying trends in overall population growth or decline will help communities to determine if there are particular spikes or losses of population over short periods or if there is a steadier trend that will need to be addressed.

Understanding who is moving into and out of your district is also useful, including a breakdown of:

- the level of natural increase (births and deaths),
- net internal migration (domestic flow in and out of the district); and,
- net overseas migration (flow of international migrants in and out of the district).

This data will help you to identify if your town needs to increase existing inflows, stem outflows or manage turnover. Where communities are experiencing a high rate of turnover, it may indicate deeper liveability issues. The examples on the following page show how to use the available data to develop a picture of mobility trends relevant to your community, identify the major inflows, outflows and turnover.

Understanding which age groups are growing or shrinking in your community may also reveal some underlying opportunities or challenges. For example, most regional communities are experiencing the broader trend of an increase in the number and percentage of older residents. This has implications for aged care services but it also provides opportunities to capitalise on, and potentially specialise in, attracting a workforce, services and enterprise to cater for the needs of older people.

On the other hand, some regional communities are experiencing a surge in the number of young children but then losing them as they reach working age. Identifying the educational, social and employment gaps that would assist in slowing or reversing this loss will be important.

“Regional returners” are another demographic to factor in. These are people who grew up in regional Australia, moved to the city, and are now moving back to the regions. They are an important but often unnoticed group who are changing their futures and the future of many regions.<sup>vi</sup>

Some regional communities find their gender distribution is significantly unbalanced, particularly at certain age demographics, which can also impact on perceived liveability and opportunity.



The Census highlights some important mobility trends for regional Australia.

The long-term trend of population drift from regional Australia to the capital cities is starting to reverse. The 10-year trend from 2006 and 2016 shows that over 135,000 more people moved out of Australia's capital cities and into regional areas than the other way around.

There are significant intra-regional movements. Census data showed that 207,510 people moved from one regional area to another during the last Census period. Of those already living in regional Australia who were considering moving, around 80 percent intended to remain in a regional area.

Australia also has a high level of youth migration. Just over half of young people aged 15-24 years moved residence, with migration rates for rural 15-24 year olds among the highest of any age group nationally. Moreover, migration rates for this age group have increased over time.

The way young people move to and between regional communities is of particular interest to policy makers as this cohort consists of families as well as early-to-mid career professionals and tradespeople, all of whom can boost the human and social capital of regional communities and are highly desired regional residents. This issue is unpacked further in the RAI report *The Big Movers: Understanding Population Mobility in Regional Australia*.

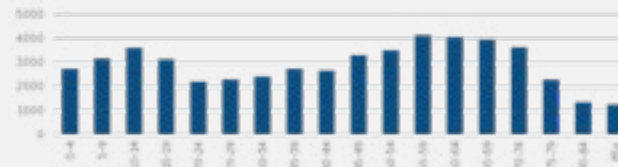
### Young people in Gympie, QLD

Take a look at some of the mobility trends in Gympie, Queensland. Drawn from the Census, this data shows the population churn that Gympie is experiencing in people under the age of 30.

Many regional people are worried about the loss of young people from their place. Most regional places have a dip in their age profile covering people aged 15 to 24, as young locals will often leave the area to finish Years 11 and 12, take up post school education, or seek work.

The chart below shows that this is true in the LGA of Gympie. Showing each five-year age group in 2019, the chart shows a pattern typical for many regional places, with the highest number of residents in the 55-59 age group, and a dip in the number of young people aged 20-24.

But while the total number of residents may show



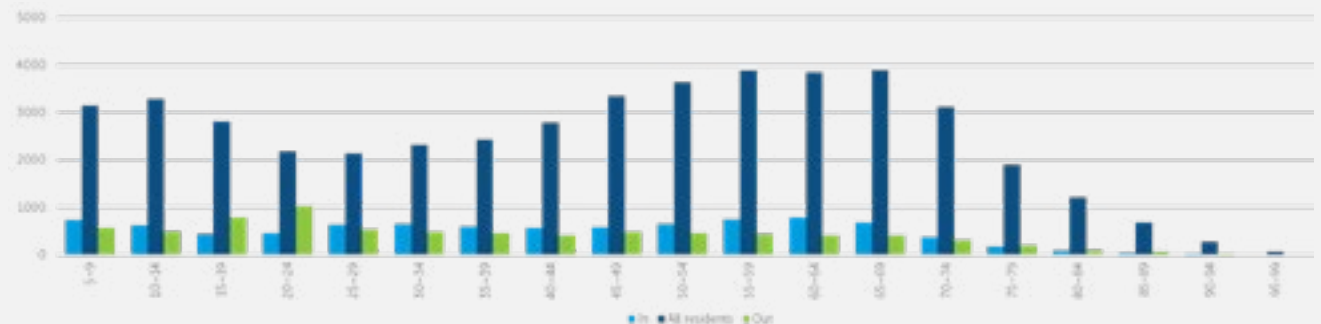
Gympie LGA population by age, 2019.  
Source: ABS.Stat@Commonwealth of Australia

a dip in the number of young people, for most places this does not mean that there is only a one-way flow out. The 20-34 age group is highly mobile in Australia and for most regional places there will be a sizeable number of people in this age group coming into a place as well as leaving it, which is evident in Gympie.

The chart below shows data about people moving in and out of Gympie between 2011 and 2016. It shows that while more young people aged between 15 and 24 left the area than came to it, in fact for all age groups over 25 years, more people came to the area than left it.

The number of 20-24 year olds who left (1,027) was almost half the total number of this age group remaining in the area in 2016. On the other hand, the number of 25-29 year olds who came to Gympie was about 30 per cent of the total number of residents in that age group. Almost one third of people living in Gympie in 2016 in that age group had arrived in the previous five years. These figures show how significant the churn of people, including young people, is to this community.

This pattern is very common across regional Australia and it is vital that a region looking to prepare a population attraction strategy is aware of these flows and their implications so leaders can tailor their approach for maximum impact.



Gympie LGA people flows by age, 2011-2016.  
Source: ABS.Stat@Commonwealth of Australia



## STEP 4: PREDICT JOBS AND SKILLS NEEDS

### UNDERSTANDING WORKFORCE NEEDS

A key reason many regional towns want new residents is to fill the growing and/or changing labour and skill needs that their employers have. It is important for regional leaders to understand how the regional workforce is changing and to help build populations which will fill current as well as future workforce needs.

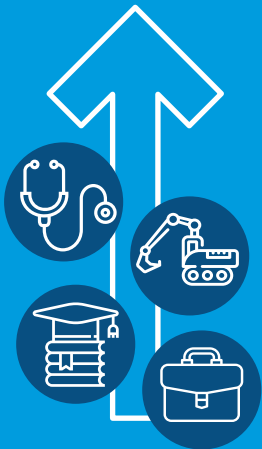
The nature of jobs in regional Australia, like the rest of the country, and indeed the world, is shifting. The ability to manage technological and labour force

changes remains a challenge for workers, employers and policy makers. It is important to address precisely what recent changes in employment and technology mean for people working in Australia's regions.

Across Australia, industries which are projected to contribute most to employment growth nationally are health care and social assistance; construction; education and training; and professional, scientific and technical services, while the industries projected to experience a fall in employment nationally due

to increased automation are wholesale trade, and agriculture, forestry and fishing. Note that these are general Australia-wide trends and may not apply to your town or region. This is why it is important to ensure that your thinking is local and place-based, and to determine the jobs and skills needs for your region.

In terms of job types and occupations, there is growing demand for professionals along with community and personal service workers. These two occupational groups are expected to account for



### On the Rise

Together, these industries are projected to provide two-thirds of total employment growth nationally to 2023:

- **Health Care and Social Assistance** reflecting implementation of the NDIS, the ageing population and increasing childcare demand.
- **Construction** reflecting strong infrastructure investment and ongoing residential demand.
- **Education and Training** reflecting continued growth in school age population and the international education sector (note the impact of COVID may affect this).
- **Professional, Scientific and Technical Services** reflecting growing demand for business services.



### Declining Nationally

Modest declines are expected in the following industries:

- **Wholesale Trade** due to a range of factors including increasing productivity through streamlined processes such as automation, online marketplaces as well as competitive pressures within and outside of the industry, including the blurring of lines between wholesalers and retailers and the passing of the favourable conditions associated with the mining investment boom.
- **Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing** marginal decreases (0.4%) expected due to employment declines driven by technological advancement and other efficiencies.

Source: Houghton K., 2019, *The future of regional jobs*, The Regional Australia Institute, Canberra.



over 60 percent of the total growth in employment across Australia over the next five years.

Managerial roles, technicians and trades workers, labourers, machinery operators and drivers and sales worker positions are also expected to grow, but jobs for clerical and administrative support workers are projected to decrease slightly.

Overall, regional job vacancies have been steadily increasing. Busting the long-held and pervading view that there are simply 'no jobs in the country', data show that employment opportunities in many parts of regional Australia are outpacing capital cities. In fact, there were more regional jobs advertised in early 2021 than before COVID-19. Around 54,000 jobs in regions were advertised in January 2021 across Australia. This level of demand has not been seen since the mining construction boom of 2010-2012.

The RAI provides a map of current regional job vacancies ([www.regionalaustralia.org.au/home/regional-jobs-vacancy-map](http://www.regionalaustralia.org.au/home/regional-jobs-vacancy-map)), which is updated monthly as new data is released. The national trend shows that most regions around Australia have vacancies in professional medical and engineering jobs, and in automotive and engineering trade jobs.

The future of jobs in regional Australia will require new skills and more highly-skilled individuals. For example, the 2019 RAI report *The Future of Regional Jobs*

showed that jobs requiring university Bachelor degree qualifications are expected to increase by 10.7 percent in regional Australia over the five years to May 2023.<sup>vii</sup>

A closer look at the mix of occupations in demand across regional Australia shows that there are similarities across regional communities, with many employers seeking similar skills to fill job vacancies, including less easily automated skills such as the high-touch and high-care jobs in education and health. This means that regional towns will be competing with each other to secure the people that each region needs in order to grow. This is where the liveability of a place really plays a role.

These are general national trends that may not be applicable to your local area. It is important to be able to collect and analyse data on jobs relevant to your local community and conduct an analysis on areas of growth or decline.

In addition to an understanding of the future job needs in your region, understanding the education and skill levels within your community is important not only for securing the right workforce for local industry growth opportunities, but also for highlighting gaps. So, in trying to identify your target population, it is also important to monitor and understand the mobility of people working in specific occupations.



What data to collect to gain insights on jobs and skills?

The most common roles or occupations in the local workforce provides insight into roles where your community may have a particular strength or pool of expertise within in its human capacity, for example in technical roles, machinery operators, personal care workers or professionals.

The level of management roles in a local area may indicate whether decision-making roles within key industries of employment are based locally and, if not, could highlight a vulnerability for the community.

The number of job vacancies in a local area, and the type of occupations in short supply gives communities a good indication of sectors that are growing or contracting. This enables regional leaders to consider the implications for local employment, whether it might lead to future workforce shortages, or whether proactive retraining or alternative work opportunities will need to be found for existing workers. The [Regional Job Vacancy Map](#) on the RAI website can be used to show the vacancies in your region.

The level and strength of business activity in a district can be gauged by looking at the number of business owners based locally, the number of new businesses and trademarks and even the number of local enterprises that service other businesses.

The RAI [Job Vulnerability Tool](#) on the RAI website can be used to explore what jobs are vulnerable in your region.

### Occupations and skills in Kempsey, NSW

Similar to the age characteristics we looked at for Gympie in the previous step, we can use the Census to look at underlying flows of people working in different occupations. The chart below shows how this plays out in the town of Kempsey.

The chart shows that Kempsey, like most places, saw sizeable numbers of people moving in and out between 2011 and 2016. There is a steady rate of churn in most occupations, with no particular occupations showing signs of shrinking overall.

Looking across the occupations of people in the Kempsey labour force in 2016, a total of 1,416 people moved in while a total of 1,581 moved out. Although this is a minimal net loss of 165 people, the story becomes more interesting when we look at which occupations are being attracted to and away from Kempsey.

There was substantial movement within the Community and Personal Services and Professionals occupational groups, contributing to 36 percent of the leaving labour force. Interestingly, while there was a very small net inflow of Professionals, Kempsey lost 85 workers in the Community and Personal Services group, perhaps suggesting a shortage of such jobs in the town, or difficulties in retaining these workers and demand elsewhere. Kempsey also lost 63 Sales workers and 32 Tradespeople.

Going the other way, Managers and Machinery Operators both saw marginal net gains, implying a steady demand for both managerial and operational positions in and around the town.

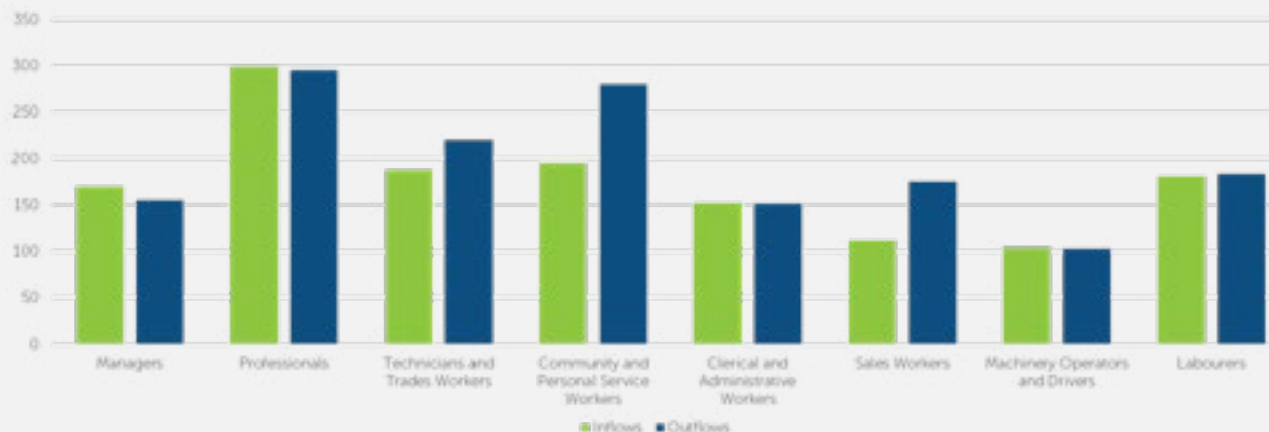
The outflows of Sales and particularly Community and Personal Service sector workers suggests local action may be needed. Expansion of training and jobs in these areas may help to attract and retain population in Kempsey.

In terms of educational attainment, Kempsey's

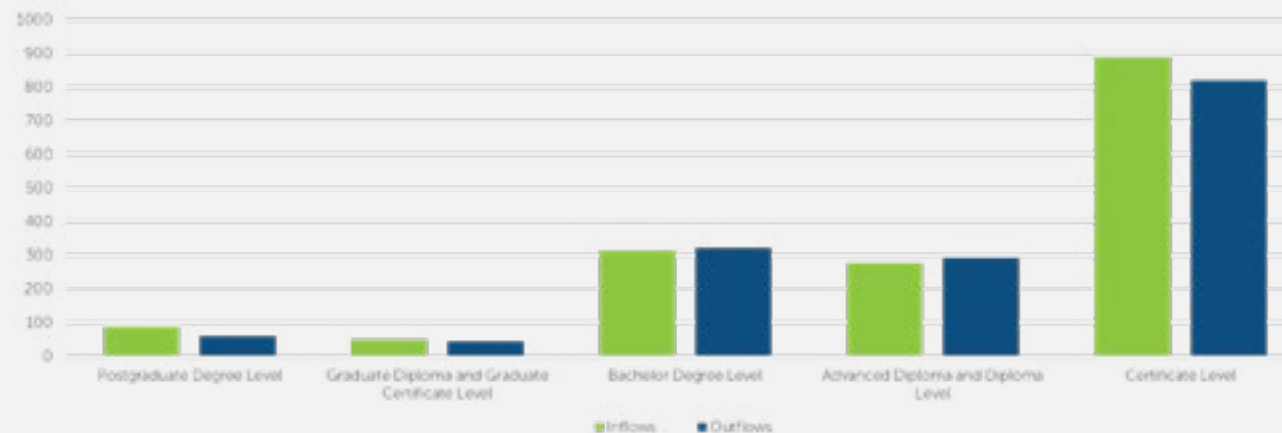
qualified population grew slightly between 2011 and 2016. This increase of qualified people was just 81 people: 1,619 qualified people moved in, while 1,538 moved away.

Importantly for the town, volumes of inflows and outflows were largely similar across all levels of qualifications, meaning that the overall qualifications base remained stable during the period.

The majority of population movement was at the certificate level and this group showed a net gain of 70 people. There was also a small net increase of 28 people with postgraduate qualifications. The flows were almost in balance for other qualifications levels.



Kempsey LGA people flows by occupation, 2011-2016.  
Source: ABS.Stat@Commonwealth of Australia



Kempsey LGA people flows by qualification, 2011-2016.  
Source: ABS.Stat@Commonwealth of Australia



Looking only at population numbers masks the underlying inflows and outflows of people. A closer look at the flows in and out help identify occupations and industries that need help with attraction and retention. Where there is a history of outflow, a place may need to look at new approaches to 'growing their own' workforce, strengthening links between schools, young people, employers and post school training providers and educators.



## WHO IS MOVING AND WHY?

### *Professional*

Sarah Thomson moved from Melbourne to Shepparton in Victoria to take up a managerial position with the local water authority. It was "a great work opportunity," she says, with so many extra benefits. She and her partner Bec traded a one-bedroom inner city flat for a "gorgeous house which backs onto a stunning red gum floodplain." She says Shepparton has a strong community backed by business and great leadership. "There is always something to get involved in and contribute to," she says. "We have found our forever place in this quirky, diverse, community-oriented town," she says.



Sarah Thomson in her large garden with vegetable plots, backing onto a red gum floodplain in Shepparton, Victoria.



## STEP 5: KNOW YOUR TARGET MARKET

Different people at various ages and stages of their lives are looking for different things in their lifestyle. Once you have analysed mobility and jobs data to identify the main target group or groups to attract to your town, you then need to consider what it is they may be looking for. Understanding the target population and what may attract them means that you can bring a more nuanced and more strategic approach to enhancing those liveability factors which may be important to new residents, giving your town a competitive edge.

The RAI has researched the question of liveability and identified some common trends across the different demographics of families, millennials (under 35 years old), professionals and boomers (over 65 years old). The analysis highlights the nuances of what people consider to be important as liveable at different stages of life.<sup>viii</sup>

### WHAT ARE PEOPLE LOOKING FOR?

The following sections show what liveability factors are important to different demographic groups. The main factors are:

- Health services
- Education Services
- Cost of Living
- Amenity
- Connection to Community
- Lifestyle and Opportunity

### HEALTH SERVICES

Health care services and the quality of those services is a key component in all liveability assessments, although it is slightly more important for older age groups. This does not necessarily mean that people expect that each town will offer exhaustive health services, but it does mean that most people expect that an array of services can be accessed easily, even if they are located in a nearby town or city. People want to have access to a range of health services that will meet their individual needs. This includes access to female GPs and dentists, especially for women and children.

In general, families, millennials and professionals tend to be satisfied with a general practitioner and a chemist in their communities so long as other services can be accessed nearby. While some families may still require access to specialist health services and to hospitals, on the whole, GP and chemists are seen as essential for most families.

It is reasonable to assume that older people are more likely to require the in-region availability of specialist health services, which in many cases may also mean access to these services through community or government-provided transport.

The ability to access health services has been significantly boosted with the increased access to Telehealth in regional Australia in response to COVID-19 lockdowns. This has effectively broadened the scope of services available remotely.



Bear in mind that the factors which attract populations may differ from those which retain populations. It is useful to ask why recent movers chose your town and whether that is still the reason that they stay. This can be done through a voluntary survey or by conducting a community consultation and inviting new residents to come and have their say.

## EDUCATION SERVICES

Education options are especially important for families with young children, and for those continuing education through university or TAFE. Studies show that families will seriously consider moving so that their children can have access to better schooling, particularly secondary schooling. This reflects the strong desire to have children attend local schools and minimise travel time or boarding school arrangements. Having at least two schooling options in a place is important to those with primary and secondary school aged children. Secondary schools that offer a range of subjects, depth of teaching and extra-curricular activities are valued by families in the community. The availability of accredited early childhood education can also be a key consideration for families and professionals with infants, noting that accreditation is important for rebate purposes.

The lack of access to higher education in many regional communities has contributed to the outflow of young people, undermining efforts aimed at attracting and retaining population. Reliable digital connectivity is a critical factor to facilitate long-distance tertiary studies. However, face-to-face learning is still the preference of many tertiary students. The emergence in Australia of tertiary study hubs and community-run Regional University Centres is already helping towns retain young people by allowing them to study without having to travel or relocate outside the region.

Traditionally, young people living in the Murraylands in South Australia who wanted to pursue tertiary study had three options: move to the city, face a long daily commute, or give up on their dreams. As well as contributing to “local leakage” of young talent, the Rural City of Murray Bridge, in South Australia, understood that the lack of local tertiary education options was a significant barrier to enterprise growth across the region.

The Murray River Study Hub was established to provide opportunities for regional students to pursue tertiary and vocational and education training studies without having to relocate to the city. The local government, in partnership with Regional Development Australia Murraylands and Riverland, TAFE SA, the Riverland G3 Alliance and the Coorong District Council, was successful in obtaining grant funding from the Federal Department of Education and Training to roll out the Study Hub, offering online and mixed mode courses from CQ University Australia, Flinders University and TAFE SA.

Program manager Vanessa Leigh said, “Local youth want to stay in the region to remain close to family and friends, combine study with local work opportunities or reduce their living costs by avoiding the expense of relocating to the city to live and study. On top of this, they can enjoy all the perks of our fantastic river lifestyle and maintain connections with their sporting clubs.”



Consider if there are opportunities for young people and career professionals for post-secondary study in a supported environment within your region without having to leave for a capital city. What options are there to partner with academic providers to create a local study hub?



Murray River Study Hub. Photo: Jennings Media

A group of community members in Rupanyup, a small Victorian town of around 500 people, started the Rupanyup Rural Migration Initiative (RRMI) seeking to attract new residents and grow its population. An important aspect of its work is to provide comfortable and affordable housing that will attract more families to live in the town. To do so, the RRMI established a company — Building Rupanyup Pty Ltd — whose role was to purchase and renovate a property and then make it available for sale or rent. A trust mechanism was set up so that locals from the town could invest in the venture. With support from further investors, the model could be replicated to invest in other homes. A spokesperson for the RRMI said that finding suitable housing was one of the biggest hurdles in attracting new residents.

"Most country towns have limited housing available and the houses that are available are often run down and need work. You can't expect people to move without somewhere reasonable to live."



The first property to be bought by Building Rupanyup in 2019.  
Photo: Rupanyup Rural Migration Initiative

## COST OF LIVING

A town will be assessed as liveable if there is a good balance between employment remuneration, affordable housing options and living expenses such as food, travel costs, and services. The RAI's research indicates that it is the balance that is crucial. For example, a town may be experiencing economic growth that is accompanied by well-paying jobs but if the cost of living is still high, people tend to relocate to another town and commute to work instead of choosing to live locally. The RAI's Move Tool, found on our website, shows that some places fall in the 'sweet spot', where incomes are good but house prices are still affordable.

An emerging component of the cost of living is the availability of rental properties in a regional community. The availability of affordable private rentals is expected to increasingly feature in the liveability assessments of highly skilled tradespeople and professional workers who are looking to move to, or stay in, regional Australia and who may want to experience living in a regional community before committing to purchase a local property.

In regional areas with high amenity and a large tourism trade, property owners have been increasingly withdrawing their properties from local rental markets and opting to maximise earnings through holiday letting. This decreases the supply of rental accommodation and can create intense competition for homes that remain available. Difficulties accessing rental properties is generally viewed negatively by people assessing liveability, as they had little option but to take up short-term accommodation (usually a holiday let) before an application for a rental property was successful.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a dramatic impact on regional housing prices which have been increasing at a faster rate than metropolitan values, indicating strong demand on the ground. Housing market pressures are

also evident in regional rental markets with vacancy rates at an all-time low. While regional living can be affordable, lack of available and suitable housing can be a very real barrier to being able to attract new residents.

Communities in many parts of Australia are struggling with the issue of lack of housing stock and, until now, little interest from commercial developers. This may change given the impact of COVID-19 on housing prices. Innovative community approaches are also being trialled by some towns and may involve refurbishing old farm buildings, adapting former commercial buildings or exploring the "tiny house" trend of shipping containers and mobile homes, allowing people to downsize.



Access the RAI Move Tool on our website to gain useful information on the average wages in an area compared with house prices, helping people to determine where they may pay off their mortgage the fastest.

Conduct a cost of living assessment of your town, comparing it with the cost of living in a town of similar size elsewhere in regional Australia. Are there areas where stark differences appear?

## AMENITY

Like the concept of liveability itself, 'amenity' is multi-faceted. However, it broadly covers the natural, physical and cultural attributes of a place. This includes the landscape, character of a town, its cultural vibrancy as well as its social character. Amenity, particularly access to nature and green spaces is an important driver for people who are considering leaving city life. In the RAI's 2020 survey of people considering moving to regional Australia, a sense of space and connection to the natural environment were both chosen by 77% of respondents as reasons to shift.

The following are some components that are part of the concept of amenity.



Conduct an "amenity assessment" of your town, considering its natural and built amenity, green spaces, walkability, retail and shopping opportunities. Try looking at your place through the eyes of a potential new resident – what stands out as the strengths or weaknesses?



Collie Art Gallery.

## Parks and green spaces

- access to bushland
- nature walks and trails
- exercising in a natural setting
- space to exercise dogs
- space for children to play
- outdoor recreational activities such as kayaking and fishing



## Sporting activities and participation

- sport for exercise
- sport participation for kids and families
- social connection through sporting activities



## Cultural and community life

- shopping and retail experiences
- cultural and artistic activities and events
- clubs and interest groups to join
- perceptions of safety



## WHO IS MOVING AND WHY?

### Millennial

When her plans to travel to London were hijacked by the coronavirus pandemic in 2020, lawyer Alicia Chisholm swapped a city commute in Melbourne, for a walk to work at the Office of Public Prosecutions in Burnie, north-western Tasmania. "I'm more relaxed," she says, "and instead of being exhausted on the weekend, I have energy to explore this amazing place and do things like rock-climbing, white-water rafting and hiking." She says her job affords her opportunities she'd never have in a bigger city, there's a great community of young professionals, and with rents much cheaper than in Melbourne, she and her partner have "saved a huge deposit for a property."



Alicia Chisholm and her partner embracing the active lifestyle they now lead in Burnie, Tasmania. Photo: Alicia Chisholm

Different demographic groups will value different aspects of amenity. Surveys show that regional residents value their local environment, including attractive buildings, parks and bushland. Access to green spaces and parks is important across all demographic groups. This access is valued not only for the amenity or beauty it brings to a town but also because it broadens the kinds of leisure activities available to residents.

People over 65 years who are not tied to the workforce can choose physically attractive places to live, and many choose to move to coastal locations. Other areas with natural attractions such as snowfields and rainforests also appeal to “amenity-seeking residents”.<sup>ix</sup>

Being able to have increased space is also a driver, particularly for those with children, and large blocks and backyards can be important drawcards for growing families. Access to sporting clubs and activities is important, particularly for younger people.

Access to shopping and retail opportunities are also important aspects of amenity, cited particularly by younger people. In fact, some research shows that lack of retail options has been ranked as an important reason to relocate to another area.\*

Walkability is a key liveability factor in most urban and regional liveability indices. A ‘walkable’ town centre also helps to create a feeling of physical safety in a community.

The perception of safety is important for personal wellbeing and there are frequently misperceptions about the relative safety of a particular town, which can be exacerbated by social media. If your town is impacted by such perceptions, being able to attract new residents may call for active measures to counter myths.

### *Regional Hubs and Co-working Spaces*

Throughout regional Australia, the concept of a “hub” where people come together to cooperate and share resources is growing in popularity.

From training and study hubs, to technology and science hubs, to innovation and arts hubs or co-working or professional development spaces, many communities are understanding the value that they can bring. Some regional towns in Australia have opened a community hub as a way of increasing connection within the community.

When Target closed its store in Gilgandra in central western New South Wales in 2019, residents were left with a huge empty space on their main street. Morale and customer traffic both took a dive. But the council and community rallied, and with some federal

funding, they created “The Gil” – a community hub incorporating a visitor information centre and space for fifty regional artists, artisans and businesses to work and market their products and services. There’s also free Wi-Fi, hot desks, a family friendly area and hire spaces available for anything from workshops to yoga and movie nights. Gilgandra Mayor Doug Batten says The Gil draws tourists and locals alike, with high street businesses reporting a boost in sales since it opened in June 2020. The hub will also house the town’s library, with construction work due to start in 2021. “We’re very pleased to have Gilgandra home to an initiative such as this, something that adds to our main street, supports our local businesses and provides even more reason and opportunity for people to shop local,” Councillor Batten says.



The retail space of The Gil at its opening in June 2020.



## CONNECTION TO COMMUNITY

The prospect of being connected to a community is an important part of liveability. People want to be socially included and connected to other people in a town, and a friendly, welcoming community is a key priority. The RAI's research has shown that wanting a stronger sense of community is an important factor for 63 percent of metro dwellers considering a move to regional Australia.

Connection to community is valued across all demographic groups. However, this connection can be shaped differently for different people.

For younger people, while close friendships and family connections are important, so is the ability to connect with them through telecommunications or digital platforms, or to be able to travel to visit them. Access to sporting opportunities is also particularly important for younger demographics who tend to build and maintain social connections through these activities.

Families tend to forge connections through school and sporting activity and frequently volunteer in these areas.

The over 65 year old group is the most likely to volunteer in the community compared with other demographic groups and well-being surveys show that they are also the community members that report the strongest sense of belonging. Conversely, millennials feel the least connected to friends and community and sometimes reported difficulty in finding ways to make new connections.

Access to and participation in arts and cultural activity contribute to a town's 'cultural vitality', which is important across all demographic groups, but specifically important to those aged over 65 years old.

A connection to the 'place' is highlighted as important by families and those over 65 years old and in particular to returners in these groups. This connection is considered to be a subjective combination

of the connection to the community, its way of life, and to the local natural environment. This means that opportunities to 'connect' to nature and the environment were valued alongside community and friendship.

While some people value having close friends located in the community more than others, all demographic groups valued a connection to the community itself. These connections were particularly important to new arrivals in a town, although they may be difficult to forge in places with high population turnover.



Consider the ways that different groups value and feel "connection" with the community. Are those well-established in your town, or could opportunities to forge connections be enhanced?

Check with sporting and recreational clubs, faith-based institutions, volunteer groups and cultural groups to ask what might enhance their reach and participation levels.

Many local councils in regional Australia supply "welcome packs" to their new residents, which contain information about community services, groups and events. Some local councils and community groups have gone a step further to personally welcome new people into their community. The Glenelg Shire Council in south-western Victoria, for example, hosted a Welcome Day barbecue in Casterton for the town's newest residents, including skilled migrants from overseas. Leaders from the community, including sporting clubs, service groups and school, hospital and council representatives attended to answer questions and provide advice on all of the opportunities available in the region. Councillor Karen Stephens noted: "This welcome event was borne from our local community wanting to pass on their appreciation that these people have chosen our town to call home. Moving from a foreign land to a rural and remote community must be extremely stressful and daunting for these individuals. If we can make their transition a little more comfortable, providing a welcoming and friendly smile [and] building a relationship over lunch, it is a step in the right direction."



Councillor Karen Stephens reading with skilled migrant children at a Welcome Day event in Casterton. Photo: Glenelg Shire Council

## LIFESTYLE AND OPPORTUNITY

The 'regional lifestyle' is valued across all demographic groups. Commonly, the components of this lifestyle include a slower pace of life than in metropolitan areas, shorter commute times, increased leisure time and the ability to reassess personal values so as to focus on "the important things" that help bring about a better quality of life.

The RAI survey conducted in 2020 showed that 69 percent of metro residents who were considering a move to regional Australia wanted to reduce general stress and anxiety.

For families, the regional lifestyle offers a more relaxed environment for children and a greater chance for them to experience play and outdoor activities than their metropolitan based counterparts. Some perceived advantages can be greater flexibility to be involved in their children's school and extra-curricular activities. Families primarily connect to each other through school and sporting activities, although opportunities to be involved in cultural and artistic activities are also valued. Through volunteering, especially through school and sporting activities, some parents value being able to take a leadership role in the community and 'build something' for residents and children. This is an opportunity that is perceived to exist especially in regional communities, where there is arguably a better work-life balance that allows parents to make meaningful contributions to their community.

For professionals, the regional lifestyle provides opportunities to engage in a range of cultural, artistic and sporting leisure activities. Shorter commuting times and a better work-life balance are also valued and are a key reason why many people are looking to make the move. Some professionals value the career opportunities that working in regional communities can bring. For example, doctors have reported undertaking work that is often broader and deeper in

scope than their metropolitan peers, so that they are likely to assume leadership positions earlier in their careers.<sup>xi</sup> Many people also value the opportunity to contribute to the community and to 'make a difference' through their professional role in the community.

While traditionally, regionally-based professional workers may have felt overlooked, disconnected from their metropolitan peers, or even regarded negatively by them, Australian views of work and lifestyles have dramatically shifted since the pandemic. Increasingly, Australia's most influential corporations are understanding the benefits of "regionalisation" and are working together to ensure that there are increased jobs and career opportunities in regional areas.<sup>xii</sup>

Other important factors for millennials may include housing affordability, debt levels, stress and overwork as well as perceptions of safety in country communities, bringing up children in simpler settings, being closer to nature and the imagined peacefulness of living in less populated and more aesthetically pleasing environments.

The RAI's research of those considering a move to regional Australia clearly showed the desire by most to escape the "rat race" and focus on the 'important things' in life. These important things include enjoying the natural amenity of a place, enjoying friendships and family connections, spending more time with children rather than stuck in traffic and being active within the community.



Consider the particular demographic you are wanting to attract and, in general terms, determine what they may be looking for in regional living. Can your town offer it? What liveability aspects can be enhanced?

## BARRIERS TO MOVING

As well as understanding why people consider moving to regional Australia, it is also useful to know what some of the perceived barriers are. The RAI's 2020 research showed that the top three reasons people may be hesitant to move to regional Australia are:

- Perceived lack of job opportunities (55%)
- Moving away from friends and family (52%) and
- Concerns about healthcare (51%)

Concerns about the lack of broadband connectivity was the fourth-top reason (49%).





Consider how your community can build professional networking opportunities, through business chamber activities, special networking events or even professional development opportunities. A strong professional connection with colleagues or peers within and across industry sectors can provide new professionals a sense of connection and belonging that increases their satisfaction with the quality of life in their new community.



The Coasters at a special networking event.

The Coasters is a networking group for young people in the Cradle Coast region of Tasmania. Established in 2017 and managed by a working group of passionate volunteers, the Coasters is hosted by the Cradle Coast Authority and supported by the University of Tasmania and CPA Australia. It aims to reduce social isolation and increase the ability of career development for young people in the region. One of the working group members, Sophie Wright, said that "the Coasters aim to host events that provide opportunities for personal development and bring people together through networking" adding that, "it's great to see so many different professions come together in a supportive and educational environment."

Physically getting together with your co-workers is a challenge when you live hundreds of kilometres apart, but Outbackhubs has made that easier for residents of Central Western Queensland. Outbackhubs is a network of co-working spaces in small, remote towns across the region, launched in 2017 by RAPAD – an organisation established by the region's seven local governments to promote sustainable growth and development. The idea has spread north and south, with more than twenty Outbackhubs now operating across central Queensland. "Originally the hubs were to support and grow a digitally connected community and propagate new entrepreneurial talent, but when COVID hit, the region already had zoom technology set up in the hubs so we didn't miss a beat," says RAPAD CEO David Arnold. While the initial project has concluded, work is underway for individual local governments to acquire or manage the shared working spaces.



The RAPAD Outbackhub in Winton. Photo: RAPAD



## STEP 6: ASSESS LOCAL LIVEABILITY

Now that you have an objective understanding of your community and target market, it is time to think about what you can do to attract and retain the target demographic group through improving local liveability.

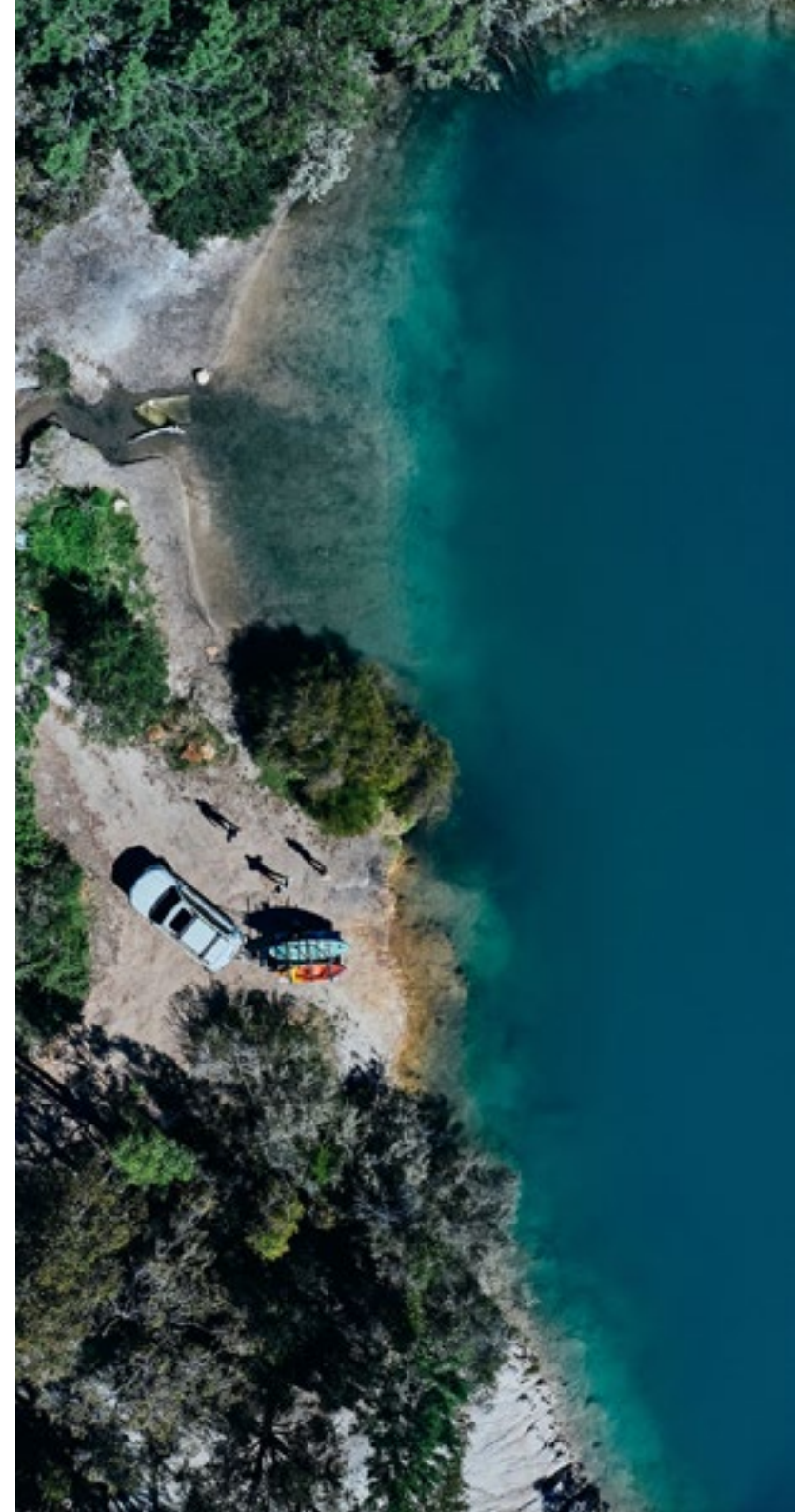
It is important to candidly take stock of your town and community, assess areas of strength and identify gaps. Some of this work may have been done by Council in its strategic planning, but has not necessarily been done through the lens of attracting new residents, and targeting specific demographic groups. This assessment should be focused on areas which may make your town more attractive to your target market of new residents. This will ensure that your town is as equipped as possible to attract the residents it needs to grow and thrive.

As you take stock, highlight the liveability factors that really make your place stand out. What are the highlights from the perspective of the residents in your community?

Don't forget that local residents are a key source of information about your town and how liveable it is. Ensure there is an opportunity for locals to give input on the headline liveability factors from their point of view. These may include the schools, a unique festival, the natural beauty, the sports centre and many others.

Use the checklists on the following pages to help identify liveability strengths and gaps.

Lastly, come back to the target population you want to attract. With that target group in mind, highlight the liveability factors that you have, and those that you need, in order to best appeal to this group. This will help you to prioritise which gaps to focus on to strengthen your town's appeal for that group.





## HEALTH

### Considerations

- Access to doctors including a female GP and bulk-billing clinics
- Access to pharmacy
- Access to dentist
- Access to mental health and specialist services

### Our strengths are...

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### Our gaps are...

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If these services are located elsewhere, consider facilitating access, for example, through the use of community transport.



## EDUCATION

### Considerations

- Access to accredited early childhood education services
- Access to primary school options
- Access to a local secondary school with breadth of curriculum
- Access to tertiary options
- Access to English language classes if seeking to attract new migrants

### Our strengths are...

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### Our gaps are...

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Where access to tertiary options is limited, consider establishing a study hub, with access to computers and Wi-Fi, and explore links with tertiary education providers. Can the community organise English conversation classes for new migrants?



## AMENITY

### Considerations

- Access to parks and green spaces and space for keeping pets
- Walkable town centre/neighbourhood?
- Perceptions of safety are important
- Culturally vibrant town
- Retail opportunities

### Our strengths are...

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### Our gaps are...

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Should a local farmers' or artisans' market be established? Can more bike paths or a pedestrian mall be installed? Are security cameras and lights needed in dark or isolated areas of town? What facilities are there for selling of local produce and handicrafts? Can unused land be turned into a dog park or playground?



## COST OF LIVING

### Considerations

- Availability of suitable housing for rent or purchase
- Cost of fresh produce
- Access to bulk billing
- Access to government subsidised childcare and schools

### Our strengths are...

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### Our gaps are...

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Think innovatively about housing and freeing up available land or refurbishing former commercial buildings. Would a farmers' market for fresh local produce and sale of locally produced items help reduce grocery costs?



### COMMUNITY CONNECTEDNESS

#### Considerations

- Access to religious facilities, sporting clubs, other clubs and community groups
- Opportunities to volunteer
- Welcome committee for new residents
- Culturally diverse events and festivals
- Co-working space or community hub
- Broadband and telecommunications

#### Our strengths are...

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#### Our gaps are...

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Establish a welcoming committee for new residents to meet locals, including through the school when new children are enrolled. Become familiar with the RAI's toolkit, *Steps to Settlement Success*, when seeking to attract migrants. Turn an unused commercial building into a community hub and co-working space. Organise networking and other events at local businesses.



### LIFESTYLE & OPPORTUNITY

#### Considerations

- More relaxed pace of life and less commuting
- Access to a range of leisure activities including sports and recreation
- Cultural events
- Opportunities to participate in community life

#### Our strengths are...

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#### Our gaps are...

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What new art exhibitions, music or cultural events can be attracted? Are there walking or nature trails and barbeque facilities? Ensure that a welcome pack is provided to new residents, highlighting all the local lifestyle opportunities available.



## STEP 7: ACTIVATE

Having identified the target population to attract, and understanding some of the liveability factors which may appeal to it, it is now time to develop and implement a Liveability Action Plan for your town to improve aspects of liveability.

It is important to ensure that the Plan is realistic in terms of resources and achievable within a reasonable timeframe, rather than creating a “wish list”. As well as seeking to address identified gaps, consider how you can build momentum in areas that your town considers its strengths, for example, its compact size, friendliness, range of employment opportunities, available housing, natural amenity etc. Try also to consider your strengths from an outsider’s perspective, which could be different from an insider’s view.

The Plan needs to identify areas where your town or region can strengthen its liveability and then to prioritise actions to achieve this. It needs to include a timeframe for each action as well as to ascertain human and financial resources. It is also important to identify who will be responsible for driving the achievement of an action, and to ensure that there are regular updates on progress.

Use the following template as a guide to ensure that each important consideration is covered in your Liveability Action Plan.

As you map out the Plan you may identify other champions and key stakeholders who need to be involved to help bring the Plan to life.

### WHO IS MOVING AND WHY?

#### *Boomer*

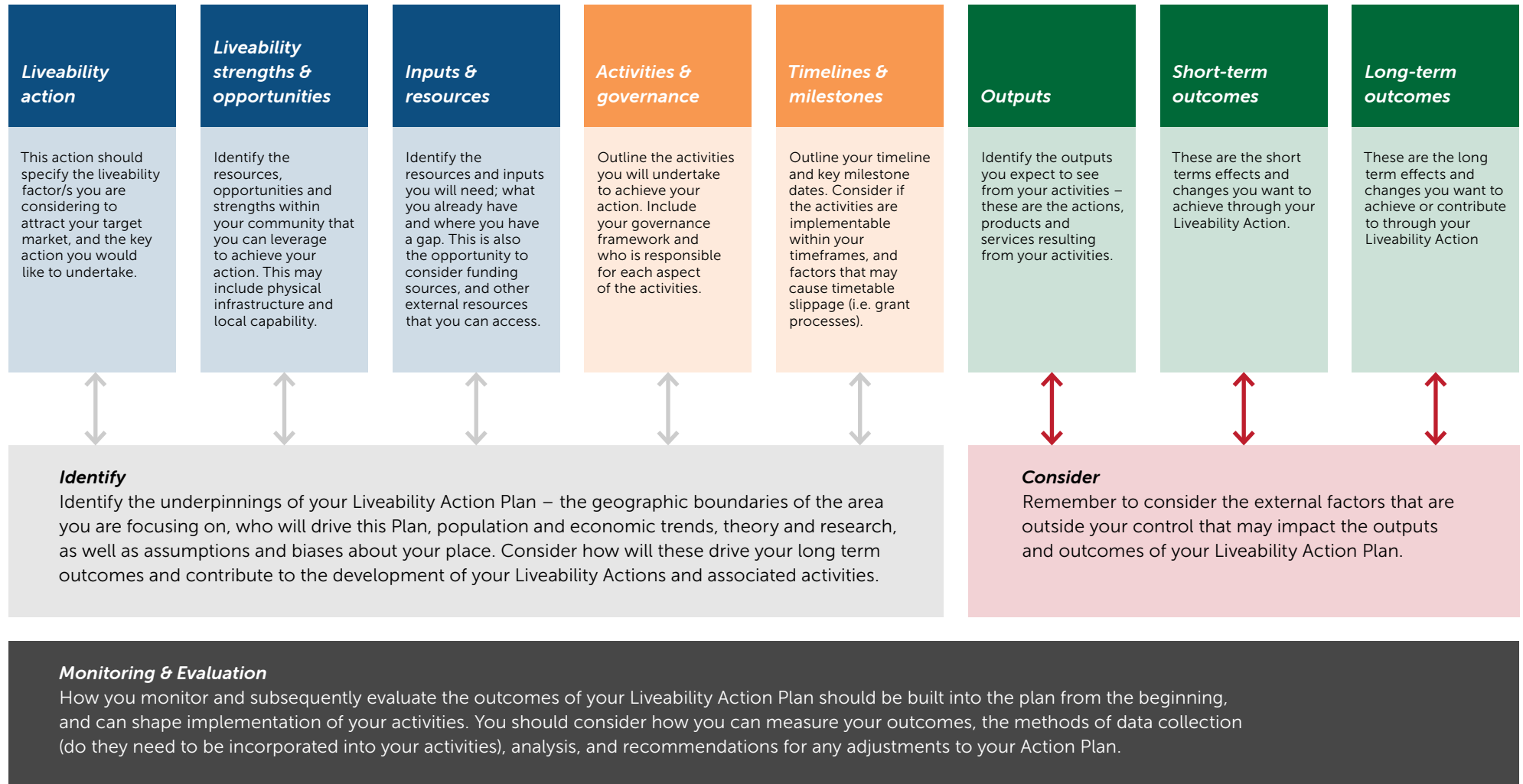
Once their book-keeping business was fully online, there was nothing tying John and Scott Rhys Jones to Sydney. So, they decided to indulge their long-held passion for Celtic culture and move to Glen Innes Highlands in the New England region of New South Wales. It’s home to the Australian Standing Stones where the Australian Celtic Festival is held every May. “Participation in the local community, both in societies or at markets, local events and festivities has gone from strength to strength and our business has adapted to include our Celtic interests and cottage industry wares,” John says. And after 30 years of renting, they bought a house. “Moving to Glen Innes was the best move we ever made,” he says.



John Rhys Jones (R) wearing his Welsh National Tartan in Glen Innes, NSW.

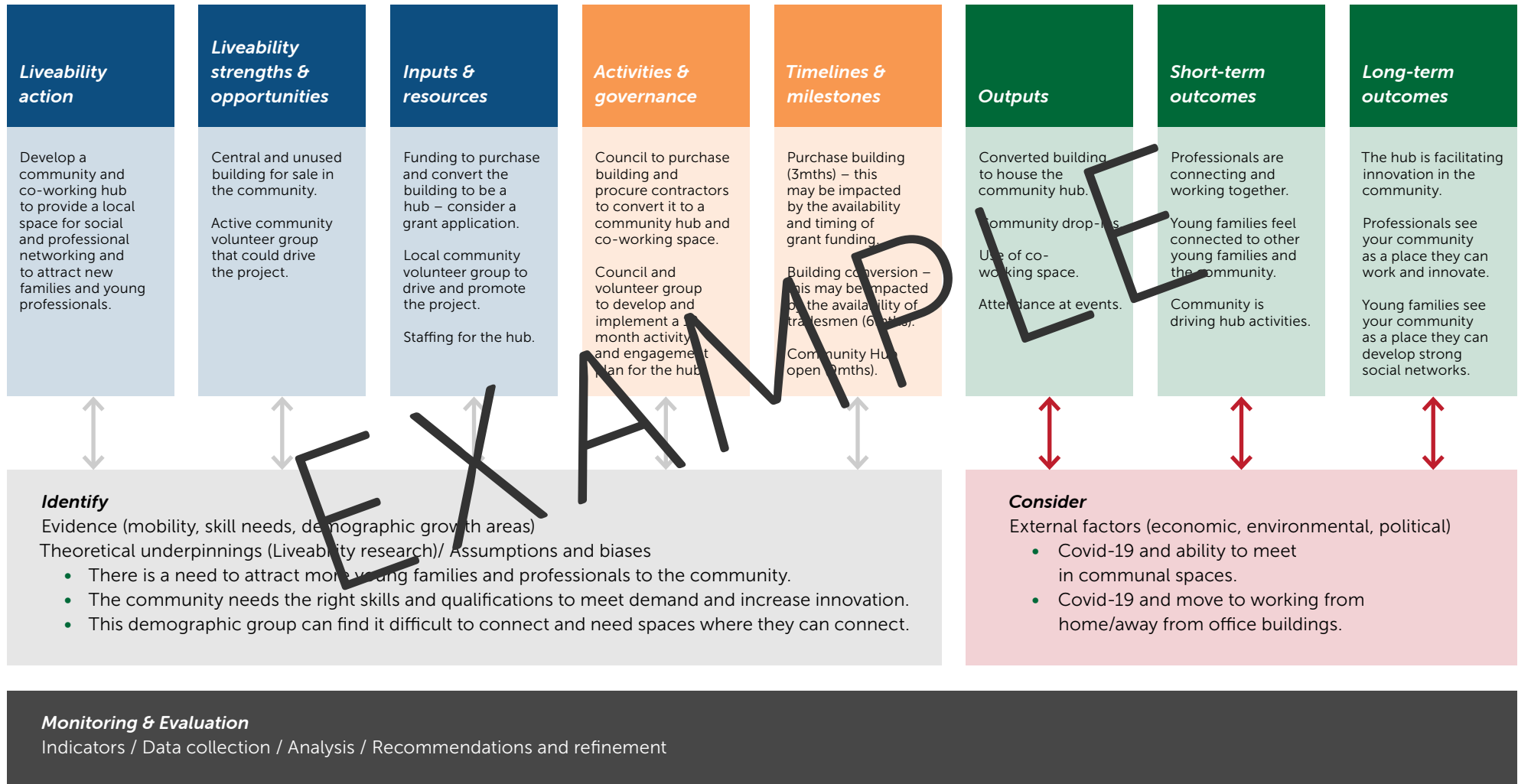


## LIVEABILITY ACTION PLAN TEMPLATE



## LIVEABILITY ACTION PLAN EXAMPLE

*Priority: community connectedness for new families and young professionals*



## RESOURCES

Not all actions may require financial resources, but many probably will. There are a variety of potential funding sources.

### Grants and donations

Keep abreast of federal, state and local government grants. As well as local Council websites and websites of the local Regional Development Association (RDA), key sites to monitor are:

- Federal [grants.gov.au](http://grants.gov.au)  
[regional.gov.au/regional/programs](http://regional.gov.au/regional/programs)
- ACT [grants.act.gov.au](http://grants.act.gov.au)
- NSW [nsw.gov.au/grants-and-funding](http://nsw.gov.au/grants-and-funding)
- NT [grantsnt.nt.gov.au](http://grantsnt.nt.gov.au)
- QLD [grants.services.qld.gov.au](http://grants.services.qld.gov.au)
- SA [grantassist.sa.gov.au](http://grantassist.sa.gov.au)
- TAS [communities.tas.gov.au/csr/grants](http://communities.tas.gov.au/csr/grants)  
[stategrowth.tas.gov.au/grants\\_and\\_funding\\_opportunities](http://stategrowth.tas.gov.au/grants_and_funding_opportunities)
- VIC [vic.gov.au/grants](http://vic.gov.au/grants)  
[rdv.vic.gov.au/grants-and-programs](http://rdv.vic.gov.au/grants-and-programs)
- WA [wa.gov.au/service/community-services/grants-and-subsidies](http://wa.gov.au/service/community-services/grants-and-subsidies)  
[dlgc.communities.wa.gov.au/GrantsFunding/pages/community-grants-programs](http://dlgc.communities.wa.gov.au/GrantsFunding/pages/community-grants-programs)
- Other [frrr.org.au](http://frrr.org.au)  
[philanthropy.org.au](http://philanthropy.org.au)

### Community Bank

By definition, community banks are owned and managed locally, serving the needs of the local community. They invest profits back into the community by way of grants, scholarships, sponsorships, donations and partnerships. Community banks are another potential way that liveability and amenity projects can secure support.

When the 880 residents of Henty in south-western New South Wales lost their local bank, they lost business as well, so they started their own bank. The Henty Community Bank – a franchise of Bendigo and Adelaide Bank – has ploughed \$3.2 million of its profits back into the community since it opened its doors in 1998. That's helped to get a new local hospital, a house for the local doctor, a new civic centre and a refurbished community pub. "The community bank has been the salvation of this town," says Les Dale, who together with his family, owns and runs the local supermarket, hardware and electrical stores. "It gave us all confidence. Business has gone from strength to strength," he says, and so has the population, now sitting at 1,200 people.



Henty Community Bank Branch of Bendigo Bank.

### Corporate Australia

Corporate social responsibility is firmly entrenched in the ethos of most of Australia's largest national companies, many of which actively support local community projects around Australia. Many of the big names we see across the country, Australia Post, Commonwealth Bank, ANZ, Aurizon, NBN Co and Elders to name just a few, have community grant or sponsorship schemes. It's worth researching the grant criteria of Australia's nationwide corporations, particularly those which may have a presence in your community.

The Aurizon Community Giving Fund was established to provide ongoing support to regional communities in which Aurizon operate and its employees live and work. The fund provides much needed financial assistance to assist local community organisations with initiatives and projects that aim to improve outcomes in sectors such as education, community safety, environment, and health & wellbeing. Greg Hebble, CEO of Foodbank WA, said "Foodbank WA is extremely grateful to receive this generous grant from the Aurizon Community Fund to assist vulnerable families living in Mullewa, Western Australia. These funds will go a long way in providing food relief to individuals and families living in the regional town of Mullewa, approximately an hour east of Geraldton, where unemployment and lack of transport has impacted their access to affordable food. Receiving this Aurizon Community Fund grant will allow our Foodbank Geraldton branch to provide emergency food relief hampers filled with essential items to these families over a 6 month period." Since 2011 over 400 organisations have benefited from funding provided from the Aurizon Community Giving Fund.

### Community fundraising

Traditional community fundraising methods include school fetes, fun runs, country fairs or carnivals, quiz nights and other social events. Such events can be fun, highly social and a means of community building. Keep in mind also the power of technology. Appeal websites and crowdfunding platforms are another way of fundraising and can be hugely successful.

The District Hospital in Cohuna, a small town in northern Victoria, was in need of a new cardiac defibrillator pacing unit, costing \$5,000, but had been unable to secure government funding. After a local doctor penned a letter to the State Government, which went viral on Facebook, a former Cohuna local stepped in and started a crowdfunding page. Within a day it had surpassed the required amount. The appeal ended up raising over \$38,000 which went into a pool at the Hospital to purchase the pacing unit and other necessary equipment, to ensure that the medical standard of care was maintained.



Remember, Regional Australia is vast and diverse. While there are common liveability factors, each region in Australia has its own unique features and characteristics. Your Liveability Action Plan should suit the features, needs and strengths of your town (a place based approach).

### Local Business

Think innovatively with local industry, what actions may they be interested in supporting? Some regional areas have one or two major employers, for example in mining or meat processing. They are often active contributors to the local community, supporting local schools, sporting clubs and community organisations. Some also have community grant programmes.

The WesTrac Cat vs Epiroc T20 Charity Cricket match in Kalgoorlie-Boulder is now in its second year. It is being embraced by local businesses who are generously donating items and services for the raffle and auction, as well as the community who love to get behind a good local cause. In its first year, the Match raised approximately \$160,000 which was donated to the Red Cross for bushfire relief. This year, the Charity Cricket match will support Full Circle Therapies, a not-for-profit Paediatric Allied Health Therapy centre for all children based in the region. It was established in 2010 by local community members initially to provide services in the Goldfields to children with Autism but has since expanded to include Occupational Therapy, Speech Therapy and Psychology.

Jeremy Foale, the co-founder and organiser of the Cricket Match says, "It's more than just a cricket match, it's about getting loKal businesses and the community together and raising money for a good cause".

Small local businesses are also an important supporter of the community and will be a key stakeholder in the development and achievement of the Liveability Action Plan. There are many inspiring examples of local businesses donating for community projects to enhance the liveability of a town, for example, businesses regularly supporting local schools and sporting clubs, or one-off initiatives such as the construction of a playground, fairy lights in the main street<sup>xviii</sup> or the installation of a shade-sail, to increase the town's amenity.

A group of local residents in Wycheproof decided that their small town of around 780 people in northern Victoria needed a bakery. Four local couples committed to financing the project, bought an old heritage building in the town and worked hard at renovating it. A relationship between the Wycheproof Township and Keilor Rotary Club led to mentorship and assistance in sourcing needed equipment. Networking to find staff led to a Melbourne-based baker moving to Wycheproof as well as visa-holders making the move to the small town. The bakery has filled a gap for the town and attracted many visitors. Ann Durie, one of the founders, said "the change we have seen in the town since opening the bakery has been immense. It has reinvigorated the town, given it a positive vibe and its success has inspired the creation of other new businesses."



Bakery on Broadway in Wycheproof, VIC. Photo: Maddie Durie.

## CONCLUSION

Understanding the role that liveability plays in directing people's decisions to move to, stay in or move from a regional town can help communities more keenly target policy and program efforts to attract and retain residents. Identifying the underlying mobility and job trends in your region can help you target the demographic that your town needs to grow and thrive into the future. You can then identify the liveability features that people in that demographic may find important.

Being able to find a job and access critical infrastructure such as telecommunications and electricity supply, and the accessibility and quality of water, are liveability 'hard gates' that are expected in any first assessment as to whether a regional community is worth further investigation for a potential new resident considering a move.

The health and education services, amenity of a place, cost of living, connection with the community and opportunities for better work-life balance and life

satisfaction all feature as part of the more subjective elements of liveability. The importance which is placed on them varies person by person, but there are some general trends according to different demographics. Using this knowledge will help Australia's regional communities to better target their efforts in attracting new residents, allowing them to grow and thrive.

Regional Australia is undergoing a renaissance as an attractive and viable alternative to capital city living, with opportunities for affordable housing and a better work-life balance. We are seeing more and more Australians "voting with their feet" and this trend has been accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the "work from home" phenomenon. Australia is on the cusp of a new era, one in which regional Australian towns grow and thrive like never before. It has never been a better time for regional communities to take stock, focus their efforts and create a viable, actionable plan to improve their town's liveability.

## RAI TOOLS

### REGIONAL JOB VACANCIES MAP

The interactive job vacancies map can be used to find out what jobs are available in your region:

[regionalaustralia.org.au/home/regional-jobs-vacancy-map](https://regionalaustralia.org.au/home/regional-jobs-vacancy-map)

### BIG MOVERS REPORT – REGIONAL MOBILITY

This resource builds a more comprehensive picture of where residents moved from, and to, at the Local Government Area, or council, level:

[regionalaustralia.org.au/home/the-big-movers-understanding-population-mobility-in-regional-australia](https://regionalaustralia.org.au/home/the-big-movers-understanding-population-mobility-in-regional-australia)

### HOUSING AFFORDABILITY – THE 'MOVE' TOOL

This resource shows how your community stacks up in terms of housing affordability:

[regionalaustralia.org.au/home/move](https://regionalaustralia.org.au/home/move)

### GREAT SMALL CITIES DATA TOOL

The RAI has constructed an interactive data visualisation tool to explore and compare how your city stacks up with others around you and across the nation:

[regionalaustralia.org.au/home/great-small-cities-data-tool](https://regionalaustralia.org.au/home/great-small-cities-data-tool)

### BUSINESS DYNAMO – BUSINESS ACTIVITY AND INNOVATION

This resource sits within the Regional Australia Institute's InSight online data tool.

It shows different levels of business activity and innovation in each region:

[regionalaustralia.org.au/home/insight-second-edition](https://regionalaustralia.org.au/home/insight-second-edition)

### STEPS TO SETTLEMENT SUCCESS

This resource outlines the steps communities can go through to encourage migrants to relocate to their town:

[regionalaustralia.org.au/home/migration-toolkit](https://regionalaustralia.org.au/home/migration-toolkit)

## RAI SERVICES

### POPULATION AND MOBILITY ANALYSIS

Based on latest data available, the RAI can identify and analyse the characteristics of people (age, education, incomes, and qualifications) moving to and from the town or region. The analysis provides insight into populations being lost, as well as the demographics of people who have been attracted to the region and whether they have come from a regional or metropolitan area of Australia, or overseas.

### EMPLOYMENT ANALYSIS

The RAI is able to provide an analysis of the current and upcoming workforce needs and challenges in a particular town or region and review other economic or business opportunities which are available. RAI will model regional workforce requirements based on existing knowledge of employment projections (net new jobs) and recruitment for replacement of existing workers (churn) to identify the scale of recruitment needs over the next five years. Consulting with local employers, businesses and leaders, the analysis helps regions to plan for a strong future.

### LIVEABILITY OPTIMISER

The RAI's Liveability Optimiser is a service covering the full spectrum of support for a region or community in developing a Liveability Action Plan. It includes data gathering and analysis on mobility and jobs, consultation and workshops with regional leaders, local businesses and community members, an assessment of liveability factors, priority planning, advice on reaching target markets and support in obtaining funding. The RAI Liveability Optimisers are tailor-made and place based, owned and led by locals, and supported by our expertise.

### PATHFINDER INITIATIVE

An economic growth tool, the Pathfinder Initiative is a deep examination of growth prospects for a town or region, which involves a strategy development process led by the local community and informed by the RAI's research and analysis. Pathfinder helps regional leaders to identify the most important Future Factors for economic prosperity in a region and gives practical and relevant advice on the way ahead. This is a comprehensive consultation process and assessment which will help a region to understand growth opportunities and focus on the right initiatives for future development.

For further information on the RAI Services: [info@regionalaustralia.org.au](mailto:info@regionalaustralia.org.au)

## REFERENCES

- <sup>i</sup> Bourne, K., Houghton, K., How, G., Achurch, H. and Beaton, R. (2020). *The Big Movers: Understanding Population Mobility in Regional Australia*. Canberra: Regional Australia Institute.
- <sup>ii</sup> As well as the surveys and reports mentioned in this section, the RAI undertook a comprehensive desk review of relevant reports and studies. A selection of the most useful reading includes:
- McKenzie, F. (2016). *A Regional Career: Migration histories of professionals working in Bendigo, Victoria. Summary of Findings*. The State of Victoria Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning.
  - Charles-Edwards, E., Bell, M., Cooper, J. and Bernard, A. (2018). *Population shift: understanding internal migration in Australia*. Australian Bureau of Statistics.
  - Bureau of Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Economics (BITRE). (2014). *The evolution of Australian towns*. Report 136. Canberra.
  - A review of key liveability indices including: The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) liveability survey; OECD – Better Life Index; Global Liveable Cities Index (GLCI); Stockland Liveability Index.
- <sup>iii</sup> Schirmer, J., Yabsley, B., Mylek, M. and Peel, D. (2016). *Wellbeing, resilience and liveability in regional Australia: The 2015 Regional Wellbeing Survey*. Canberra: University of Canberra.
- Schirmer, J., Mylek, M., Peel, B., and D Yabsley, B. (2014). *People and place in Australia: The 2014 Regional Wellbeing Survey*. Canberra: University of Canberra.
- Schirmer, J. and Berry, H. (2014). *People and Place in Australia: The 2013 Regional Wellbeing Survey – Summary Report and full Technical Report*. Canberra: University of Canberra.
- <sup>iv</sup> Government of Western Australia. (2013). *Living in the Regions: A survey of attitudes and perceptions about living in regional Western Australia*. Government of Western Australia. (2016). *Living in the Regions 2016: Insights Report*.
- <sup>v</sup> Charles-Edwards, E., Bell, M., Cooper, J. and Bernard, A. (2018). *Population shift: understanding internal migration in Australia*. Australian Bureau of Statistics.
- <sup>vi</sup> *Talking Point: Returning to Regional Australia*. (2014). Canberra: Regional Australia Institute.
- <sup>vii</sup> Houghton, K. (2019). *The future of regional jobs*. Canberra: Regional Australia Institute.
- <sup>viii</sup> Much of the information and general observations in this section are drawn from the University of Canberra Regional Wellbeing Surveys of 2013 and 2015, as well as the Government of Western Australia Living in the Regions Surveys of 2013 and 2016 (see Endnotes iii and iv above). See also, Bourne, K. (2019). *Understanding Regional Liveability: Briefing Note*. Canberra: Regional Australia Institute.
- <sup>ix</sup> Bureau of Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Economics (BITRE). (2014). *The evolution of Australian towns*. Report 136. Canberra.
- \* *Living in the Regions*. WA. (2013).
- <sup>xi</sup> UNSW Media. (2019). *Rural practice linked to junior doctors being more satisfied*. Available at: <https://newsroom.unsw.edu.au/news/health/rural-practice-linked-junior-doctors-being-more-satisfied>
- <sup>xii</sup> The Regional Australia Council 2031 (known as RAC2031) comprises some of Australia's largest and most influential private sector actors, who are seeking to prioritise the regionalisation of Australia, including establishing strategies and resources that will help corporate organisations and employees easily make the move to regional Australia.
- <sup>xiii</sup> For example, the Lismore Chamber of Commerce, sponsored by local business, created a Christmas wonderland in the Lismore CBD in December 2020, complete with falling snow and hundreds of fairy lights.







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