



## DSRD Regional Offices

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Department of State and  
Regional Development



# Overcoming skills shortages: A practical guide for regional communities



# Introduction



The skills shortage in NSW and indeed Australia as a whole has attracted considerable media attention in the past few years and prompted initiatives by all three levels of government. Peak groups, business and communities have also attempted to find answers to this extremely complex issue.

The complexity is due to the many factors affecting the availability of skilled people. Recently, for example, the minerals boom in Western Australia and the high wages on offer led to the exodus of many tradespeople from the eastern states. Sometimes a skills shortage might stem from technological changes in a particular industry that demand new skills sets.

There is no uniform solution applicable across the board but experience to date shows that different approaches can work and that partnerships involving government, business and communities are often effective.

This booklet describes briefly how regional communities can gather information on the nature of the skills shortage affecting their area and then go about developing the right responses. Its principal strength lies in the supporting examples of practical action taken by various regional councils and community-based groups, most of which include contact details for further information. Also included is a listing of useful internet resources.

The NSW Department of State and Regional Development hopes that the booklet will help spark new projects by regional communities to attract and retain skilled people in local industries.

## Step 1

# Work out the nature of the skills shortage

### Gather information

Skills shortages can occur in different situations. For communities, finding out whether a skills shortage is widespread or confined to particular businesses is the essential first step to developing effective responses.

To gather valuable information on skills shortages in businesses across the area or in a particular industry:

- search the internet. Relevant sites include those of the Australian Departments of Employment and Workplace Relations and Transport and Regional Services, Australian Bureau of Statistics, and Area Consultative Committees – see the *Useful contacts* at the end of this brochure for details
- conduct surveys, interviews or focus groups with state, regional and local business groups in affected industries
- undertake a general business survey.

Once the nature of the skills shortage is known, a full training needs analysis can be conducted.



## Case studies

### Tumbarumba Shire Council

In 2006 the council conducted a Business Retention and Expansion Survey. The survey sought detailed information on the issues facing businesses, including skilled labour needs. The results indicated that a range of businesses were experiencing skills shortages. TAFE later followed up the survey with a training needs analysis.

**Contact:**  
Chris Blake  
Economic Development Manager  
02 6948 9116

### Bega Valley Building Industry Taskforce

The taskforce was established to address a number of issues facing the industry and confirm or debunk anecdotal evidence of an ageing workforce and low apprentice intakes. It surveyed businesses, confirming what people had been saying.

There was a subsequent study of skills shortages across all industries in the local government areas covered by the South East NSW Area Consultative Committee. Findings were reported to survey participants, educational institutions and industry associations.

**Contact:**  
John Dedman  
South East Area Consultative Committee  
02 6492 5688

## Step 2

# Develop responses

The most effective responses to skills shortages are targeted, that is the responses address the issues specific to individual industries. However, there are some broad approaches that are applicable across industries as the following examples illustrate.

### Develop employment and training opportunities for the broad population:

## Case studies

### Orange Cabonne Blayney Industry Skills Project

Initiatives stemming from this project to address local skills shortages in the metals fabrication and engineering industries included:

- stronger contact between career advisers and businesses – the advisors now act as business talent scouts
- an industry stand at a careers expo in Orange, including demonstrations by an apprentice metal machinist
- establishment of an industry cluster to support cooperation between businesses, including labour sharing and work referrals.

**Contact:**

Tony Boland  
Orange City Council  
02 6393 8243

### Nambucca Vehicle Body Manufacturing Cluster

The cluster, which comprises five core companies, aims to make the Nambucca Shire a recognised centre of excellence for vehicle body manufacturing in Australia.

Its focus has been training and skills development. After the cluster established the need for a new qualification in vehicle body manufacturing, TAFE introduced two new certificate level courses, both of which use flexible delivery methods. While trainees still attend some classroom sessions 60 kilometres away at Coffs Harbour, TAFE assessors come to the trainees' workplaces one day per fortnight to deliver practical training and assessments. As a result trainees have much more on-the-job training.

To increase the breadth of skills, the largest company in the cluster rotates trainees internally around different workplaces every two months while the smaller companies send trainees to different firms.

**Contact:**

Wayne Lowe  
Nambucca Shire Council  
02 6568 0226

### Far West Region Growth and Investment Strategy

Prepared by the OutBack Development Forum in partnership with all three levels of government plus local agencies, the strategy examined how best to equip the regional workforce to meet the challenges posed by planned major development projects.

Identifying attraction and retention of skilled labour as crucial to regional growth, the strategy articulated the need to:

- increase the availability of labour by re-engaging local residents in the workforce and stemming the departure of young people from the region
- attracting skilled workers, including workers from overseas
- improving the local training system.

**Contact:**

Scott Howe  
Area Consultative Committee  
08 8087 8383

## Think outside the square in attracting workers

Some regions have low unemployment but also low labour force participation rates. In these circumstances it can be worthwhile promoting employment opportunities to groups not well represented in the workforce, such as older people, women, indigenous people and farmers. While individual businesses may often be better placed to try this approach, there is still potential for community action.



## Casestudies

### Orange Cabonne Blayney Industry Skills Project

As a result of this project, local employers advertised for older people to fill jobs in metal fabrication and engineering. More than 300 applied. Twelve people, the oldest 53 years, were subsequently taken on as mature-aged apprentices. They will complete apprenticeships in two to three years and will generally enter supervisory positions when fully qualified.

Also under the project, local mines sought to recruit farmers with trade qualifications. The response in this instance was very low, perhaps because farmers tend not to have such qualifications.

#### Contact:

Tony Boland  
Orange City Council  
02 6393 8243

### Eurobodalla Shire Council

Industry-based initiatives that the Council has set up to address labour shortages include:

- encouraging more mature-aged workers to enter or stay in industries such as building and construction
- promoting practical ways to accommodate the workplace needs of older workers, for example by restricting heavy lifting to younger employees.

#### Contact:

Greg Bowman  
Eurobodalla Shire Council  
02 4474 1271

## Step 2 (cont.)

### Develop responses

#### Target schools in promoting local industries and careers

Secondary schools, many of which offer vocational courses to senior students and have existing links with local industry, can usefully be targeted in coordinated employment promotions. And, as the following examples show, different strategies can all be effective.

### Case studies

#### Joint presentations in Tamworth

Local Community Partnership, Youth Pathways, and the Regional Industry Career Advisers joined forces to organise a presentation at a career expo in Tamworth. The event drew 2,500 senior school students and 130 exhibitors. A 'Live, Train and Work in Tamworth' night followed with more information for young people on local opportunities.

**Contact:**

Careers Network Inc  
02 6765 9334

#### Illawarra Skills Shortages Taskforce

Recognising the power and popularity of the web, the taskforce developed [careersurfing.com.au](http://careersurfing.com.au). This is a portal to existing government and non-government online careers and jobseeking advice and to local information on Illawarra employers, job opportunities and training providers.

In addition to the website, the taskforce has undertaken various initiatives including development of resources for employers on how to attract skilled labour, such as apprenticeships and traineeships.

The taskforce was established following a skills shortage forum run by the Australian Industry Group and the Illawarra Area Consultative Committee.

**Contact:**

02 4227 4550



#### Industry Bridge to Schools

Industry connected to schools in the Hume-Riverina area in an innovative way through Industry Bridge to Schools – a solar car competition. It involved teams of six to ten students in Years 8 or 9, each working with an engineer from the local manufacturing industry to design, build and race a remote-control, solar-powered car.

The project aimed to:

- build strong and ongoing relations between industry and schools
- promote careers in manufacturing to schools and the school community
- engage students in a more practical learning experience.

Industry Bridge to Schools is a project under the Australian Industry Group's Adopt-a-School program – see the *Useful contacts* at the end of this brochure for details.

## Attract and retain skilled labour from elsewhere

Skilled labour can be attracted from elsewhere in Australia and overseas.

To attract and retain skilled labour, communities first need to analyse and, if necessary, address their desirability as a relocation destination in terms of:

- lifestyle
- the availability of affordable quality housing and services
- the social and cultural environment
- employment opportunities for spouses.
- Next comes developing a promotional plan. Some of the promotional activities to consider include:
  - covering local employment opportunities in tourism campaigns – many skilled workers move to an area where they have previously enjoyed a holiday
  - linking up with the Australia Needs Skills expos run both here and overseas by the Australian Department of Immigration and Citizenship
  - showcasing job opportunities on websites and at open days
  - taking a stand at the annual Country Week expo (which also involves a jobs board).

There is also scope to directly recruit migrants to fill skilled positions. See *Useful contacts* in this brochure for the addresses of websites with relevant information.

And, after the recruitment is done, it's important to offer skilled workers post-arrival assistance and advice, especially concerning schools, banks and health care.

## Case studies

### Community Open Days

A town in regional NSW ran open days to expose city people to the benefits of the local community, reimbursing their petrol costs for the visit.

The open day allowed visitors to discover a town with:

- high quality but cheap housing
- good schools and hospitals
- great social and sporting amenities, including golf, tennis and bowls
- friendly locals with a sense of community
- a low crime rate.

The local council also agreed to reimburse newcomers' first year rates and to help them find jobs.

### Greater Taree Council

Tellusyourskills.com.au is a web-based tool developed by the Greater Taree Council. Local businesses register on the site and list the type of employment they have available. People interested in relocating to the Taree area can use the site to record their qualifications and skills. This information goes to appropriate businesses, which can then make contact if there is a skills match.

#### Contact:

Chris Ryan  
Greater Taree City Council  
02 6592 5346

## Step 2 (cont.)

### Develop responses

#### Case studies

##### **Murray Regional Development Board**

The Board employed a Settlement Officer to manage post-arrival assistance and advice – the key responsibilities being welcome, orientation, introduction to the community and advice on how to access local services.

**Contact:**

Nicole Doughty  
Murray Regional Development Board  
02 6041 2019

##### **Riverina Regional Development Board**

An independent evaluation of the board's successful skilled migration program showed that:

Skilled migrants were attracted to the Riverina region because of the fresh air, relaxed lifestyle and the large country town feeling.

Most were pleased that towns within the region, like Wagga Wagga and Griffith, had most of the facilities and amenities found in the cities. Many felt that living in the area gave them a better life for themselves and their families.

In terms of what migrants didn't like, some mentioned a lack of public transport, isolation from the rest of Australia, lack of support networks, limited promotion opportunities and a feeling that their skills were not always used to their fullest potential.

Most sponsoring employers reported that skilled migrants not only plugged the skills gap, they also brought experience and different skills. They were often productive from day one, allowing employers to take on more business, and started work with a fresh mindset for the job.

Sponsoring employers also felt that skilled migrants often saw their new jobs as being a 'real opportunity' and displayed a good work ethic.

However, sponsoring employers were concerned about the length of time from identifying an appropriate skilled migrant to getting that person on the job in Australia. They also reported uncertainty about whether the migrant had the right skills – including language, the visa process, and whether migrants would fit into the community and the workplace.

**Contact:**

Peter Dale  
Riverina Regional Development Board  
02 6921 4112



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The Standing Committee on Regional Development publication *'Attracting and Retaining Skilled People: A Practitioners Guide'*, provides more examples of successful initiatives to attract skilled people to regional areas. It is available at [www.sd.qld.gov.au/dsdweb/v3/guis/templates/content/gui\\_cue\\_doc.cfm?id=5891](http://www.sd.qld.gov.au/dsdweb/v3/guis/templates/content/gui_cue_doc.cfm?id=5891)

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# Community checklist

## Getting started

- Have you conducted business and/or community consultation/ workshops/needs surveys to establish whether skills shortages exist in more than one business?
- Have you got community commitment?
- Do your local businesses think about using recruitment consultants?
- Have you sought assistance from professional organisations/associations?
- Have you developed an action/strategic plan?

## Promotion

- Have you considered redevelopment and revitalisation of your town?
- Have you considered your PR strategy?
- Have you produced informative/marketing materials?
- Have you recently promoted the benefits of a regional lifestyle, including promotional materials and open days?
- Are attraction packages offered (such as salary/premises/land discounts)?
- Do your local businesses think about placing advertisements for jobs/work experience outside local area?

## Support

- Do you have council support in terms of active endorsement and financial contribution?
- Do you have industry/employer support for weekend, vacation work, or work placement opportunities for students, and training and qualifications?
- Do you have industry/employer support in terms of people relocating to the area?
- Have you sought Regional Development Organisation support?
- Do you have funding from State/Australian Government/other programs?
- Have you investigated whether it's worthwhile using a skilled migration program?

# Useful contacts

## Research and statistics

Australian Department of Employment and Workplace Relations' Labour Market Information Portal (links to Australian Bureau of Statistics)  
[www.workplace.gov.au/lmip](http://www.workplace.gov.au/lmip)

Australian Department of Transport and Regional Services  
[www.dotars.gov.au](http://www.dotars.gov.au)

NSW Area Consultative Committees  
[www.acc.gov.au/contact\\_us/nsw.aspx](http://www.acc.gov.au/contact_us/nsw.aspx)

NSW Regional Development Boards  
[www.business.nsw.gov.au/region/rdb/default.htm](http://www.business.nsw.gov.au/region/rdb/default.htm).

Rural Development Council – Attracting and Retaining Skilled People in Regional Australia (free downloadable guide)  
[www.rdcouncil.gov.au/downloads/skilled\\_people.aspx](http://www.rdcouncil.gov.au/downloads/skilled_people.aspx)

## Recruitment

NSW Office of Industrial Relations  
*A Quick Guide to Recruiting Staff* (free download)  
[www.industrialrelations.nsw.gov.au/workplace/practice/recruit.html](http://www.industrialrelations.nsw.gov.au/workplace/practice/recruit.html)

The Recruitment and Consulting Services Association  
– index of recruitment companies  
[www.rcsa.com.au/membershipindex/SearchMain.cfm](http://www.rcsa.com.au/membershipindex/SearchMain.cfm)

## Apprenticeships and traineeships

Australian Apprenticeship Centre  
[www.australianapprenticeships.gov.au/default.asp](http://www.australianapprenticeships.gov.au/default.asp).

Australian Apprenticeships referral line  
Tel: 13 38 73

## Job Network

[www.workplace.gov.au/workplace/Programmes/JobNetwork](http://www.workplace.gov.au/workplace/Programmes/JobNetwork).  
Tel: 131715

## Linking with schools

Australian Industry Group 'Adopt-A-School' program  
[www.aigroup.asn.au/scripts/cjiip.exe/wService=aigroup/ccms.r?PageID=802](http://www.aigroup.asn.au/scripts/cjiip.exe/wService=aigroup/ccms.r?PageID=802)

## Community Economic Development

NSW Department of State and Regional Development  
Community Economic Development program  
[www.regionalcommunities.nsw.gov.au](http://www.regionalcommunities.nsw.gov.au)

## Skilled migration

NSW Department of State and Regional Development  
[www.business.nsw.gov.au/migration/](http://www.business.nsw.gov.au/migration/)

Australian Department of Immigration and Citizenship  
(including Australia Needs Skills expos)  
[www.immi.gov.au](http://www.immi.gov.au)