Collaborative workforce innovation

A practice guide for developing a Foundational Capabilities Pathway built on lessons from the AgFutures initiative

David Longley and Kira Clarke   2025

Contents

Acknowledgements

The authors acknowledge and thank the partner organisations who collectively stewarded the AgFutures initiative, particularly colleagues from South West TAFE, Skills Impact, Dairy Australia, Brophy Family and Youth Services, and Food and Fibre Great South Coast. Their contributions to the design and delivery of the AgFutures initiative were invaluable, and their deep insight and expertise was essential to informing the development of this practice guide.

The authors would also like to thank the leaders, case managers and teachers across South West TAFE, Brophy and Brotherhood of St. Laurence who supported the delivery of the AgFutures pathway from 2022–24. Their efforts and their dedication to young people supported the pathway to be delivered in manner that was engaging, safe and inspirational for the young people who undertook it.

Finally, the authors would like to thank the contributions and engagement of the Barwon South West community. The support, insight, contributions and welcoming environment that the community provided cannot be understated.

Glossary of terms

BSL	Brotherhood of St. Laurence
CIC	community investment committee
CoP	community of practice
ESP	employment service provider
FCP	Foundational Capabilities Pathway
F&FGSC	Food and Fibre Great South Coast
NYEB	National Youth Employment Body
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
SWTAFE	South West TAFE
VET	Vocational Education and Training
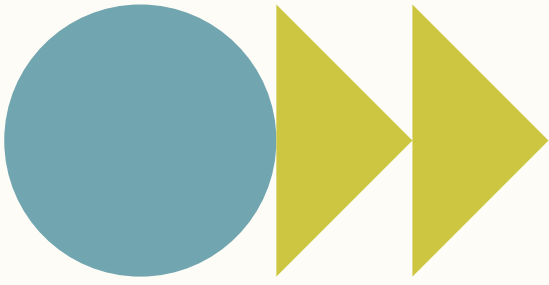
Introduction

About this practice guide

Collaborative workforce innovation: a practice guide for developing a Foundational Capabilities Pathway built on lessons from the AgFutures initiative outlines an approach to skilled workforce development through the Foundational Capabilities Pathway (FCP). The FCP is a model and a practice approach for the collaborative design and delivery of an entry-level employment–based training pathway that gives jobseekers a set of core technical skills they need to enter an industry.

The model grounds the design and delivery of this pathway within a specific place/region and aligns it with the immediate and future needs of local young people and employers. The practice approach enables this by:

- accounting for local conditions that shape workforce entry
- recognising the social and economic contexts of young people in the region
- bringing together stakeholders with complementary expertise in the systems and structures that impact local workforce development needs and opportunities
- enabling collaborative and adaptive co-design and co-delivery that leverages local resources and expertise and responds to challenges and opportunities as they arise.

This approach is informed by several core theoretical frameworks, including the Brotherhood of St. Laurence (BSL) Applied Systemic Change[1] methodology and the Capability Approach.[2]

This practice guide was developed using insights from an FCP demonstration project – the AgFutures initiative – which tested the application of the model and practice approach in the agricultural sector in Victoria's Barwon South West region from 2022–25. Insights from testing the FCP model through the AgFutures initiative are used throughout this practice guide as examples of the model in action.

The primary audiences of this guide are workforce development practitioners, Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector stakeholders, youth and social service providers and employers, and industry bodies engaged in localised workforce development solutions.

---

1   Mallett, S, James, S, Borlagdan, J, Thornton, D & Brown, D 2022, *Applied systemic change: an implementation guide for building capability in human service systems*, Brotherhood of St. Laurence, Fitzroy, Vic.

2   The Capability Approach, developed by Amartya Sen, aims to enable people's freedom to 'be and do', providing them with opportunities to pursue their own interests and to life a good life as they determine it.

The structure of the practice guide

This practice guide is divided in six sections – five chapters and appendices.

Chapter 1 explains what an FCP is and describes the problems they respond to. It then provides a high-level summary of the AgFutures initiative as an example of the FCP model being applied to address a set of local workforce development problems.

Chapter 2 provides guidance on ways to establish the systems and structures required to successfully use the FCP model to co-design and test an entry-level pathway. This includes explanations of the expertise required to steward an FCP, and mechanisms for building leadership, governance and co-learning into an initiative.

Chapter 3 details the co-design process, which utilises the structures and processes set out in the previous chapter to collect evidence, build consensus, then draft and refine the design of an FCP pathway. It provides short examples and lessons from the co-design of the AgFutures pilot.

Chapter 4 outlines how to test the co-designed pathway throughout delivery. It demonstrates how the governance and learning mechanisms maintain the adaptability and responsiveness of the pathway as local conditions change and/or new conditions emerge, and how these mechanisms draw lessons from delivery. The chapter also contains examples of delivery and adaptation from the AgFutures initiative.

Chapter 5 discusses how an FCP concludes. This includes how the initiative transitions participants out of the pathway, and how the final set of lessons from implementation and delivery are captured, interpreted and shared.

The **appendices** contain an FCP quick implementation guide, examples of project documentation to support implementation as well as stakeholder vignettes outlining the activities and contributions of key stakeholder groups in the AgFutures initiative, including initiative partners.
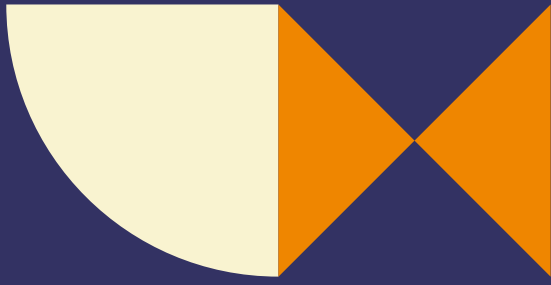
1 A new approach to workforce development

The world of work is changing. The continued integration of information technology into the workplace, a changing climate and the advent of Artificial Intelligence have all significantly altered skill needs within industries, requiring a shift in what and how people are taught. To keep pace with changing workplace skill and knowledge needs, approaches to workforce development should reflect existing and projected future changes.

Changes in the nature of work are not the only reason a new approach to workforce development is needed. New industries are emerging, while others are experiencing long-term labour shortages and are seeking to address the challenges of entrenched gender disparity, a lack of diversity and ageing workers. New entrants to the Australian labour market are increasingly expected to hold tertiary qualifications. By 2026, one in three workers will be expected to hold a VET-level qualification. At the same time, they are projected to change careers and move between industries more frequently than any previous generation. To be effective, workforce development approaches need to diversify who has access to work across all industries.

Despite a range of significant workplace and industry changes, the rate of unemployment among young people has remained twice that of the general population.[3] Young people are also experiencing high levels of underemployment. These numbers are even higher for young people experiencing disadvantage.[4] Though there are numerous interventions that successfully address these conditions, they often remain reliant on short-term funding and operate at a very small scale. Under these conditions, interventions cannot create change in the systems designed to support workforce development.

Australia's workforce development systems, funded and steered by both federal and state/territory governments, have been tasked with identifying future workforce needs, developing programs that build skills employers need and delivering them to diverse jobseekers across Australia. Workforce development is the

---

3   ABS 2024, 'Labour Force, Australia', reference period December 2024, Australian Bureau of Statistics, Canberra. Viewed 14 February 2025.

4   AIHW 2021, 'Engagement in education or employment', Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Canberra. Viewed 14 February 2025.

responsibility of several human service systems. These include employment services, the tertiary education system and adjacent support systems, tasked with creating conditions under which jobseekers can build the skills and knowledge needed to access decent work.

Vocational Education and Training (VET) is a critical part of the multi-system workforce development landscape. It is a key vehicle for building a skilled workforce. While over 1.4 million young people engage with Australia's VET system each year, low completion rates and weak conversion of qualifications to job outcomes remain a concern. New approaches are needed. Strengthened workforce development must include a transformation in the way the VET system is engaging with employers, young people and community – not only at the point of delivery but also throughout the design and evaluation of training products and pathways.

Using a systems lens to understand barriers to youth employment and develop better workforce development solutions

A systems lens recognises that a jobseeker may be connected to multiple systems at the same time, each of which can influence the experiences, opportunities and outcomes of the individual connected to them. For example, a young person may be undertaking tertiary study while also being connected to an employment case manager, receiving disability support and accessing social housing. Using a systems lens helps us to understand, diagnose and strengthen weaknesses in the way workforce development operates, including the interaction between elements of a system and the overlaps between different systems. It aims to identify the conditions and structures that shape how individuals move into, through and out from human service systems.

When applying a systems lens to workforce development, it is useful to consider three broad categories of workforce development approaches:

- **Supply-side interventions**: seek to increase the size of the available workforce through training or by bringing new cohorts into the labour market.
- **Demand-side interventions**: aim to address the specific needs of employers or industry through incentivising and promoting workforce entry into the industry.
- **Bridging interventions**: aim to work with existing supply and demand while strengthening connections between industry and jobseekers to ease jobseekers' transition into employment.

While each of these approaches can lead to some degree of success in workforce development, each operates on a single system or single component of a system. This separation limits potential impact on youth unemployment and underemployment, and labour shortages facing all industry sectors.

A systems lens can also help consider the constraints of centralising workforce development approaches. Centralised workforce development approaches limit responsiveness to local conditions and homogenise the diverse needs of young people and employers. Centralised design and delivery of workforce development approaches also excludes many of the key stakeholders and intended beneficiaries from the design process, meaning that the products developed do not meet the needs of employers and jobseekers they are designed for.

Using a systems lens to understand these points of weakness makes for better workforce development. Recognising system users (both jobseekers and employers) in the design process is critical to building new and more locally responsive systemic approaches.

The Foundational Capabilities Pathway: a new approach to systemic change in workforce development

The FCP is a model that enables a joined-up approach to workforce development focused within a specific community or region. It aims to design, test, implement and refine workforce development approaches that are fit-for-purpose for employers and jobseekers. It does this by using a systems lens to identify the parts of systems that limit the effectiveness of workforce development approaches. The FCP aims to enable strong workforce outcomes for jobseekers and employers, build the capability of local actors to engage in workforce development activities and develop evidence to inform the refinement of workforce development policies, structures and practices. Outputs of the model include an industry-specific pathway, including training,

employment and support mechanisms that will enable access to, participation in and completion of the pathway.

The FCP is grounded in three core principles: place, partnership and breadth. Place recognises that workforce development solutions are most effective when they are responsive to the local circumstances influencing young people's engagement with education and employment. Partnership recognises that collaboration and connection between stakeholders and networks is essential for the design and implementation of approaches that can meet the needs of a specific region. Finally, breadth recognises that, to account for the complexity of workforce development and the connected elements within the system, workforce development solutions need to be informed by a wide range of expertise and experience.

The FCP practice approach requires effective governance, a stewardship mindset, and commitment to co-learning across a four-phase model:

Table 1   The four phases of the FCP model

Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4
Designing a training pathway that meets the needs of participants and stakeholders	Designing a model of delivery for the pathway that aligns with local capabilities and opportunities	Testing the efficacy of the designed pathway through delivery and adaptation	Supporting participant transition out of the pathway and codifying lessons from testing

It aims to design, test, implement and refine workforce development approaches that are fit-for-purpose for employers and jobseekers.

Building these core components into the practice approach means that the FCP model:

- enables collaboration between key stakeholders throughout the design and delivery phases
- aligns the pathway design with needs and perspectives informed by all relevant stakeholders and beneficiaries
- establishes an adaptive approach to design and delivery that responds to both local conditions and challenges as they arise.

The FCP model emerged through lessons from BSL's role as the enabling organisation for the National Youth Employment Body (NYEB), which has highlighted the need for new practice approaches to cross-sectoral collaboration. It is underpinned by BSL's Applied Systemic Change[1] methodology and grounded in the Capability Approach[2], which aims to enable people's freedom to 'be and do', providing them with opportunities to pursue their own interests and to life a good life as they determine it.

AgFutures: a case study testing the FCP model and practice approach

AgFutures was an initiative that tested the implementation of the FCP model and practice approach in Victoria's Barwon South West. AgFutures aimed to address problems facing the agriculture workforce within the region. Funded by Victoria's Department of Jobs, Industries, Skills and Regions (DJSIR), the AgFutures initiative operated from 2022–25 and brought together a coalition of six partners to test the FCP model in the agriculture industry. The partnership group included three local stakeholders and three national level stakeholders: community service organisation Brophy Family and Youth Services (Brophy); education provider South West TAFE (SWTAFE); regional industry representative body Food and Fibre Great South Coast (F&FGSC); anti-poverty and social research organisation BSL; industry peak body Dairy Australia (DA); and Skills Impact (formerly a Skills Service Organisation and now known as Skills Insight, one of the Jobs and Skills Councils).

Victoria's Barwon South West region was facing three workforce development problems that were illustrative of those seen in similar regions across the country:

1. An ageing agricultural workforce that is increasingly turning to the short-term employment of migrant and temporary workers.
2. A declining uptake and completion of agricultural VET qualifications by local young people.
3. Entrenched youth unemployment and underemployment, with limited access to capability and capacity building opportunities.

These problems remained unaddressed by business-as-usual workforce development practices.

The AgFutures initiative applied and tested the ability of the FCP model to address these core challenges. Together, partners used the model and practice approach to design and deliver the AgFutures pathway, an entry-level employment-based training pathway aimed at supporting local unemployed young people aged 17–24. The AgFutures pathway included a training component as well as six months of paid, entry-level employment in an on-farm role.

Examples and lessons from the AgFutures initiative are used throughout this practice guide to illustrate the components and mechanisms of the FCP model and practice approach in action.
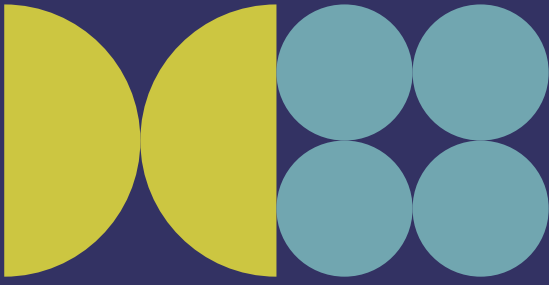
2 The mechanisms of an FCP

Implementing the FCP model through the practice approach relies upon using its stewardship, governance and co-learning mechanisms. As the building blocks of the practice approach, these mechanisms support collaboration and adaptability within each phase of the FCP model. They put the principles of place, partnership and breadth into action. Collectively, these mechanisms:

- support those implementing an FCP model to set and maintain a collective ambition for the pathway
- formalise approaches to collaboration, co-learning, and sharing information and expertise between partners, stakeholders and participants
- identify the barriers to and build solutions for workforce development using a systemic approach
- enable adaptability throughout all phases of the FCP model
- support partners to leverage diverse expertise, networks and resources to solve problems that emerge during design and delivery
- grow the capability of actors to pursue collaborative, systemic solutions to workforce development into the future.

This chapter provides a description of each of the core FCP practice mechanisms and their purpose. Details on how they operate in practice, along with how they function and examples of the mechanisms in action can be found in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4. This chapter includes guidance for:

- identifying partner organisations that can implement the FCP model and the key stewardship roles partners play
- establishing governance to enable collaborative co-design and delivery
- cultivating co-learning practices to strengthen design, delivery and strategic decision-making.

The mechanisms put the principles of place, partnership and breadth into action.

Stewardship

The FCP model uses a stewardship approach to project management. This contrasts with more traditional models of project coordination. It aims to enable both short-term and long-term alignment of decisions with an overarching ambition for change. Stewardship is provided by the group of partner organisations, some of which are local to the chosen region, who work together to guide the initiative through the four phases, and who commit to accountability, responsibility and transparency. These partners combine their expertise and experience of workforce development systems to create conditions that enable the FCP to succeed. This approach prioritises consistency and assumes that the partnership group remains consistent throughout the lifespan of an FCP.

There are several benefits to using a stewardship method of project management. Engaging local organisations ensures an FCP is actively working *in and with* the systems of the region and community. It ensures the FCP's relationship with the local community is not 'extractive' (it does not view local stakeholders as sources of information to be drawn from then ignored) and aims to actively involve it throughout the process.

Strong stewardship enables an FCP to reflect the needs of a region beyond a simple understanding of how geography and the presence of certain resources, industries and services impact those who live there. It enables the FCP partners to grow a deeper understanding of the ways social dynamics, power imbalances and pre-existing relationships impact the design, delivery and outcomes of workforce development initiatives. It also helps build relationships and the capability of local actors to play a more effective, sustainable role in future collaborative workforce development solutions.

Expertise

Successful stewardship requires a partnership group that holds the expertise necessary to effectively guide an FCP. As an FCP aims to innovate new forms of youth-focused skilled pathways into work, expertise in four areas is needed:

1. Youth transitions and employment.
2. Workforce development.
3. Industry (the chosen industry).
4. VET design and delivery.

As outlined in the table below, these areas of expertise relate to system and practice challenges that have been observed in existing workforce development approaches through BSL's systemic change work in VET and youth transitions. Although all necessary types of expertise should be provided by the stewardship group, it can be spread across the partners. In some cases, it may be appropriate for one organisation to fulfil multiple functions; in others, multiple organisations may fulfil similar or overlapping functions. Additional functions and types of expertise can be included in the partner group if additional workforce challenges in the region of choice are identified. For example, if First Nations young people were identified as the priority cohort, Indigenous employment expertise may be identified as a priority to include.
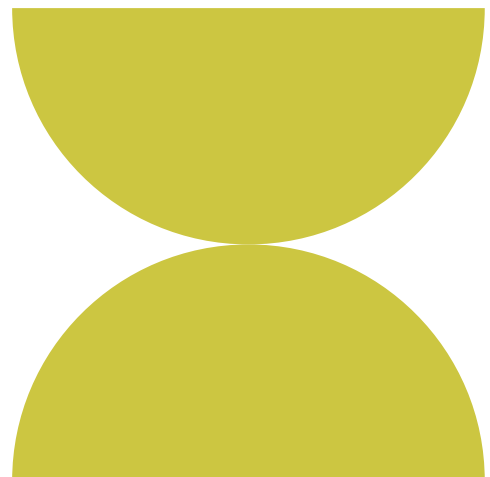
Table 2   Expertise required to support FCP stewardship

Challenge	Solution	Required expertise
Centrally designed pathways do not account for the local conditions that impact young people's engagement with education and training	Pathways account for local young people's aspirations, opportunities and the social, health and community participation barriers they face	A **youth transition specialist** with knowledge of best practice and connection to, and experience working with, local young people (e.g. a youth service provider, a youth engagement and development organisation)
Absence of 'youth friendly' practice in training delivery and the management of entry-level employees	Pathways and employment methods follow best practice for 'youth friendly' approaches to working with young people	
Pathways enable early career entry but do not align with opportunities for career growth	Pathways meet immediate employer skill needs while enabling career growth	A **workforce development specialist** with knowledge and expertise in state and national level workforce development, including training and employment (e.g. a Jobs and Skills Council or a member of an Industry Advisory Group)
Locally developed pathways often do not account for future trends in national workforce development policy	Pathways are designed with knowledge of state and national workforce development landscape	
Centrally designed pathways do not consider the conditions facing local industry	Pathway delivery accounts for the needs of local employers and the conditions that impact their hiring of entry-level staff	An **industry body** with connection to employer networks and knowledge of local and national industry trends (e.g. an industry peak body)
Local and industry stakeholders do not possess the educational expertise to design and deliver training unsupported	Pathways align local knowledge with expertise in teaching and curriculum design	A **training design and delivery specialist** with a footprint in the chosen region (e.g. a TAFE, RTO or school)

A coordinating organisation

In most cases one organisation will serve as coordinator for an FCP. The coordinating organisation does not act as the final decision-maker or authority within the stewardship group, but provides facilitation that may take the form of:

- coordinating and administrating the FCP (e.g. scheduling and facilitating meetings, managing documentation)
- resourcing material supports required for design and delivery (e.g. venues, marketing resources, participant materials)
- identifying and resourcing any staffing requirements for design and delivery (e.g. evaluation roles, participant support roles)
- holding relationships with external funders or sponsors of the FCP (where applicable)

- conducting and coordinating evidence collection and pathway monitoring.

The coordinating organisation may be one that sits outside the expertise areas listed above, but brings its own experience, expertise and resources to support the FCP's implementation. This was the case in the AgFutures initiative, where BSL acted as coordinating organisation. While BSL did not fill any of the four areas of expertise for the initiative, the organisation's longstanding experience in systemic change activities, applied research and the coordination and delivery of services to young people qualified them as a member of the stewardship group and to be the coordinating organisation.

Governance

Embedding the principles of place, partnership and breadth in the implementation of an FCP requires structured and clear governance. Governance also moves more decision-making around workforce development into the hands of community actors and stakeholders, increasing their capability to design workforce solutions now and into the future. The FCP model includes three governance mechanisms:

- A strategic mechanism.
- Reference mechanisms.
- An operational mechanism.

Each governance mechanism has a different role to play across the lifespan of an FCP. Their responsibilities across each phase of the initiative, and how they interact with the co-learning mechanism can be found in Figure 1. The form governance mechanisms take will depend on the context of an FCP and what the stewardship group identifies as the most suitable approach. The form the mechanisms took for AgFutures is detailed in FCP mechanisms – AgFutures.

Additional forms of governance may be necessary depending on the scale and focus of the FCP project. Decisions to implement additional forms of governance should be made by the partner group and in support of the FCP achieving the desired workforce development ambition.

Strategic mechanism

Creating a diverse and expert stewardship group is an important first step in taking a collaborative approach. However, diverse expertise alone is not enough to activate and sustain meaningful co-design and co-delivery. While many workforce development initiatives use front-loaded consultations to inform design, the FCP aims to sustain partner input across the lifecycle of the initiative through strategic governance.

The strategic governance mechanism enables partners to regularly meet across the four phases of the FCP. It is the central decision-making body of the FCP and the mechanism through which partners:

- maintain a shared understanding of initiative progress, lessons and challenges
- adapt the design and delivery of the pathway to respond to new conditions and information
- build the conditions for sustaining and scaling practices after the initiative has concluded.

Reference mechanisms

Traditional workforce development approaches rely on a network of state and national peak bodies to be the voice of industry and employer need, and often exclude the young people they are being designed for altogether. While this approach works to identify macro-level trends and needs, traditional solutions are less likely to account for local conditions and the educational, occupational, health and social needs of those who undertake them. This can result in pathways that do not reflect regionally specific needs of employers, training curricula and qualifications that do not support jobseekers to find real-world employment opportunities, and training delivery that leaves learners isolated and disengaged.

The FCP model uses reference mechanisms to centre the voices of system users. These enable the involvement of pathway users (e.g. local employers, local young people) in the co-design process. They seek input on topics such as weaknesses in local workforce development, their needs and aspirations, and feedback on design decisions made during phases 1 and 2.

Operational mechanism

Phase 3 of the FCP model focuses on delivering and testing the co-designed pathway. To ensure that operational matters do not dilute the focus of the strategic mechanism, the FCP model includes an operational mechanism. The operational mechanism enables those responsible for pathway delivery to regularly meet, maintain alignment between the design of the pathway and its delivery, and sustain awareness of pathway progress and challenges.

Co-learning

Co-learning, or collaborative learning, is a process in which multiple individuals or organisations learn or attempt to learn something together. Co-learning is important for the effective design and delivery of an FCP pathway. Strong co-learning practices and activities can enable the stewardship group to share expertise, collect evidence to support the design and refinement of the pathway, and learn what is effective in meeting the ambition of an FCP.

A strong culture of co-learning supports partners and stakeholders to address problems that might have been too complex for any one organisation to solve alone, combining diverse expertise, skills, experience and viewpoints with up-to-date evidence from the implementation of the model. In this way, co-learning enables pathway adaptability and supports the capability building of partners and stakeholders. Co-learning also aims to ensure lessons that emerge during the project can support project partners to build the conditions for sustaining changed practices and networks after an initial phase of project work. This can include evidence and lessons that inform the design of future workforce development solutions, improvements to best practice and more effective methods of collaboration between organisations in the regions.

Co-learning is an intended by-product of the stewardship and governance described above. In addition, there are three explicit components that support co-learning practices within the FCP: a community of practice (CoP), delivery monitoring and feedback loops.

Community of practice

A CoP is a group of people who have a common concern, set of barriers or ambition for change. They come together to share expertise, resources, experiences and best practice to help progress individual and group goals. This approach prioritises collaboration over competition and adheres to the principle of place by recognising that local actors are best able to identify and harness local community resources to support, in the case of an FCP, young people's transition into employment.

A CoP meets to focus on a specific theme, set of issues or milestone, depending on the phase of the initiative. It is an opportunity to share lessons, provide insight, identify opportunities for collaboration and engage in collective problem-solving. CoP events are organised by the stewardship group and/or coordinating organisation, with varying degrees of involvement from the community depending on its readiness and desire to contribute. Partners activate their local networks to ensure adequate representation from community.

Adopting a CoP approach when developing innovative workforce solutions has three key benefits. Firstly, it centres the local community by emphasising local knowledge and expertise. Secondly, it helps to overcome siloing between stakeholders by ensuring that all relevant parties are included when developing solutions. Finally, it enables the identification and coordination of resources across the community, allowing for greater reach and impact than if driven by a single organisation.

Monitoring

A key enabler to real-time adaptation of the designed pathway (see Chapter 4) is the collection and use of evidence during the delivery phase. The coordinating organisation collects data from those utilising the pathway and feeds it back to the strategic and operational mechanisms. This way, the FCP can ensure that the experiences and voices of participants are included in co-learning, and directly inform any adaptation to the pathway.

In practice, FCP monitoring can take any form of direct data collection based on objectives and resources. Similarly, both quantitative and qualitative data can be collected. Responsibility for the design and execution of the monitoring role is at the discretion of the stewardship group and should be made early in an initiative so the monitoring approach and focus can align with the co-designed pathway.

Feedback loops

Allowing regular and deliberate feedback loops throughout the four phases of an FCP is important for the conversion of evidence into lessons, and lessons into change. Distinct from pure feedback,

which relays information back to a central hub or governance mechanism, feedback loops integrate insights from implementation into future decision-making. Feedback loops within an FCP can exist between the members of the stewardship group and between the various governance mechanisms. Feedback loops aim to complement the evidence collected through monitoring the pathway by creating opportunities for individuals and organisations taking part in an FCP to share and discuss what they have experienced.

Figure 1   FCP development and implementation

PHASE 1	PHASE 2	PHASE 3	PHASE 4
Designing a training pathway that meets the needs of participants and stakeholders	**Designing a model of delivery for the pathway that aligns with local capabilities and opportunities**	**Testing the efficacy of the designed pathway through delivery and adaptation**	**Supporting participant transition out of the pathway and codifying lessons from testing**

Reference mechanisms and community of practice

Community stakeholders, employers and young people provide expertise and share lived experience

Community stakeholders, employers and young people engage in co-learning and capability building for post-initiative sustainability

Evidence building and design feedback	Evidence building and design feedback		Sharing lessons on systemic barriers and enablers to inform future workforce development

Strategic mechanism

Ensures pathway design aligns with ambition

Enables evidence building and co-learning

Stewards co-learning and adaptability

Supports initiative sustainability and lesson-sharing

		Evidence from delivery to inform adaptation and lessons	Evidence from delivery to inform adaptation and lessons

Operational mechanism

	Ongoing development of tools and resources identified during design	Ensures delivery aligns with pathway design. Supports co-learning and adaptability	Ensures post-pilot delivery aligns with pathway design

		Sharing participant data from delivery	Sharing participant data from post-delivery

Monitoring

Collects data of participant experience of pathway

FCP mechanisms – AgFutures

The AgFutures partnership group

AgFutures brought together six partner organisations to steward the FCP initiative. Each partner brought their own expertise and perspectives to the initiative alongside a shared ambition to strengthen pathways for unemployed young people. More detail on the expertise and contributions of the partner organisations can be found in the **stakeholder vignettes** in Appendix A.

Youth employment expert – Brophy Family and Youth Services

Brophy Family and Youth Services (Brophy) is a community-based not-for-profit organisation operating in the Barwon South West region that provides services aimed at promoting a just society and improving the life circumstances for people who are experiencing vulnerability and disengagement.

Training design and delivery expert – South West TAFE

South West TAFE (SWTAFE) is the largest education and training provider in south-west Victoria. SWTAFE focuses on delivering courses that give graduates the skills they need to thrive in their chosen careers, providing accessible and equitable training and education opportunities that enable students, industry partners and communities to flourish.

Each partner brought their own expertise and perspectives to the initiative alongside a shared ambition to strengthen pathways for unemployed young people.

Industry expert –
Dairy Australia

Dairy Australia (DA) works towards a profitable and sustainable dairy industry by providing services that benefit and advance dairy farm businesses and the industry. DA supports Australia's dairy regions with a national team of specialists across strategy, research, development, sustainability, policy support, international trade, marketing and communications.

Workforce development expert –
Skills Impact [5]

Skills Impact was a Skills Service Organisation, a not-for-profit, industry-owned organisation that collaborates with industry, government and training providers to track industry trends and document skills opportunities and challenges. Their work helped support learners and workplaces with their skills needs, promoting employment opportunities and industry competitiveness.

Industry expert –
Food and Fibre Great South Coast

Food and Fibre Great South Coast (F&FGSC) is the representative body for food and fibre production businesses and their vast supply chains in south-west Victoria. F&FGSC aims to help grow the value of regional food and fibre production, improving the prosperity and resilience of the community.

Coordinating organisation –
Brotherhood of St. Laurence

BSL is a social justice organisation working to prevent and alleviate poverty across Australia. It does this by working alongside people experiencing disadvantage to address the fundamental causes of poverty in Australia.

---

5   During the delivery of AgFutures Skills Impact transitioned from a Skills Service Organisation to one of the 10 Jobs and Skills Councils, taking the name Skills Insight. For consistency they are referred to as Skills Impact throughout this practice guide.

AgFutures governance mechanisms

AgFutures utilised all core FCP governance mechanisms during the initiative.

Table 3   AgFutures governance mechanisms

Group name	Function
Strategic Governance Group (SGG) Strategic mechanism	The SGG included representation from each of the six partner organisations. It met monthly during phases 1 and 2 of the initiative, and every second month during phases 3 and 4.
Employer Reference Group (ERG) Reference mechanism	The ERG was made up of 9 local employers from across Barwon South West. Membership included both family-owned and corporate farms. The ERG met 6 times during phases 1 and 2 of the initiative.
Youth Reference Group (YRG) Reference mechanism	The YRG was made up of 7 local young people between the ages of 18 and 25, all with employment experience in the agriculture sector. The YRG met five times during phases 1 and 2 of the initiative.
Operational Working Group (OWG) Operational mechanism	The OWG was made up of senior members of the AgFutures delivery team and representatives of the coordinating organisation. The OWG meet fortnightly during phases 3 and 4 of the initiative.

AgFutures co-learning mechanisms

There were two **CoP** meetings convened during the AgFutures initiative. The first occurred late in phase 2 and was used to seek feedback on the pathway design. The second occurred during phase 4 and aimed to share lessons from the initiative with the CoP and to identify and embed opportunities for local sustainability and ongoing stewardship. These events are discussed in more detail in the following chapters.

In AgFutures, **monitoring** took the form of regular phone interviews with participants and employers. This included a pre-commencement interview, two interviews during the piloting phase and a post-completion interview. These interviews aimed to capture data on participant and employer motivations to participate in AgFutures, career and workforce ambitions, and their experiences of the training and employment.

Feedback loops were present throughout the AgFutures initiative. In phases 1 and 2 time was set aside in all SGG meetings to discuss and integrate the latest lessons from the reference mechanisms and community consultation. This continued through phases 3 and 4, with the addition of feedback loops that incorporated lessons emerging from the OWG and testing of the pathway, enabled by regular written updates from the OWG and semi-regular attendance of core OWG members at SGG meetings.
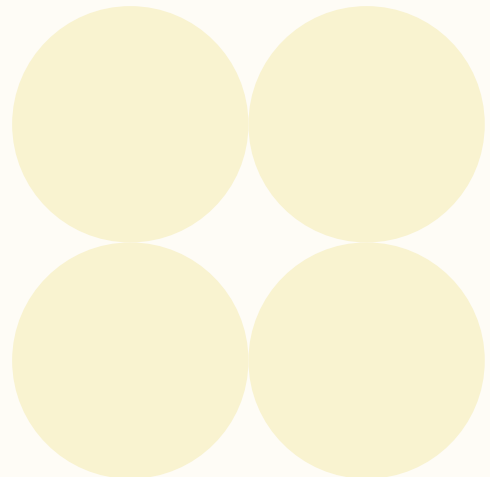
3 Co-designing a fit-for-purpose pathway

Once the stewardship, governance and co-learning mechanisms have been established (outlined in the previous chapter), these practices can be put to work enabling the co-design of a fit-for-purpose entry-level pathway in the industry of choice. The FCP model takes an iterative approach to co-design; those stewarding the FCP gather evidence of local need and opportunity, test designs, seek feedback and refine what they have designed.

This chapter outlines how phases 1 and 2 of the FCP model enable the co-design of a training pathway to entry-level employment. Phase 1 focuses on building the evidence base and designing a curriculum that aligns with the needs of both prospective young jobseekers and local employers. Phase 2 focuses on designing a model of delivery that will embed training alongside employment and wraparound support. Each requires deliberate consideration, with sufficient opportunity for input from the governance groups and community stakeholders to build an evidence base to inform the design. This approach contrasts with co-design more commonly adopted in workforce development that makes assumptions upfront but does not allow for adaptability and ongoing end user input to test and refine ideas.

The iterative process of co-design aims to establish the conditions for sustained partnership and collaboration throughout both the design and testing phases, by:

- allowing sufficient time to engage with stakeholders, proposed beneficiaries and community

- testing assumptions and observations through iterative and collaborative co-learning

- identifying conditions limiting the success of existing workforce development approaches for the industry of choice within the region

- supporting FCP partners to identify and develop solutions to those conditions in order to design a pathway and delivery approach that is responsive to place.

While the FCP model differentiates between the co-design of the training and the model of delivery, in practice these phases may overlap and draw on each other's activities. In particular, evidence building activities with local stakeholders may identify both the skills needed by employers and insights on how best to deliver a pathway to local jobs.

This chapter illustrates three broad design steps essential to developing the core components that will deliver and test an innovative workforce pilot in phase 3. They are not necessarily linear. These broad design steps are:

1. **From problem to solution:** Identifying the high-level workforce development objectives the FCP will address and, from that, the design questions that will shape the pathway.

2. **Evidence informing the solution:** Building an evidence base to answer these design questions and to inform design decisions.

3. **Designing the solution:** Designing the product and delivery model for the pathway. Refining the design based on the evidence base and testing it with stakeholders so it aligns with the core ambition.

Applying the practice principles to co-design

As outlined previously, the FCP practice principles are place, partnership and breadth.

Place is not only about targeting an initiative within a set of geographic boundaries. Recognising and valuing place also enables approaches that respond to the needs and aspirations of the people, institutions and structures within that region or community. The principle of place reinforces a focus on building individual and collective capability to sustain changed practices into the future.

Co-design is as much about asking the right questions to understand the needs and opportunities of place as it is about answering those questions. Co-design relies on **partnership** to ensure strong information sharing, collaboration and connection between stakeholders and networks.

Alongside a deep engagement with local conditions, the FCP practice principle of **breadth** (that workforce development solutions need to be informed by a wide range of expertise and experience) prioritises using diverse expertise and stakeholder viewpoints to capture immediate and long-term career and workforce development needs. In doing this, it is able to develop design questions, then answer them.

Design step 1: from problem to solution

The co-design process begins with the stewardship group identifying what they want to design. Partners may join an FCP with ideas about the solution they want to develop, however, the first step of the design process is to step back and identify real workforce challenges facing the focus industry. These challenges will vary from region to region and from industry to industry. They could include practices and attitudes, resourcing, information flows, curriculum, structural barriers and much more. Identifying challenges to address requires an understanding of the relevant systems and how they interact, as well as the chosen industry, region and any specific cohorts being targeted.

The stewardship group shapes these early design discussions by collectively identifying a set of questions the reveal the challenges and conditions that underpin them. See Table 4 for examples of questions used in these early design discussions.

Table 4   Example questions to identify workforce development challenges

Design questions

- What are the current and projected workforce needs of the industry locally?
- What are the current and projected workforce needs of the industry at the state and national level?
- How are local workforce conditions in the industry impacting young jobseekers, young workers and employers?
- What are the critical weaknesses within existing local workforce development approaches and practices for the industry?
- What are the structural barriers that affect how young people access training and employment for the industry? (e.g. transportation, housing)
- How do existing local relationships and networks between employers, young people, educators and other community stakeholders impact workforce development in the region?
- What is the perception of the industry among young jobseekers?
- What competition does the chosen industry face when trying to attract a local workforce?

The answers to these initial questions enable the stewardship group to identify challenges they need to address; begin to understand the high-level solution they are working towards; and identify a set of foundational objectives for the pathway. Using these objectives, the stewardship group can identify any gaps in the ideas that emerged from early design discussions. These gaps then drive the next step of the iterative design process, identifying further questions to build the evidence base that will inform the design of the pathway.

The early design and ambition-scoping discussions are an important part of the stewardship group's capability building. Building a shared understanding of the problem and a viable solution exposes partners to expertise beyond their own and asks them to contribute to the design of solutions that may not normally sit with them. This builds their capability to engage in future workforce development initiatives while strengthening their understanding of the various systems that contribute to and shape workforce development conditions and outcomes.

Example: AgFutures

In the AgFutures initiative, the early stages of co-design led the stewardship group to identify several key problems that an AgFutures pathway could address.

Table 5   Key problems and solutions identified by AgFutures foundational co-design

Identified problem	Proposed solution
A lack of alignment between unemployed young people and opportunities in one of the region's largest industries	A pathway that focuses on unemployed young people
Young people in the region without farming backgrounds lack meaningful exposure to agricultural workplaces and career pathways	Built-in career exploration and network-building opportunities within the pathway
Traditional educational offerings do not adequately develop work-readiness skills in learners	Dedicated work-readiness skill development for those undertaking the pathway

Identified problem	Proposed solution
Current courses are too long and narrowly focused for young people who lack a clear understanding of the industry and its career pathways	Shorter-form training that builds a range of core technical skills to support early career entry and exploration
Educational institutions and agricultural employers are unfamiliar with the requirements of young learners and employees, particularly those with a background of unemployment	A pathway that is designed in a 'youth friendly' manner so delivery aligns with the needs of participants
Unemployed young people face significant financial stresses and are unlikely to undertake training without also undertaking paid employment	A pathway that includes paid employment alongside training so that participants can 'earn and learn'

The result was the initial design of a pathway targeted at unemployed young people. Early AgFutures SGG meetings enabled partners to identify four components they believed would support the pathway to meet its aims:

- An initial **pre-employment** offering to expose participants to the agriculture industry and its workplaces, develop their work-readiness and independence, and build a strong foundation of wellbeing.

- An accredited **training** pathway of five units of competency that would develop a core set of technical skills required to commence entry-level on-farm employment in the region. These units would map to a range of qualifications across agriculture and agribusiness.

- Paid on-farm **employment** in an entry-level role for a minimum of six months, to support technical skill development in a real-world setting. This would build participant professional identity and workplace skills, provide participants with an income and support meaningful industry exposure.

- Wraparound **supports** to ease participants' transition into the workplace during the pathway, help them overcome professional and personal barriers, provide opportunities for connection and peer-to-peer learning, and support the transition of participants from the AgFutures FCP into further education and employment.

Design step 2: evidence informing the solution

Design step 2 aims to ground FCP design in a deep understanding of local conditions and workforce development systems. FCP stakeholders build evidence using diverse local sources of expertise and experience, which serves to refine initial design questions and test early assumptions about the design. They enable the stewardship group to identify the core practical considerations that will shape the design of the pathway and its delivery. This includes the needs and preferences of jobseekers and employers, and conditions that could affect their participation. In some cases, new information and insights will challenge assumptions made by initiative partners in early discussions; or will propose solutions that have not yet been considered. The co-learning ambition of the FCP, coupled with the iterative and adaptive approach to the FCP design process, aims to ensure that partners are considering, integrating and responding to a range of evidence and expertise needed to generate a fit-for-purpose solution.

The governance mechanisms are the key mechanisms through which diverse expertise and networks are assembled, so they play a critical role in building evidence to inform the pathway design.

Strategic mechanism

The strategic mechanism leads the evidence building process. As stewards of the initiative, its members shape the scope of the ambition and the scope of evidence building that is needed to inform the design. Members, particularly those local to the FCP's region, leverage their networks and roles within the workforce development systems to support the collection and curation of relevant evidence, data and insights.

Aligning evidence building with the ambition

Having considered the early design questions (see Table 5 above), members of the strategic mechanism are collectively accountable for judging the breadth and depth of evidence needed to make decisions on the type of pathway that will address the identified workforce development weaknesses. They maintain focus on the objective, prevent any 'creep' in scope or ambition during evidence-making and decide when sufficient evidence has been collected to design the pathway and method of delivery.

Collecting evidence to inform the design

As experts in their fields, members of the strategic governance mechanism inform the design process through the evidence they feed into the design discussions and additional questions they raise in response to the emerging evidence base. As the co-design process progresses, they are also responsible for narrowing the scope of questions so that the right evidence being collected for the stage of the work.

Members of the strategic governance mechanism draw on a range of sources and methods to build evidence that will inform the design, including:

- sharing insights and trends from program and service-delivery data that illustrates need, opportunity and existing workforce challenges

- drawing on evidence building practices (e.g. service user surveys and feedback mechanisms) that partner organisations perform as part of their regular duties

- leveraging their organisational and personal networks.

Collaborative sensemaking

Collaborative sensemaking is a process where people share different perspectives and work together to make sense of a situation or problem. Making sense of evidence as a group is critical for the partners in the FCP design to understand problems from varying perspectives. Regular meetings of the strategic governance mechanism provide a critical space for this collaborative sensemaking to occur. Industry, employers, young people, educators and employment service providers (ESPs) may all see different causes of and solutions to the same workforce development problems. Collaborative sensemaking of the evidence that is collected is a useful way to connect different perceptions of the problem with underlying structural causes. This can enable the strategic governance mechanism to:

- map and analyse systems, noting the intersections and interdependencies between policies and programs, and how they impact people and places

- set parameters and make decisions about what is and is not in scope for the final pathway

- lay the foundation for lessons, practices and approaches to sustain beyond the end of the FCP.

Reference mechanisms

Alongside the expertise and evidence shared through partners and their organisations, community consultation and sustained engagement with the reference mechanisms are important for building evidence. Contributions from the reference mechanisms will vary depending on the ambition and context of the FCP, including the focus industry, location and makeup of the partnership group. Regardless of the focus industry or regional context, the reference mechanisms aim to bring the lived experience and perspectives of pathway users to the co-design phases in meaningful and sustained ways.

Some of the contributions that the reference mechanisms can make to evidence building include:

- informing the design of pathway curriculum and skill requirements by identifying the tasks entry-level employees undertake at work, occupational health and safety (OHS) requirements, and progression pathways from early to mid-career
- informing the design of pathway delivery by identifying preferences regarding scheduling training, employment type and order of skill development
- informing the design of pathway supports by identifying local barriers that impact employers' capacity to take on and support young entry-level staff, and young people's capacity to engage in employment and training
- advising on the suitability of pathway tools and resources (see example) designed for delivery staff and participants
- providing advice to ensure that FCP partners, FCP staff, employers and trainers are delivering the pathway in a manner that is consistent with 'youth friendly' best practice.

Example: AgFutures reference groups

The AgFutures ERG and YRG made several contributions to evidence building during the design phases of the initiative. These contributions impacted the design of the pathway and its delivery in several ways, including but not limited to:

- raising the importance of OHS to local industry stakeholders, including setting criteria by which prospective employers and workplaces must guarantee employee safety
- raising the importance of mental health first aid training for employers to ensure proper support of young people experiencing disadvantage
- providing input on training schedules to ensure minimal disruption to workplaces once participants were undertaking employment and training
- including guides and recipes for healthy eating in participant resources to prepare them for the physical labour required for on-farm employment.

Understanding views of potential participants

Where the reference mechanisms allow for ongoing evidence gathering and feedback, the design of the pathway will be stronger if evidence is also built through one-off activities with local young people and employers outside the membership of the reference mechanisms. If partners fail to understand the aspirations and needs of young jobseekers alongside the ways existing programs and services are underserving them, the pathway risks reproducing the same poor outcomes it is trying to address.

A range of approaches can be used with potential participant groups to consult and build evidence:

- Direct surveys (where data is collected from respondents in-person, by phone or through web-based survey).
- Focus groups and facilitated consultation workshops.
- Individual interviews and consultations.

The specific blend of consultation activities undertaken will be determined by gaps the partner group identify in understanding and the evidence base needed to inform their design decisions. The two following examples from the AgFutures initiative highlight how partner expertise plays an important role in shaping the approach to consultation.

Example: AgFutures partner-facilitated evidence building

One of the key instances of evidence building during AgFutures was the delivery of two 'employer needs analysis' sessions by partner organisation Skills Impact. Employer needs analysis sessions are commonly used by Skills Impact and were part of their offering as AgFutures workforce development experts.

These sessions gathered a range of local employers, including corporate employers and sole operator farm owners for two main purposes. Firstly, they supported the co-design of the training model through a 'functional skill analysis'. This determined the tasks local employers expect entry-level workers to fulfil in on-farm roles, which helped identify any technical skills the training should provide within the pathway. Secondly, they supported the co-design of the delivery model by identifying the challenges employers faced when managing young people.

This evidence helped identify types of work-readiness the participants would be supported to develop through pre-employment and wraparound supports, and the guidance that would be provided to employers.

Wider community consultation

Early testing of the FCP model revealed the value of building evidence with the wider community. Including community perspectives and expertise further contextualises and tests what is being heard from young people and industry employers. Evidence building with the wider community also helps explore what has and has not worked for workforce development initiatives in the region, and why. Community can provide evidence on content as varied as: how the chosen industry is perceived in a region; regional economic development strategies; the efficacy of public transport in the region; and the key social institutions young people engage with.

Evidence building with the wider community can be undertaken through the same methods outlined above in **Understanding views of potential participants**. Local initiative partners and the CoP can help identify who to talk to.

Example: AgFutures evidence building and vulnerable cohorts

In AgFutures, the choice of unemployed young people as the target cohort meant that partners needed to consider the potential vulnerability of the young people in question. It was decided that, rather than consulting directly with unemployed young people and risking causing psychological harm, the initiative would draw evidence from community organisations that worked directly with unemployed young people. In addition to the contributions of project partner Brophy, the initiative consulted with youth service providers and local support services to ensure diverse perspectives were captured so that the FCP design reflected the needs of local unemployed young people.

Design step 3: designing the solution

While all collaborative discussions between partners in the two proceeding steps are design centred, design step 3 focuses on making and endorsing decisions about the final pathway design and delivery approach that will be tested in phase 3.

Having answered questions on **what** the pathway needs to do, and **what** local conditions will shape the design, in design step 3 the stewardship group shifts its discussions to **how** the pathway will address these needs in a manner that aligns with conditions in the region. Examples of the types of questions useful for guiding design decisions are presented in Table 6, below.

Table 6   Example questions guiding practical co-design

Area	Practical concerns
Industry	• Which specific workplace tasks will the pathway enable jobseekers to undertake? • What type of employment offers will the pathway make to participants?
Region	• How will the pathway account for the conditions that impact participants' access to work and training sites? • How will the pathway utilise or partner with local services and organisations to support delivery?
Training	• How will the training be scheduled and sequenced so that it aligns with the needs of employers and young people? • What are the staffing requirements to train different cohort sizes? • What are the enrolment processes and pre-requisites that will influence participant recruitment?
Young people	• What are the supports that the pathway will offer to participants during their participation? • How will the pathway enable career exploration for participants?

The approach to finalising the pathway design depends on the individual FCP, and how the partners reach agreement on different design elements. Some stewardship groups may prefer to make incremental decisions over the course of several meetings in the co-design process. Others may choose to make a series of decisions within a single meeting. Although the approach is at the discretion of the group, testing the FCP model through the AgFutures initiative demonstrated that the process is most effective when there is clarity and visibility for the whole stewardship group when a decision is being made. It also helped to have clear documentation with decisions and their rationale recorded.

Figure 2 provides an example from AgFutures on the way design questions were used to guide final decision-making on the pathway design and delivery approach.

Figure 2   Example of AgFutures sequential design questions

Objective:
An accredited training pathway to enable on-farm employment

- What certificate level will it be fesible for the initiative to deliver and also meet the needs of participants and employers?
- Which specific units from that level meet the needs of participants and employers?
- Which of these units of competency can be delivered by project partners or other education providers in the region?

Objective:
'Youth friendly' practice from trainers, employers and initiative staff

- What constitutes 'youth friendly' practice in the opinion of young people and youth transitions specialists?
- What local examples or resources can be drawn on to aid the delivery of 'youth friendly' practice that aligns with this?
- How can these be integrated into the delivery of the pathway?

Objective:
Pre-employment activities to build work readiness and enable industry exposure

- What work-readiness skills do young people require for entry-level employment in on-farm roles?
- What are the programs, practices and activities that can support the delveopment of those skills?
- Which of these are feasbile for the initiative to deliver, based on its resources, target cohort and delivery timeline?

Feedback and refinement

Regardless of the approach a partnership group takes to making design decisions, the aim of iterative co-design is to allow opportunities for decisions to be tested and validated. Just like the first two steps of the co-design process, this final step benefits from input and expertise beyond the partnership group.

The information gathered through feedback and refinement can support partners to better understand the feasibility of proposed solutions when making design decisions. Considering the design model holistically also enables partners to identify any incompatibilities between components, find any likely barriers to delivery, and test that it meets the needs of potential participants and beneficiaries. Without this information, initiatives risk designing pathways

that may meet the needs of participants and employers, but cannot be implemented due to conditions in the region. It can make the difference between a 'good on paper' initiative and a 'good in practice' one.

This process of feedback and refinement also enables the partnership group to identify where existing resources, efforts and initiatives offer opportunities for collaboration with an FCP, and to strengthen community buy-in. The presence of state and national level organisations in place-based initiatives can deter community from engaging. Many community organisations have experienced external actors entering a region to deliver short-form programs that, regardless of their success, are not sustained. This is something the FCP seeks to address through giving more power to community. The implementation of the FCP model during

AgFutures demonstrated that stakeholder buy-in is strengthened when initiative staff are transparent about the ambition of the initiative, the rationale behind design decisions, and the specifics of how community consultation and reference groups has informed those design decisions. Community buy-in can take the form of regular participation in evidence building activities, advocacy for and promotion of an FCP, or practical engagement with and support of an FCP.

Example: Designing the AgFutures solution

AgFutures partners used the monthly SGG meetings to discuss what was being learnt through evidence building, and to make shared decisions on the content of the pathway. These discussions included decisions on:

- OHS standards required for employers to be eligible for the initiative
- activities that would make up the pre-employment offering of the initiative, and how and when the activities would be delivered
- messaging on and marketing of the pathway to support recruitment of participants and employers
- the type and length of employment that was acceptable to offer participating young people and expect from participating employers.

Often the SGG came to a decision on a component of the pathway across multiple meetings. Options were considered, discussed and accepted, adapted or rejected as the partners narrowed down the approach they believed the pathway should take.

The initial design process culminated in an in-person 'co-design day', attended by all the initiative partners. The full-day event, facilitated by the coordinating organisation, had several goals including:

- reiterating and confirming decisions made through the design discussions in SGG meetings to that point
- discussing and determining the specific units of competency that would make up the training offer of the model, based on options pre-submitted to the group by the training design and delivery specialist
- discussing and determining the specific eligibility requirements of participating young people, based on the objectives, resourcing and realistic duty of care of the initiative.

At the conclusion of the co-design day the AgFutures partners had a fully drafted design for the pathway, which shaped the focus of the first CoP meeting.

AgFutures CoP 1

The first CoP event took place late in phase 2 of the pathway. It aimed to take local stakeholders – with strong representation from industry and employers – through the process and key findings of the initiative's evidence building. It also presented the first full design of the pathway for feedback and input.

The event had two panel sessions with members of the reference groups. These elevated the voices of employers and young people who had contributed to evidence building and design. They outlined why the initiative had implemented the two reference groups, shared their contributions to the evidence-making process and showed key design choices made as a result of their contributions.

The event allowed AgFutures partners to test the proposed pathway with community stakeholders, enabling further refinement prior to the start of the delivery phase.

Tools and resources

Looking ahead from design step 3 to the delivery of the co-design pathway, a key design task is making decisions about the tools and resources necessary to enable delivery. In the context of an FCP, tools guide delivery staff through any processes needed for effective delivery, while resources equip participants with knowledge to enable their success when undertaking the pathway. The content of the tools and resources will be dependent on the specific FCP. Their inclusion aims to:

- support the efficient and collaborative delivery of the pathway by providing those responsible for delivery with a consistent understanding and a set of guidelines

- support engagement of stakeholders and participants, for the purposes of recruitment and ongoing connection to the initiative

- assist participants to complete the initiative

- enable the identification of risks and support ongoing risk-management practices through consistent and transparent documentation

- contribute to initiative adaptability through knowledge management and documentation.

The operational mechanism is responsible for the development of tools and resources, and this is the first task it undertakes at its formation late in phase 2 of the FCP. However, tools and resources are strengthened through collaboration with the governance mechanisms. The mechanisms can help identify what is most needed for a given FCP, draw on existing resources, tools and practices, and provide feedback to ensure that they are fit-for-purpose. The resources and tools developed for AgFutures can be found below in [Please use the next section as a 4-page spread – maybe with a different background? End is marked].

The AgFutures pathway

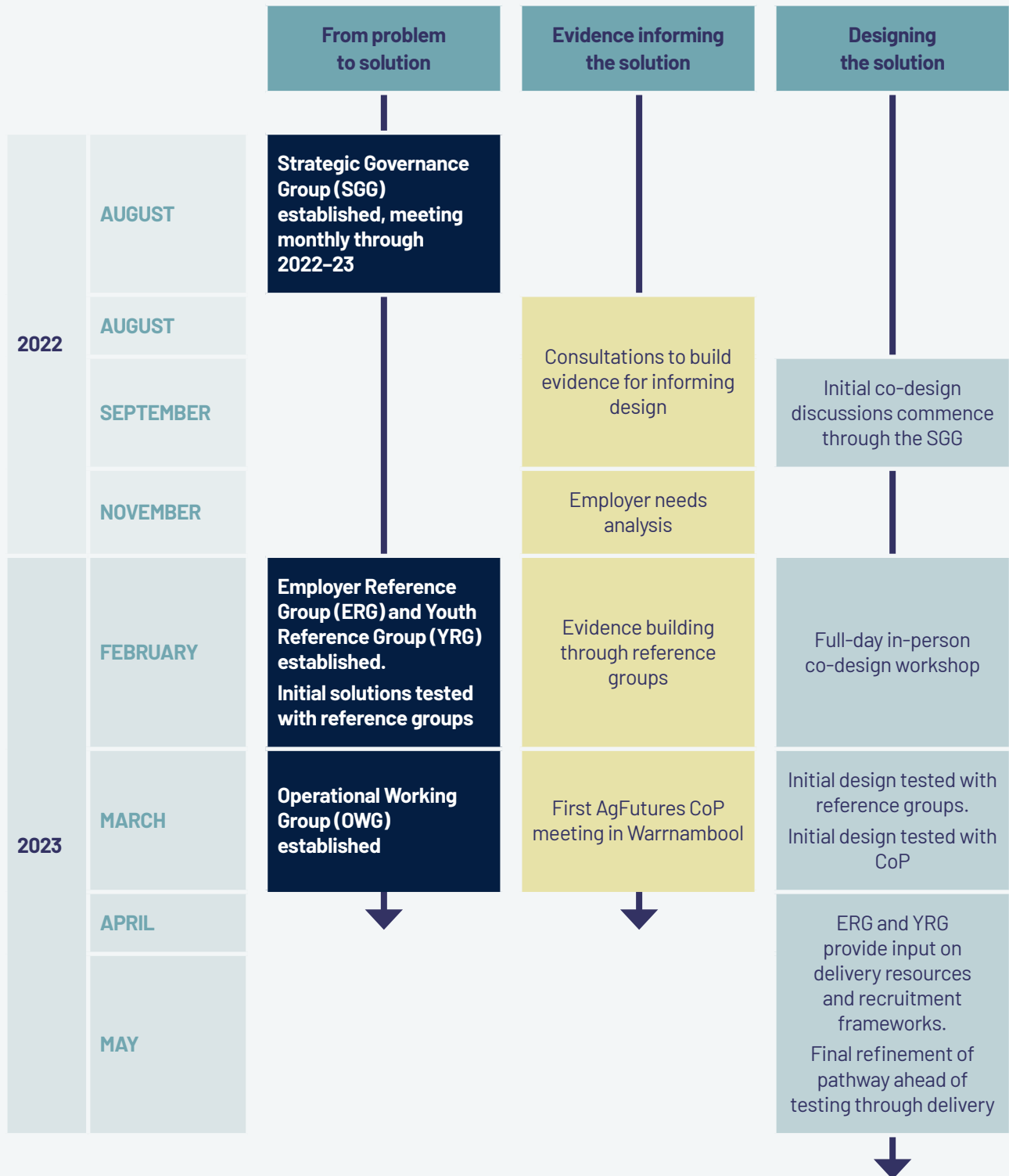**Figure 3   Timeline of co-designing the AgFutures pathway**

		From problem to solution	Evidence informing the solution	Designing the solution
2022	AUGUST	Strategic Governance Group (SGG) established, meeting monthly through 2022–23		
	AUGUST		Consultations to build evidence for informing design	Initial co-design discussions commence through the SGG
	SEPTEMBER			
	NOVEMBER		Employer needs analysis	
2023	FEBRUARY	Employer Reference Group (ERG) and Youth Reference Group (YRG) established. Initial solutions tested with reference groups	Evidence building through reference groups	Full-day in-person co-design workshop
	MARCH	Operational Working Group (OWG) established	First AgFutures CoP meeting in Warrnambool	Initial design tested with reference groups. Initial design tested with CoP
	APRIL			ERG and YRG provide input on delivery resources and recruitment frameworks. Final refinement of pathway ahead of testing through delivery
	MAY			

Table 7   The AgFutures co-designed pathway

Component of pathway	Weakness in standard workforce development (challenge)	AgFutures design response
Pre-employment	An assumption that young people already possess the workplace and independence skills to attain and sustain entry-level employment	A dedicated pre-employment offer that meets each young person's needs and includes: first aid training, a workplace wellbeing session facilitated by youth transitions specialist and intentional matching with AgFutures host employer supported by initiative staff
Training	Full qualification agricultural programs not fit-for-purpose for short-term and employment-based workforce innovation with priority and high-needs cohort	A short training offer of five units of competency that enable young people to access on-farm employment and map to a range of future qualifications in agriculture and adjacent industries
Employment	Misalignment of employment opportunities between young people undertaking study and local employers in the industry of choice	Six months paid employment in an entry-level, on-farm role that aligns with the employment needs of both the employer and young person and has been judged as suitable for a young person seeking industry entry
Supports	An absence of wraparound supports for young people experiencing disadvantage who are undertaking VET	A dedicated support role for all participants to support the development of participant work-readiness skills and provide administrative and logistical support to enable participation

The following table outlines the design of the initiative for a cohort of participants from signup through to completion of the pathway. The delivery design was later adapted based on lessons that emerged during the piloting phase, as detailed in the following chapter.

Table 8   The AgFutures co-designed delivery approach

Support	Timeline			
	Weeks 1–6	**Weeks 7–10**	**Weeks 11+**	**After 6 months**
Pre-employment and support	Up to 6 weeks of pre-employment support	2 days per week pre-farm induction and support	Weekly check-ins and wraparound support	6 months of post-pilot support from initiative staff
Training		4 weeks of accredited training	1 week of block release from employment for assessment and review of log books	Pathways mapped to a range of agriculture, horticulture, land conservation and other adjacent pathways
Employment			6 months of paid on-farm employment	Ongoing employment with host employer or supported transition to other agricultural employer

Table 9   AgFutures tools and resources

	Name	Purpose
Tools	Expression of interest form	Document key contact and personal information of prospective participants.
	Participant eligibility checklist	Internal tool to support delivery staff to determine the eligibility of a young person for AgFutures based on information such as employment status or previous VET qualifications. Also used to support employer matching process by gathering information on logistical preferences such as preferred travel distance, availability of transport and willingness to relocate for employment.
	Participant appraisal form	Internal tool to support delivery staff to determine level of pre-employment supports required for participant. Captures information such as previous employment experience, familiarity with chosen industry and participant reflection on confidence.
	Employer appraisal form	Internal tool for delivery staff to determine eligibility of employers for participation in AgFutures. Captures information such as employer's approach to staff development, flexibility, workplace culture, communication and management style.
	Young person recruitment process	Internal tool for delivery staff with a standardised, four-phase approach to the recruitment of young people to AgFutures, from initial contact through to starting employment.
	Employer recruitment process	Internal tool for delivery staff with a standardised, four-phase approach to the recruitment of employers to AgFutures, from initial promotion to starting employment.
	AgFutures 'handshake'	Agreement signed by participants (employer and young person) outlining the responsibilities and commitments of participants, employers and delivery staff during the initiative.
Resources	AgFutures employer handbook	Handbook for employers participating in AgFutures outlining the pathway and its delivery. Also includes key information and resources to support employers to work effectively with young employees.
	AgFutures participant handbook	Handbook for young people participating in AgFutures outlining the pathway and its delivery. Also includes industry-specific information and resources to support young people manage their early employment and to support career planning.
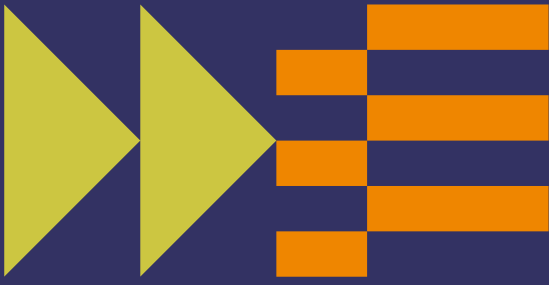
4 Testing an adaptive pathway

Phase 3 of the FCP model is the adaptive delivery of the co-designed pathway. The model and practice components aim to improve workforce development approaches and outcomes for all stakeholders, particularly for jobseekers and employers. For this reason, a key focus of the delivery of the co-designed pathway is also testing how and to what extent it is addressing the challenges it has identified. Equipped with this knowledge, the stewardship group can adapt the pathway to better align it with its objectives.

Rather than a set-and-forget approach to delivery, which assumes that the co-design process will achieve its intended aims, testing the co-designed model supports the stewardship group to:

- demonstrate whether the co-designed pathway is, in practice, deliverable
- determine if the co-designed pathway is achieving its aims and addressing the weaknesses within the workforce development approaches that it targets
- build evidence of the types of solutions that can address the weaknesses within workforce development
- identify any additional conditions or structural barriers to collaborative workforce development approaches in the region
- build local stakeholder capability to undertake workforce development in their region.

This chapter outlines the delivery of an FCP, and how the FCP model and practice elements support the testing of a pathway through its delivery. This includes the conditions and mechanisms that enable delivery and testing to occur simultaneously, and core considerations for those delivering the pathway. The chapter also outlines how the co-learning mechanism supports adaptability throughout implementation to ensure that delivery remains aligned with the core objectives and ambitions of the partners. Examples from the AgFutures initiative are used in this chapter to illustrate how adaptations made through monitoring and co-learning occur.

Conditions and mechanisms to enable testing

The practice approach and its mechanisms aim to sustain the alignment of action with ambition during the testing phase. These mechanisms support both the alignment of delivery with the co-designed pathway and with the ambitions and values of the FCP.

Operational mechanism

The operational mechanism is where those responsible for pathway delivery regularly meet and oversee the delivery of the co-designed pathway. During the delivery phase, the operational mechanism directly connects the initiative to participants and to delivery partners (the individuals and organisations that play a role in the direct delivery of the pathway to participants, such as local training institutions and staff).

The operational mechanism identifies any barriers to the delivery of the pathway as they emerge. When faced with minor barriers to delivery, the operational mechanism is responsible for determining the best approach to addressing these barriers. This can include drawing on initiative funding and material resources, securing financial and material support from community organisations and initiatives or making minor adjustments to the delivery plan.

The operational mechanism is also essential for ensuring adaptability and ongoing co-learning through phase 3 of the model. The mechanism maintains real-time information on initiative progress and participant experience and has strong connections to community and delivery partners. This means it can identify elements within the co-designed pathway that are not functioning as intended and recommend adaptations that would achieve the same aims through alternative approaches. While the final decision about adaptations to the pathway is ultimately the responsibility of the stewardship group (see below), the operational mechanism aims to ensure that any decisions made are informed by conditions on the ground.

Shared stewardship

The role of the stewardship group (through the strategic mechanism) shifts slightly in the transition from the co-design phases to the delivery and sustainability phases. Delivery is the point at which 'ambition drift' within an initiative is most likely to take place, as operational concerns and practical restrictions start to influence what can and cannot be delivered. While the operational mechanism is responsible for aligning the delivery of the pathway with its design, the stewardship group is responsible for maintaining the alignment between delivery and the ambition and values of the initiative that were set out during design step 1. This 'ambition maintenance' can include making adaptations to the FCP based on lessons emerging from delivery (supported by the operational mechanism); leveraging networks to support delivery to overcome local barriers; and providing guidance to the operational mechanism to support the delivery of the pathway as it was designed. If the lessons emerging from delivery indicate that a shift in ambition is required, then that shift should be the result of deliberate consideration by the members of the stewardship group.

The stewardship role also changes when it comes to co-learning. In phases 1 and 2, the primary aim of co-learning at the level of stewardship is to ensure that the pathway design aligns with the principles of the FCP and is able to meet the local need identified through evidence. In phases 3 and 4, co-learning by the stewardship group supports decisions made to refine or adapt aspects of the pathway through interpretation of the monitoring and evidence emerging from delivery. As noted earlier in this chapter, these lessons can relate to a number of potential benefits beyond the conclusion of the FCP, including:

• strengthening the internal practices of partner organisations

• strengthening collaborative practices between partner organisations

• improved workforce development practices, policies and structures

• identifying local barriers to, and opportunities for, future workforce development initiatives.

Considerations and practices that enable testing

Delivery will look different across each FCP, depending on the region, industry of choice and design decisions. However, there is a core set of considerations that will enable the delivery of an FCP pathway, regardless of its design. Testing should account for what is and is not possible given the resources and networks in the region. This will be shaped by local capability and capacity of stakeholders and institutions. Understanding what local partners, stakeholders and institutions are able to do based on their policies, capabilities and resources is essential for a deliverable pathway.

Responsibility for delivery

One or multiple organisations can be responsible for the delivery of the pathway. The core FCP principles of place, partnership and breadth apply to decisions made by the partnership group. To support responsiveness to local conditions, enable community ownership and the distribution of power, partners should avoid giving responsibility for components of pathway delivery to organisations outside the region. While delivery of a component can be the responsibility of organisations outside of the partnership group, partners should avoid outsourcing major components to organisations that do not have regular connection to the initiative.

Resourcing

All levels of the initiative require resourcing, from staffing to enable delivery, to funding of individual components of the pathway, to the resourcing required for each participant. As place-based initiatives, FCPs can draw on community resources to collaboratively deliver the pathway and support participants' journeys.

Resourcing decisions ultimately rest with the stewardship group. Depending on the needs and ambitions of the FCP, there are multiple forms of resourcing, both financial and material, that an initiative can draw on to support delivery, including:

- large-scale government and industry grants for workforce development and/or applied research projects
- small-scale grants and funding from local industry and government
- government educational funding (e.g. Fee-free TAFE, Skills First funding)
- resources and in-kind contributions from FCP partner organisations
- material contributions from local businesses and industry groups (e.g. workwear)
- participants' existing connections to support services and organisations (e.g. mental health support workers, employment service provider case managers)
- community initiatives that align with pathway activities (e.g. volunteer driving instructors, community busses).

Example: AgFutures delivery

In the AgFutures initiative, the core components of delivery were shared across several local partner organisations. Local youth transitions specialist and initiative partner Brophy was responsible for the delivery of the pre-employment and support pathway components. This was due to their extensive experience providing support to young jobseekers experiencing disadvantage, and the organisation's connections to support networks and resources throughout the community. Local training design and delivery specialist and initiative partner SWTAFE delivered the training component of the pathway. The TAFE's longstanding expertise in delivering agricultural training, and willingness to collaborate and innovate meant that they were also ideal for testing the pathway. Coordination of delivery was the responsibility of the coordinating organisation, BSL.

AgFutures adaptability case study: leveraging community expertise to support recruitment

Lesson – a changing employment landscape

AgFutures was initially conceived in the immediate aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. When the program launched, the youth unemployment rate in the region was uncharacteristically high. National borders were closed to migrant workers and temporary visa holders, which led to high vacancy levels in multiple sectors across the region.

These conditions changed throughout the duration of AgFutures, which impacted recruitment to the initiative. The vacancies left in non-agricultural industries were gradually filled by local young people. When national borders reopened, agricultural employers immediately filled their entry-level job vacancies with migrants and visa holders. By the time the testing phase of the initiative started, youth unemployment in the region had fallen to pre-pandemic levels.

Adaptation

With the changes to employment conditions in the region, the CoP was used to bring together stakeholders to address conditions limiting the recruitment of young people. Initiative staff recognised that often young people already with local employment service providers (ESPs) were not being referred to the initiative by their case managers. Holding to the ambition of local ownership and community-led solutions, the initiative hosted a roundtable with initiative staff, small and large-scale ESPs from across the region, and representatives of the Australian Government's Local Jobs Program. Attendees were briefed prior to the event and a discussion paper was circulated to all participants, providing background and setting out the ambition for the event.

The roundtable revealed that ESPs felt their lack of understanding of the agriculture industry and the pathways for young people to progress in the industry limited their capability to support young people into AgFutures and similar initiatives. Several actions were assigned at the meeting including refining recruitment materials and providing farm tours to ESP case workers to teach them about entry-level on-farm employment. This allowed them to better connect young people to AgFutures specifically, and to agriculture careers more broadly.

The success of the roundtable demonstrated that collaboration between local actors with a common goal leads to both initiative-specific outcomes and the deepening of collaboration for longer-term benefits for the community.

Community awareness and recruitment

Testing a pathway requires a population to test it. Depending on the design of the pathway this may be all young people within a region, or a targeted cohort. The nature of the population, as well as the chosen delivery approach for the pathway (for examples, see Delivering the training and supporting employment, below), will determine how the initiative recruits participants, including employers. Testing the FCP has demonstrated that recruiting participants to an initiative requires wider community promotion alongside targeted and structured recruitment practices. Both duties are most effectively carried out by the operational mechanism, with support from the initiative partners.

Building community awareness

It is critical that the community understands the opportunity in an FCP for local jobseekers and employers. Awareness building requires a network of local individuals and stakeholders who can spread knowledge of the pathway in the spaces that young jobseekers and employers use. Local partners and the governance mechanisms can play a key role by shaping the specific 'message' of the initiative for community. Individuals who make up the target cohort have the best idea of what information, communication styles and platforms will reach people like them. Awareness-building activities can take many forms, including:

- advertising on traditional and social media

- an initiative presence at regional careers expos and trade fairs

- 'pop-up' presences at local sites frequented by large volumes of people, such as shopping centres

- flyers and posters distributed in areas of high visibility to targeted cohorts

- information on local job and recruitment boards

- building relationships with, and distributing informational material to, organisations that support young people into training and employment (e.g. ESPs).

Example: AgFutures leveraging partner expertise

As the regional industry representative body, F&FGSC played a key role promoting the initiative to employers and industry in the region to support the recruitment of employers. As regular hosts of industry events, webinars and education sessions, F&FGSC leveraged their resources and networks to spread awareness about the initiative, including information on its aims, design process and the co-designed pathway.

Recruiting and onboarding participants

Effective recruitment practices are essential to ensure that participants are the right fit for the pathway, and that the pathway is right for them. This enables a more positive experience and stronger outcomes for participants. When young people are engaged in the pathway, their feedback provides more accurate evidence on the efficacy of its components. While the specifics of recruitment practices will be determined by the design of the pathway and the characteristics of the target cohort, testing of the FCP has demonstrated that effective recruitment is enabled by:

- a standardised, documented approach to support delivery staff and enable record keeping and accountability

- readiness appraisals of participants to determine suitability and identify any supports required for their participation

- clear verbal and written communication of the pathway 'offer' to participants

- meet and greets and/or site visits with prospective employers (if employer matching is a component of the pathway)

- support with training enrolment (if required)

- a written agreement (e.g. a 'handshake' or 'deal') outlining participant responsibilities during the pathway and acknowledging the responsibilities of other parties to participants.
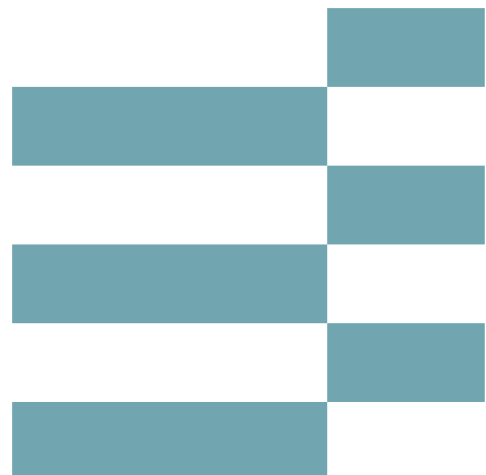
Delivering the training and supporting employment

Having recruited participants into the initiative, the operational mechanism is responsible for supporting them through to completion of their training and employment. Testing the FCP and getting feedback from training and youth specialist expert partners through AgFutures highlighted several practical considerations that influence the successful support of participants through training and employment. These include:

- the reliability of methods of communication between participants and initiative staff
- participant and employer awareness of important upcoming dates and milestones
- participants' access to training and employment sites
- materials and clothing participants may require for their training and employment
- the availability of at-home internet access for participants to support training
- induction to training and employment sites, including OHS awareness
- clarity of employment expectations through employment contracts
- participant nutrition during training and employment.

Co-learning and adapting in real time

Evidence building, co-learning and collective sensemaking all continue as an FCP moves into its delivery phase. This serves two main purposes. Firstly, it allows for the real-time adaptation of the pathway to best meet the needs of participants and stakeholders and most effectively achieve its ambition. Secondly, it draws lessons from delivery to support partners to identify the system conditions needed to sustain changed workforce development practices (the sustainability phase of the work is discussed in more detail in the following chapter).

Co-learning and evidence building

The co-learning and evidence building during phase 3 are supported by the stewardship and operational mechanisms, and by the co-learning mechanisms of feedback loops and monitoring.

Feedback loops and the governance mechanisms

As noted in Chapter 2, feedback loops during phase 3 of an FCP ensure that information, evidence and experiences from delivery are all being communicated effectively between the strategic and operational mechanisms. Supported by monitoring (see below), each governance group engages in collective sensemaking to contextualise and draw lessons from this evidence. The operational mechanism understands the degree of alignment between the design of the pathway and its delivery, and the conditions that are enabling and/or disabling that alignment. The stewardship group can monitor whether the pathway has been successful in addressing the problems it was designed to solve. Strong feedback loops between these two mechanisms throughout phase 3 ensure that each maintains a holistic view of the success of the pathway and can make decisions regarding any adaptations that may help realign delivery with design and/or ambition.

Monitoring progress during phase 3

Monitoring plays a key role in supporting the operational and stewardship mechanisms throughout phase 3 of the model. Collecting real-time data on participant experience aims to support co-learning and testing the pathway by:

- supporting the adaptability of the pathway by providing additional data to judge whether delivery to the co-designed pathway is going as planned, and to identify any barriers to delivery
- providing a mechanism for stewardship to pose targeted questions to participants on a specific component or approach within the pathway (e.g. the utility of a particular unit of competency in the training, the usefulness of a résumé writing workshop for participants).

Example: monitoring during phase 3 of AgFutures

As the coordinating organisation, BSL monitored AgFutures participants (young people and employers), and regularly shared data with the partners through the SGG. Monitoring data enabled several key co-learning opportunities and adaptations to the delivery practice, including:

- documenting the individual participant journeys through the pathway to aid partners' understanding of how participants were experiencing the various components. This evidence was also useful for initiative sustainability as it captured instances where participants utilised or were reliant on external supports (e.g. mental health case workers) to progress. This knowledge helped partners identify how workforce development systems operated in place

- the introduction of a participant newsletter, which went out to young people and employers participating in AgFutures. This newsletter was a response to feedback from employers saying they felt they were not being regularly updated on the content of their employees' training.

Making adaptations

Testing the pathway during delivery enables the initiative to respond to challenges and opportunities as they emerge. If a component of the pathway is not functioning as intended or is not producing the results that justified its inclusion, then this should be addressed as soon as possible. If stewards know early in the delivery of a pathway that one element of a component is not working effectively, they can remove it and avoid unnecessarily draining initiative resources.

As with the design decisions made late in phases 1 and 2, the approach to making decisions regarding adaptation is at the discretion of the stewardship group. Adaptation is most effective when it is clear when it is taking place and its rationale is well documented. Unlike design decisions, which sit solely with the stewardship group, decisions regarding adaptation are most effective when there is a shared understanding and agreement between the stewardship group and the operational group.

AgFutures adaptability case study: training delivery

The design of the delivery approach to training went through two revisions during AgFutures. Each of the adaptations made was a response to conditions that emerged through the testing of the pathway during phase 3 of the model.

LESSON 1 — The employment requirements of unemployed young people

The first lesson on the suitability of the training delivery came early in the testing phase. As noted previously, the employment landscape in the region changed between the initial design and the start of delivery. Through their relationships with ESPs and youth support services in the region, initiative staff identified that a front-loaded 'block' approach to training would not work to engage the high volume of young people experiencing disadvantage the initiative was attempting to recruit. The climbing cost of living and falling local housing availability meant that those experiencing disadvantage needed immediate paid employment more than training.

Adaptation

In response to this change in need, initiative partners led by SWTAFE decided to change the training delivery to a monthly schedule, concurrent with employment. This enabled participants to start their on-farm employment earlier in the pathway, while still completing the units of competency by the end of their period of employment. The result was an increase in enrolments in the initiative.

LESSON 2 — Cohort building and educational outcomes

Midway through delivery, frontline representatives from SWTAFE and Brophy came to the stewardship group with concerns that the monthly training schedule was no longer fit-for-purpose. The gap between training days meant participants lacked opportunities connect with each other and engage in peer-to-peer learning. They also noted that training staff at the TAFE campus were not able to build enough of a rapport with the young people participating to enable effective education. Staff were concerned that this would lead to poorer educational and employment outcomes for the participants.

Adaptation

Based on the recommendations of the frontline representatives, the stewardship group decided to adjust training delivery to a fortnightly schedule. Even though this idea had been proposed during the co-design phases, the ERG had argued that it was not feasible as the regularity of participant absence from their places of work would put too much strain on employers. However, ongoing pathway testing demonstrated that employers were more invested in the development of their employees than first expected, particularly given the backgrounds of disadvantage of many participants. Despite the initial concerns of the ERG during the design phase, employer participants were very happy to work with the training adaptation to ensure the best educational outcomes for their employees, demonstrating the value of real-time testing of the model post-design.
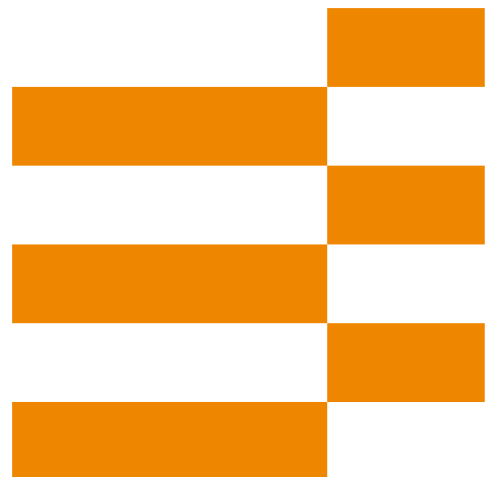
5 Sustaining lessons from innovation

Sustaining and continuing change efforts requires taking the lessons that have emerged through implementation and delivery and using them to strengthen workforce development practices, structures and policies. As such, the conclusion of delivery marks the point at which an FCP moves into its fourth and final phase, which looks at ways to sustain the impact. It also provides an opportunity for those who have participated in a stewardship or operational capacity to take lessons from the implementation of the model and the pathway delivery.

This final chapter outlines the considerations of phase 4 of the FCP model. It includes guidance for:

- the role of the operational mechanism in transitioning participants out of an FCP pathway
- final opportunities for evidence building and co-learning post-delivery
- the different forms that post-initiative sustainability can take, including sharing lessons learnt during pathway delivery.

This chapter will give examples from the AgFutures initiative to illustrate these points, focusing on core lessons learnt and lesson-sharing activities undertaken in the final phase of the initiative.

Offboarding participants and post-pilot support

Workforce development initiatives and programs that focus on job placement as the sole metric of success often fail to recognise that the supports that helped young people to get a job placement are still required once they start work. Although an individual may gain employment, it takes time for pay and stability to address barriers they may be facing, such as housing insecurity, transportation, community connectedness and mental wellbeing. Similarly, getting a job does not mean a person's development in career planning, work-readiness and similar 'soft' skills is complete. To address this, the FCP aims to gradually transition participants out of the initiative and from the pathway-related supports they may be receiving.

Supporting a participant to transition out of an FCP includes helping them feel confident visualising their next career step post-delivery, either through training or through ongoing employment. This takes a holistic view of what constitutes a successful outcome for

participants, influenced by the principle of breadth. An FCP values equipping learners with the skills and knowledge they need to pursue their interests and build a career, rather than filling roles in an industry and assuming no further mobility. A young person who completes an FCP and continues with employment or study in the chosen industry is considered a successful employment outcome. A young person who completes an FCP and decides to transition to an adjacent industry using their experience to make an informed career choice is also considered a success.

An individual's career trajectory is rarely linear. Keeping this in mind, what participant transition looks like in phase 4 of an FCP will vary based on the specifics of the pathway. The transition aims to slowly remove FCP supports at a pace that enables the participant to sustain employment, and to support the participant to articulate and plan the next step in their career progression. Approaches to this transition draw on current youth transition best practice. They can include:

- having post-pathway check-ins with participants
- providing participants with resources and/ or information on where their qualifications and employment experience can lead in the medium and long-term
- supporting participants into further study or employment
- connecting participants to career guidance professions to support career planning
- connecting participants to local support services if necessary.

Evidence building and co-learning post-delivery

Post-delivery monitoring and participant check-ins can be important avenues through which to collect evidence and understand the ability of the pathway to achieve short and medium-term outcomes. The insights provided by monitoring and check-ins in phase 4 can include:

- how the pathway helps participants secure ongoing employment post-delivery
- how the pathway meets employer skill needs
- participant experience of the pathway and its individual components, and the way components and supports enable pathway completion
- the extent to which the pathway strengthened participants' industry awareness and career planning
- the usefulness of the pathway for participants moving into employment and/or training in adjacent industries.

The CoP can also support co-learning during the final phase of the model. In particular, it can play a key role in co-learning regarding the sustainability of initiative lessons, practices and relationships. The CoP can support the stewardship group through:

- the interpretation and contextualisation of evidence collected through phases 3 and 4
- providing a community lens when drawing out the implications of the successes and challenges to delivery in the region
- identifying practices, relationships and structures in the community that enabled the implementation of the FCP.

An FCP values equipping learners with the skills and knowledge they need to pursue their interests and build a career, rather than filling roles in an industry and assuming no further mobility.

Sustainability and sharing lessons

The sustainability ambition of the FCP is wide-reaching. As outlined in Chapter 2, initiative sustainability can come in many forms. Traditionally, it has referred to the continuation, scaling and increased uptake of programs and initiatives. While this is one potential sustainability outcome of an FCP, the systemic ambition of the model means that sustainability also includes what has been learnt throughout the co-design and testing of the pathway. This is called '**lesson sustainability**'.

Just as co-learning is deliberately built into the FCP model, so too is sharing the lessons that emerged through implementation and delivery. Many excellent and successful initiatives and programs are implemented every year across Australia, however, they are often tied to short-run, programmatic funding. In many cases, this means that the lessons learnt, practices developed and relationships built during the delivery of these programs are lost. The FCP's systemic change ambition recognises that lesson sustainability is just as important as the persistence or scaling of a program. By ensuring that lesson sustainability is a core component of phase 4 of the model, the FCP aims to contribute to the ongoing refinement of local, state and national workforce development approaches.

The final phase of the model aims to provide a space for partners and the stewardship group to identify and communicate the core sustainability lessons from the previous three phases. This includes ways they might contribute to the strengthening of workforce development practices, policies and structures, such as:

- effective practices developed through the design and testing of the pathway that can be adopted by partner organisations or shared with those undertaking workforce development
- collaborative relationships between partners and the community that were developed through the FCP and can be sustained to contribute to effective local initiatives in the future
- components of the co-designed pathway that were effective in addressing weaknesses or barriers within existing workforce approaches and can be shared to strengthen workforce development approaches in other industries and regions
- components of the co-designed pathway that did not align or were incompatible during delivery, that can inform the design of future pathways
- structural and policy barriers that slowed or prevented the implementation of the FCP model and/or the delivery of the co-designed pathway that can help identify and address the systemic issues preventing effective workforce development practices and solutions.

Example: AgFutures and sustainability

The AgFutures initiative saw a number of sustainability outcomes and undertook a number of activities to enable the sustainability of lessons learnt.

Strengthened relationships

The collaboration between the AgFutures training design and delivery specialist and the youth transitions specialist strengthened their relationship and appetite to collaborate in future. Both parties committed to working more closely together when training young people and supporting them into employment. Participation in AgFutures also helped SWTAFE recognise that they could improve their practices when training young people experiencing disadvantage. They will leverage their strengthened relationship to build staff capability for engaging young learners with high needs.

AgFutures CoP 2

The second CoP event coincided with the completion of the AgFutures piloting phase. It was a key moment in building community ownership of lesson sustainability and approaches. The second CoP event included representation from community organisations, ESPs and a small number of representatives from industry. This reflected the event's focus on sharing lessons from the delivery of the pathway, and collectively addressing some of the local structural barriers that had impacted delivery.

The event elevated the voices of AgFutures participants, some of whom took part in a facilitated Q&A with initiative staff, speaking about their AgFutures journey and what they saw as the enabling conditions for a successful pathway. This was supported by a panel of AgFutures partners and employers who shared their perspectives on what had and had not worked in the delivery of the model. This helped identify the structural conditions that continue to hinder workforce development. The final session of the day looked beyond AgFutures. Facilitated by a local partner, attendees brainstormed solutions to these barriers, to address them by leveraging and connecting local resources and initiatives.

Warrnambool–Moyne Community Investment Committee

Brophy Family and Youth Services, the youth transitions specialist for AgFutures, is the lead partner organisation of the Warrnambool–Moyne Community Investment Committee (CIC), which operates as part of the NYEB. A CIC is a group of local individuals and organisations who work together to oversee and guide the allocation of resources, funds or programs aimed at supporting local communities. This can cover a range of areas, including economic development, education, healthcare, housing, social services, environmental sustainability and more. Through their role in AgFutures, Brophy have identified the CIC as a mechanism to sustain the work of AgFutures and to address several of the structural and policy barriers to workforce development identified.

Applied research lessons

As the coordinating organisation for AgFutures, BSL has produced a number of written outputs, including the stakeholder vignettes in the appendices of this practice guide. Aimed at workforce development practitioners across government, industry and the community sector, these outputs communicate the process of AgFutures, lessons from co-design and testing, and the enabling conditions for place-based initiatives. Lessons from AgFutures, including interim findings from the evaluation and case studies from the design phase, have been presented at academic VET conferences in Melbourne and Sydney.
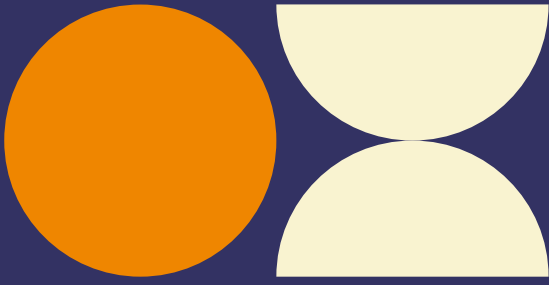
6 Appendices

Appendix A:
AgFutures stakeholder vignettes

AgFutures Partners: youth transitions specialist Brophy Family and Youth Services

Brophy Family and Youth Services (Brophy) is a community-based not-for-profit organisation operating in the Barwon South West region that provides services aimed at promoting a just society and improving the life circumstances for people who are experiencing vulnerability and disengagement. Brophy has a long history of working to support the region's young people into employment through wholistic, person-centred approaches.

Leading innovative approaches to workforce development

Brophy was one of six partner organisations in the AgFutures project. AgFutures aimed to address systemic weaknesses within current workforce development approaches. It did this by expanding community involvement in design and delivery of a locally developed entry-level pathway that met the needs of local jobseekers and employers.

AgFutures operated on the principle that workforce development solutions are more effective when they bring together diverse expertise alongside community stakeholders, to co-design and co-deliver pathways that meet the specific needs of those in the region. It tested these ideas with local and national partners, designing and testing an entry-level training and employment pathway into the agriculture sector aimed at young people facing barriers to education and employment.

Why should youth transitions specialists guide the design and delivery of workforce development projects?

Traditional workforce development approaches exclude young people and those who work with them from the design process. Without considering young people's needs and the conditions impacting how they move through training and into work, workforce development projects aimed at youth employment do not adequately deliver sustainable, long-term outcomes for young people. Through their deep connections to young people, youth specialist organisations understand the barriers that local young people face, as well as their needs and aspirations. The expertise and experience youth transition specialists have in supporting young people to achieve educational and employment outcomes can strengthen the design and delivery of workforce development projects.

What contributions did the youth transitions specialist make to AgFutures?

As an expert local youth transitions organisation, Brophy shared the responsibility of stewarding the AgFutures project throughout its design and testing phases. Brophy provided youth specialist expertise and examples of best practice throughout the co-design of the pathway, ensuring that it met the needs of participants. Staff advocated for young people's ambitions and informed project partners of the barriers that local young people face when undertaking education and employment. They provided opportunities for youth voice and young people's lived

experience to shape the pathway and inform the thinking of the partnership group. As an essential local partner Brophy drew on its deep connection to the youth support ecosystem in their region, connecting AgFutures to community networks vital for enabling the delivery of new workforce development approaches.

In addition, Brophy also made material contributions to the project, which included:

• supporting the recruitment of participants to the project through its connection to young people and ESPs in the region

• providing case management and support to project participants, drawing on its decades of experience and expertise working with young jobseekers

• collaborating with existing support networks in the region to facilitate participant recruitment and deliver participant supports.

How did the presence of a youth transitions specialist strengthen AgFutures?

Brophy's contributions to AgFutures as a youth transitions specialist brought a wide range of benefits to the design and delivery of the project. Contributions from Brophy's youth employment coaches enabled the project to be designed and delivered in a 'youth friendly' manner. Through the input from Brophy staff with direct experience supporting job outcomes for young jobseekers, each component of the co-designed pathway considered the pre-employment and post-placement support needs of participants. Brophy's youth and family support teams were able to use existing young-person centred models and established Advantaged Thinking practices to influence the delivery of AgFutures' training, employment and wraparound supports. AgFutures participants reported high levels of satisfaction with their experiences as they passed through the project, including the support and mentoring that was provided as part of the wraparound

support that Brophy advocated for during the co-design phase.

Brophy's ties to the Barwon South West community, and its connection to workforce development stakeholders and support services, ensured that AgFutures could involve local stakeholders in the design and delivery of the pathway. This community involvement and co-ownership allowed both the process and the pathway to reflect the needs and opportunities within the region, laying foundations for future community-led workforce development projects.

Cultivating an enduring co-learning culture was a key feature of the partnership collaboration in the AgFutures project. For several partners with less experience working with young people or in designing youth-specific workforce solutions, Brophy's contributions supported a collective deepening of understanding and strengthening of capability to work with young people, particularly those experiencing disadvantage. The co-learning that Brophy and the other partners undertook strengthened the youth friendly approaches of local training and industry stakeholders.

AgFutures Partners: training design and delivery specialist South West TAFE

South West TAFE is the largest public training provider in south-west Victoria, offering accredited courses, programs and qualifications that prepare students for a wide range of jobs in all industries. The TAFE focuses on delivering courses that give graduates the skills they need to thrive in their chosen careers, providing accessible and equitable training and education opportunities that enable students, industry partners and communities to flourish.

Leading innovative approaches to workforce development

South West TAFE was one of six partner organisations in the AgFutures project. AgFutures aimed to address systemic weaknesses within current workforce development approaches by expanding community involvement in design and delivery of a locally developed entry-level pathway that met the needs of local jobseekers and employers.

AgFutures operated on the principle that workforce development solutions are more effective when they bring together diverse expertise alongside community stakeholders to co-design and co-deliver pathways that meet the specific needs of those in the region. It tested these ideas with local and national partners, designing and testing an entry-level training and employment pathway into the agriculture sector that was aimed at young people facing barriers to education and employment.

Why should local training design and delivery specialists guide the design and delivery of workforce development projects?

Traditional workforce development underutilises the expertise and community knowledge of local training providers. Without considering the conditions that impact educational outcomes within a region or listening to those who have taught local young people, workforce development projects aimed at youth employment will not adequately support young people's development of technical skills and theoretical knowledge required for career entry and growth.

Training design and delivery experts understand the needs of local young people, the educational barriers they face and how best practice training design and delivery can enable strong learning outcomes for participants. In addition, the long-term relationships that TAFEs and regional training providers typically have with their industry stakeholders also heavily informs the type of training needed. This includes specific delivery models and elective unit choices for accredited training; and other mandated or regulated training that may be needed.

The presence of training design and delivery experts in workforce development projects helps ensure that programs and practices are designed to meet the educational needs of local young people and the industry that they will be working in.

What contributions did the training design and delivery specialist make to AgFutures?

As an expert training design and delivery organisation, South West TAFE shared the responsibility of stewarding the AgFutures project through its design and testing phases. South West TAFE provided training expertise and examples of best practice throughout the co-design of the pathway, ensuring that it met the needs of both the unemployed young people participating and local agricultural employers. South West TAFE partners facilitated co-design discussions and decisions with project partners to identify and determine the most appropriate curriculum for the AgFutures pathway, drawing on their own deep connection to employers in the region. They advocated for young people's educational experience and showed project partners the barriers that young people face when undertaking training. South West TAFE provided opportunities for best practice teaching approaches to shape the pathway and inform the thinking of the partnership group.

In addition, the TAFE also made a number of material contributions to the project, which included:

- delivering the training component of the AgFutures pathway, including on-campus teaching and site visits to local businesses for exposure to a variety of agricultural worksites
- supporting the recruitment of participants to the project through connection to local industry, employers and career practitioners.

How did the presence of a training design and delivery specialist strengthen AgFutures?

South West TAFE's contributions to AgFutures as a training design and delivery specialist brought a wide range of benefits to the project. Contributions from the TAFE's educational staff enabled the project to be designed and delivered so that it achieved its training ambition. Through input from South West TAFE staff with direct experience supporting job outcomes for young jobseekers, each component of the co-designed pathway considered the educational needs of participants. AgFutures' training delivery was influenced by established practices from within South West TAFE's agriculture training team. AgFutures participants reported high levels of satisfaction with their experiences as they passed through the project, including the hands-on component of the training, the cohort building that on-site training enabled and the responsiveness of staff to participants' educational needs.

South West TAFE's ties to the Barwon South West community and its connection to workforce development stakeholders and industry ensured that AgFutures could involve local stakeholders in the design and delivery of the pathway. This community involvement and co-ownership helped ensure that both the process and the pathway reflected the needs and opportunities within the region, laying foundations for future community-led workforce development projects.

Cultivating an enduring co-learning culture was a key feature of the partnership collaboration in the AgFutures project. For several partners with less experience in education or delivering training with strong outcomes, South West TAFE's contributions supported a collective deepening of understanding and strengthening of capability to align industry and employer needs with the design and delivery of training. The co-learning that South West TAFE and the other partners undertook strengthened the capability of local industry and youth service stakeholders to work with educators.

AgFutures Partners: industry specialists
Dairy Australia
Food and Fibre Great South Coast

Dairy Australia is a national body that works to shape a profitable and sustainable dairy industry by providing services that benefit and advance dairy farm businesses and the industry. Dairy Australia supports Australia's dairy regions with a national team of specialists across strategy, research, development, sustainability, policy support, international trade, marketing and communications.

Food and Fibre Great South Coast is the representative body for food and fibre production businesses and their vast supply chains in southwest Victoria. Food and Fibre Great South Coast aims to help grow the value of regional food and fibre production, thereby improving the prosperity and resilience of the local community.

Leading innovative approaches to workforce development

Dairy Australia and Food and Fibre Great South Coast were two of six partner organisations of the AgFutures project. AgFutures aimed to address systemic weaknesses within current workforce development approaches by expanding community involvement in design and delivery of a locally developed entry-level pathway that meets the needs of local jobseekers and employers.

AgFutures operated on the principle that workforce development solutions are more effective when they bring together diverse expertise alongside community stakeholders, to co-design and co-deliver pathways that meet the specific needs of those in the region. It tested these ideas with local and national partners, designing and testing an entry-level training and employment pathway into the agriculture sector, aimed at young people facing barriers to education and employment.

Why should industry specialists guide the design and delivery of workforce development projects?

While industry traditionally plays a significant role in workforce development, this mostly occurs at a national or state level, with limited consideration for the differences across regions and communities. Without considering the conditions that impact the success of workforce development projects in a specific region or the needs of local employers, workforce development projects aimed at a specific industry will not build the skilled labour force required for the jobs available in their local region.

The presence of both national and local industry specialists in AgFutures helped ensure that the program and practices were designed by those who understand what industry needs locally, and the long-term trajectory of the industry at a national level – in this case agriculture. It ensures that the design of the project is not focused only on immediate job outcomes, and that it considers the needs of local employers.

What contributions did the industry specialists make to AgFutures?

As experts in the needs of industry and employers, Dairy Australia and Food and Fibre Great South Coast were involved in stewarding the AgFutures project throughout its design and testing phases. Dairy Australia provided expertise on national industry needs, including guidance on career opportunities and future career progression pathways for entry-level workers. They provided AgFutures with important context on where industry employers felt that their capability to work with and manage young people needed strengthening. Food and Fibre Great South Coast advocated for the needs of local employers, providing key advice on how AgFutures should best collaborate with local employers to design and deliver the pathway.

Through their relationships, both Dairy Australia and Food and Fibre Great South Coast directly connected AgFutures to employers, enabling employer voice and lived experience to inform design. Dairy Australia drew on its own industry training content and approaches to support the training design and delivery of AgFutures. In addition, Dairy Australia and Food and Fibre Great South Coast made several material contributions to the project, which included:

- helping build community awareness of AgFutures through industry newsletters, in-person events and webinars
- supporting the recruitment of local employers to participate in the pathway through the identification of and connection to employers interested in supporting homegrown workforce development.

How did the presence of industry specialists strengthen AgFutures?

Dairy Australia and Food and Fibre Great South Coast contributions to AgFutures as industry specialists brought a wide range of benefits to the project. Contributions from both organisations' staff and members within the region enabled the project to be designed and delivered to meet the needs of employers who took part. Through the input from Dairy Australia workforce development staff and Food and Fibre Great South Coast members, AgFutures defined a set of industry-informed parameters for expectations of employer capability and worksite safety, to ensure a safe and positive experience for participating young people.

The two organisations' ties to the Barwon South West community, and their connection to workforce development stakeholders and industry ensured that AgFutures involved local stakeholders in the design and delivery of the pathway. This community involvement and co-ownership helped ensure that both the process and the pathway reflected the needs and opportunities within the region, laying foundations for future community-led workforce development projects.

Cultivating an enduring co-learning culture was a key feature of the partnership collaboration in the AgFutures project. For several partners with less knowledge of the agriculture industry and the career pathways it offers entry-level workers, Dairy Australia and Food and Fibre Great South Coast contributions supported a collective deepening of understanding of what a career in agriculture can offer a local young person.

AgFutures Partners: workforce development specialist Skills Impact

Skills Impact is a Skills Service Organisation, a not-for-profit, industry-owned organisation that collaborates with industry, government and training providers to track industry trends and document skills opportunities and challenges. Their work helps support learners and workplaces with their skills needs, promoting employment opportunities and industry competitiveness.

Leading innovative approaches to workforce development

Skills Impact were one of six partner organisations in the AgFutures project. AgFutures aimed to address systemic weaknesses within current workforce development approaches by expanding community involvement in design and delivery of a locally developed entry-level pathway that meets the needs of local jobseekers and employers.

AgFutures operated on the principle that workforce development solutions are more effective when they bring together diverse expertise alongside community stakeholders, to co-design and co-deliver pathways that meet the specific needs of those in the region. It tested these ideas with local and national partners, designing and testing an entry-level training and employment pathway into the agriculture sector, aimed at young people facing barriers to education and employment.

Why should workforce development specialists guide the design and delivery of workforce development projects?

While workforce development specialists traditionally play a significant role in workforce development approaches at a national level, they are often excluded from the design and delivery of regionally specific projects. Their exclusion means that local workforce development projects are unable to draw on contemporary best practice and national and state trends when designing and delivering their project, and that local innovation is less likely to inform and shape national workforce development approaches.

The presence of workforce development specialists in local workforce development projects helps ensure that the programs and practices are designed in the context of the national skills landscape, and long-term workforce trends. They ensure that projects that were focused on a specific industry still equip participants with skills that will enable career mobility and transition to related industries. Through their connection to the current policy landscape, workforce development specialists identify how projects can align with areas of government interest and bring the voice of community to state and national level decision-making.

What contributions did the workforce development specialist make to AgFutures?

As an expert in industry skill needs and national curriculum, Skills Impact contributed to stewarding the AgFutures project throughout its design and testing phases. Skills Impact played a key role in the design of the training pathway, drawing on its own knowledge of industry needs, deep expertise of training packages and units of competency, and evidence from its research divisions. Skills Impact provided guidance on how units and qualifications mapped to future training opportunities for potential participants. The team provided AgFutures with important context on where industry had identified weaknesses in workforce development practices, and how the project could contribute to addressing these weaknesses. In addition, Skills Impact made several material contributions to the project, which included:

- the delivery of 'functional skills analysis' sessions with local employers to accurately determine the technical and non-technical skill requirements for entry-level workers in the region

- contributions to building national awareness of AgFutures through workshops and industry conferences.

How did the presence of a workforce development specialist strengthen AgFutures?

Skills Impact's contributions to AgFutures as workforce development specialists brought a wide range of benefits to the project. Contributions from the organisations' stakeholder engagement team enabled the project to be designed and delivered so that it met the needs of both the employers who took part, and the industry as a whole. Through the input from Skills Impact staff, AgFutures was able develop a training product with a core set of units that not only aligned with immediate employer need but also mapped to a wide range of future agriculture and agriculture-

related qualifications, ensuring future training and career mobility for participants.

Skills Impact's ties to national workforce development policymakers and stakeholders enabled them to advise the partnership group on how workforce development projects were addressing similar problems to AgFutures, preventing the project from repeating approaches which had been demonstrated to be ineffective. This connection also enabled AgFutures partners to identify which lessons emerging from the design and delivery of AgFutures could be communicated to national stakeholders to support the ongoing improvement of workforce development approaches.

Cultivating an enduring co-learning culture was a key feature of the partnership collaboration in the AgFutures project. For several partners with less knowledge of workforce development approaches, Sills Insight's contributions supported a collective deepening of understanding of workforce development, career and training progression for young people, and how community innovation can contribute to the improvement of national workforce development.

AgFutures Partners: coordinating organisation Brotherhood of St. Laurence

The Brotherhood of St. Laurence (BSL) is a social justice organisation working to prevent and alleviate poverty across Australia. The organisation's purpose is to advance a fair Australia through leadership on policy reform, partnerships with communities and the quality of services. It does this by working alongside people experiencing disadvantage to address the fundamental causes of poverty in Australia.

Leading innovative approaches to workforce development

BSL was one of six partner organisations of the AgFutures project. AgFutures aimed to address systemic weaknesses within current workforce development approaches by expanding community involvement in design and delivery of a locally developed entry-level pathway that meets the needs of local jobseekers and employers.

AgFutures operated on the principle that workforce development solutions are more effective when they bring together diverse expertise alongside community stakeholders, to co-design and co-deliver pathways that meet the specific needs of those in the region. It tested these ideas with local and national partners, designing and testing an entry-level training and employment pathway into the agriculture sector, aimed at young people facing barriers to education and employment.

Why should coordinating organisations support the design and delivery of workforce development projects?

Traditional workforce development approaches focus only on supply-side or demand-side interventions, and rarely consider the conditions, systems and structures within a community or region which either support or limit their success. Without considering these conditions, and the way in which the multiple systems responsible for supporting learners through education and into employment interconnect, workforce development approaches will not meet their ambitions.

The presence of a coordinating organisation in AgFutures helped ensure that the project took a holistic view to design, accounted for the local conditions impacting the success of workforce development, and enabled collaboration between a diverse group of stakeholders. The coordinating organisation ensured that the design of the project was not focused only on immediate job outcomes, but also contributed to growing the community's capability to design and implement solutions to the barriers which limit jobseekers' opportunities and outcomes.

What contributions did the coordinating organisation make to AgFutures?

As a peak not-for-profit organisation focused on enabling systemic change in employment, skills and training, BSL shared the responsibility of stewarding the AgFutures Project through its design and testing phases. BSL facilitated collaboration between diverse local actors and provided expertise on how to engage community stakeholders to build a strong evidence base for the co-designed workforce development solution. They supported partners to develop a 'top-down, bottom-up' approach to the design of the AgFutures pathway, ensuring that it met the immediate needs of local young people and employers, but also reflected input from partners on national industry and education trends. BSL played a key role in distilling and communicating lessons from the design and delivery of AgFutures.

As the coordinating organisation, BSL also provided core administrative supports throughout the lifespan of the project. In this role BSL made a number of material contributions, which included:

- scheduling and facilitating project governance meetings
- managing project documentation
- resourcing material supports required for design and delivery
- conducting and coordinating evidence collection and pathway monitoring.

How did the presence of a coordinating organisation strengthen AgFutures?

BSL's contributions to AgFutures brought a wide range of benefits to the project. The organisation's experience and expertise in holistic approaches to community-led projects enabled AgFutures to connect with a wide range of local stakeholders and directly involve them in pathway design and delivery. This was further supported by their expertise in systemic approaches to workforce development, enabling project partners to recognise and account for the connected systems and structures responsible for the success of workforce development in the region. This resulted in a project that reflected the diversity of the region and adequately responded to the needs of those who both engaged with and benefited from the pathway.

Cultivating an enduring co-learning culture was a key feature of the partnership collaboration in the AgFutures project. BSL's role in evidence collection and communication supported co-learning between partners and the community, and ensured that lessons from design and delivery were captured and supported the refinement of practices within and between partner organisations. BSL led the dissemination of these lessons from the project to a wide range of local, state and national level stakeholders in industry, education and training, and government. This enabled the project to contribute to the current national VET reform effort, and carry community innovation and community voices to government at a state and national level.

AgFutures: Supporting young people to start a career in agriculture

Early school exit and a challenging home life

Matthew (16) grew up in Warrnambool. Attending school online during COVID-19 made him feel like he was not that good at school. He found going back to the classroom challenging, and his mother supported his decision to leave school at the end of Year 9.

Matthew was engaged in a local work and study program. At this stage, Matthew had poor mental health and was unsure what he wanted to do. His case worker wanted to help him find something he was passionate about and so took him on an industry experience to a local farm. This was the first time Matthew had been on a farm as no one in his family worked in the industry and he had not received any information on or exposure to agriculture careers at school. The visit to the local farm motivated him to give farming a go and with support from his case worker, he signed up for AgFutures.

A supportive employer and time building confidence on-farm

Matthew and his mum met with the AgFutures operational staff in July 2023. Matthew did not have his driver's licence so his mum would drive him to and from work. This meant Matthew would need an employer that would enable him to work on days that his mum was unavailable.

As part of onboarding for the AgFutures pathway, Matthew had a meet and greet with a potential employer, Phill, who had a dairy farm located in Tyrendarra. Phill showed Matthew the dairy, calf shed and mill and explained the different jobs involved in running the farm. Entering the workforce for the first time, Matthew wanted to start slow and only work Friday and Saturdays.

Phill, as an employer wanting to support a young worker starting out in the sector, was willing to give him a go and Matthew started work only a week after the first meeting.

Being new and working on-farm for the first time, Matthew felt that he was not as good or fast as the other workers at milking. He often felt unsure about what he should be doing as tasks changed each day. To address this, the AgFutures operational staff spoke to Phill and asked if he could let Matthew know what tasks he should be doing each day. Matthew said that Phill sending texts before his shifts saying what tasks he needed to do helped to reduce his anxiety.

Matthew said it took about three months to get the hang of the different tasks on-farm. At the beginning he had found milking difficult, but it had become easier. He also felt less nervous asking his colleagues questions if he got stuck.

Becoming comfortable being in the classroom again

When training started, AgFutures operational staff observed that Matthew was withdrawn, did not speak in group settings and did not want to engage with the other young people. AgFutures operational staff found that working with Matthew one-on-one helped to build his confidence. The car rides with other young people to Glenormiston also helped Matthew feel less anxious and helped him form a couple of strong friendships.

As the months progressed, work on-farm became easier for Matthew. He built up strength for milking and received regular support and check-ins from Phill. The TAFE training also helped build new skills, like drenching, which made him feel confident as he did not have to ask Phill or his colleagues how to do it.

Matthew had three trainers during the TAFE component of the pathway. He said he connected with two of the trainers because they understood the young people's backgrounds, and they were easy to understand and helped him out when needed.

Matthew said that the TAFE training was 'way better than normal school and wasn't as stressful'. He said he was nervous for the first couple of lessons. He liked having the AgFutures operational staff in the classroom because they helped when he got stuck on questions. He also said, 'they always stayed positive even if we were having a bad day'.

Matthew enjoyed meeting the other young people participating in the AgFutures pathway. He enjoyed talking to them.

'I'd rather be doing this than anything else.'

At the end of the AgFutures pathway, Matthew was working five days a fortnight. The main tasks he was doing on-farm were milking and cleaning the dairy. He said the thing he enjoyed most was just being there and he enjoyed everything about working on-farm. Matthew said that milking was now a lot easier because he had built up the muscle memory. His role was now ongoing and he hoped to be working for Phill long-term.

AgFutures operational staff observed Matthew's confidence grow through participating in the AgFutures pathway. At the start he would not make eye contact with anyone and by the end he was joking around with everyone. AgFutures operational staff said that giving him the nickname 'Swampy' also helped get him out of his shell. They also observed Matthew start developing healthy habits.

The case worker from the work and study program also observed a significant change in Matthew over the AgFutures pathway. They had seen his mental health improve as a result of the routine of going to work and attending training. Matthew also spoke highly of his boss Phill and the connection he had to his colleagues. The case manager said that when talking about work Matthew had a huge smile on his face and participating in the AgFutures pathway had changed him as a person.

AgFutures operational staff observed Matthew's confidence grow through participating in the AgFutures pathway. At the start he would not make eye contact with anyone and by the end he was joking around with everyone.

AgFutures: Employers supporting innovation in local workforce development

A different approach to workforce development

The AgFutures project in Victoria's Barwon South West involved the local community in the design and delivery of an entry-level pathway that met the needs of local jobseekers and employers. The project operated on the principle that workforce development solutions are more effective when they bring together diverse expertise alongside community stakeholders, to co-design and co-deliver pathways that meet the specific needs of those in the region. It tested these ideas with local and national partners, designing and testing an entry-level training and employment pathway into the agriculture sector, aimed at young people facing barriers to education and employment.

Investing in the future

Employers in the Barwon South West were motivated to contribute to the design and delivery of AgFutures because they wanted to invest in the future of their own and the region's workforce.

This motivation to 'grow our own' was shaped by the agricultural industry's ageing workforce and, as one farmer emphasised, there 'hasn't been too many young people coming into the industry'. Employers joining the AgFutures project wanted to take an active role in rebuilding a homegrown agricultural workforce. They wanted to help local young people to feel there was a future for them working in farms across the region, and build their own careers as farmers – and, eventually, farm owners.

AgFutures aimed to provide experience in the agriculture industry to young people who had experienced barriers to education and employment, many of whom had no agricultural background. Employers viewed AgFutures as

an opportunity to give a local young person a chance, and to show them what the industry could offer. They recognised that the participating young person may decide that farm work wasn't for them, but still might find their passion in the broader agricultural sector. Even if in the long run a young person pursued interests elsewhere, employers wanted to support the development of professional skills that would aid them wherever their career journey took them.

In addition to supporting the next generation of agricultural workers, employers also saw involvement in AgFutures as an opportunity to develop their own skills for working with young people. As one local owner-operator of a beef farm said, the AgFutures pathway was an opportunity to gain management experience and develop their capability to work with new employees in a supported way.

Contributing to the design of the pathway

Local employers were involved in AgFutures from the very start of the project, playing a key role in its design. Their contributions came in several forms. Many contributed directly, taking part in consultations with project staff, or in a series of employer needs analysis workshops. These consultations and workshops provided employers with opportunities to identify their workforce and skill needs, their expectations as employers and to share their opinions on how a pathway for young people entering the industry should look. Other employers contributed indirectly through an online survey, which allowed them to provide information on their specific workforce needs.

The contributions of employers to the design phase were critical to the development of a pathway that not only met employer needs, but also adequately supported the young people who participated. Employers routinely raised the importance of farm safety, both for the training young people received and for the expectations placed on their employers. Those who had worked with young people in the past noted the importance of supporting young workers to develop good nutrition practices to keep up with physically demanding farm labour. Finally, employers were keen for young people to have a positive experience during AgFutures. This, they noted, required participating employers to be positive role models for young people, and support their employees' connection to the local community.

Employers and supporters of young people

A range of dairy and beef farmers employed AgFutures participants during the pilot delivery of the co-designed pathway. Participating employers included large-scale corporates through to small, family-owned farms where the employer was the owner-operator.

Employer involvement in the co-design phase was reflected in employers' satisfaction with the skills young people were being supported to develop. All employers who retained a young person on their farm agreed that the training they were receiving aligned with the tasks the young person was undertaking on-farm. Employers were equally satisfied with the quality of the training delivered by the local TAFE, noting that the young people were arriving on-farm with the skills required of an entry-level worker.

Employers also found it rewarding to support the development of young people who had no prior experience in the industry. Often employers found that the process of teaching new staff brought benefits to those already working on-farm, with one employer noting that having someone younger on-farm gave other workers the opportunity to learn through teaching. One employer reflected on the benefits of teaching his young worker went both ways. It was 'good to see his confidence grow', and, 'my confidence is growing' as well.

Lessons and positive experiences

Participation in AgFutures has led to changes in workplace practices for many employers. One, whose large-scale farm employed three participants, noted that taking part in AgFutures made them reflect on their recruitment and employee-support practices. They had since made a number of changes as a result of working with young people and youth specialist organisations. These included a formalised mentoring system and regular HR check-ins for new employees. All employers said the supports provided by the AgFutures operational staff were instrumental in the young people building confidence and sustaining employment. They aimed to continue instituting similar supports across the workplace.

Often employers found that the process of teaching new staff brought benefits to those already working on-farm, with one employer noting that having someone younger on-farm gave other workers the opportunity to learn through teaching.

Appendix B:
The Foundational Capabilities Pathway quick implementation guide

This is a short-form guide to the implementation of the Foundational Capabilities Pathway (FCP) model. It is intended to supplement, rather than replace, the long-form guide to the FCP – *Collaborative workforce innovation: a practice guide for developing a Foundational Capabilities Pathway built on lessons from the AgFutures initiative.*

What is the FCP?

The Foundational Capabilities Pathway (FCP) is a model and practice approach that enables a joined-up approach to workforce development focused within a specific community or region. It aims to design and test approaches that are fit-for-purpose for employers and jobseekers. Implementation of the FCP model will allow stakeholders to:

- identify the conditions and structures limiting the success of workforce development in a chosen industry and region

- design and deliver a pathway to support entry-level employment in the industry and region of choice, which meets the needs of local stakeholders and accounts for local conditions

- develop a set of key lessons from the design and delivery of the pathway that can support the improvement of workforce development practices and policy at a local, state and national level.

How does the FCP work?

The FCP is grounded in three core principles, place, partnership and breadth:

- **Place** recognises that workforce development solutions are most effective when they are responsive to the local circumstances influencing young people's engagement with education and employment.

- **Partnership** recognises that collaboration and connection between stakeholders and networks is essential for the design and implementation of approaches that can meet the needs of a specific region.

- **Breadth** recognises that, to account for the complexity of workforce development and the connected elements within the system, workforce development solutions need to be informed by a wide range of expertise and experience.

To operationalise these principles, the FCP practice approach uses mechanisms of **stewardship**, **governance** and **co-learning** across a four-phase model. The three mechanisms set the foundations on which the four phases are built. These mechanisms guide who is involved in the FCP, how they collaborate and how they involve local stakeholders and community.

Table 10   The four phases of the FCP model

Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4
Designing a training pathway that meets the needs of participants and stakeholders	Designing a model of delivery for the pathway that aligns with local capabilities and opportunities	Testing the efficacy of the designed pathway through delivery and adaptation	Supporting participant transition out of the pathway and codifying lessons from testing

Implementing the FCP model and practice approach

Stewardship

In contrast to project management approaches that focus on meeting a set of metrics, a stewardship approach of the FCP places responsibility on a group of organisations or individuals to align design and delivery with an overarching ambition and maintain that alignment throughout implementation. Stewardship is provided by the group of partner organisations, some of which are local to the chosen region, who work together to guide the initiative through the four phases, and who commit to accountability, responsibility and transparency. As an FCP aims to innovate new forms of youth-focused skilled pathways to work, partner membership should include expertise in four areas:

- A youth transition specialist with knowledge of best practice and connection to, and experience working with, local young people (e.g. a youth service provider, a youth engagement and development organisation).
- A workforce development specialist with knowledge and expertise in state and national level workforce development, including training and employment (e.g. a Jobs and Skills Council or a member of an Industry Advisory Group).
- An industry body with connection to employer networks and knowledge of local and national industry trends (e.g. an industry peak body).
- A training design and delivery specialist with a footprint in the chosen region (e.g. a TAFE, RTO or school).

Additional types of expertise can be included in the partner group to address the workforce challenges of a chosen industry in that region.

In most cases one organisation will serve as the coordinating organisation for an FCP. This organisation plays an administrative function to enable steady progression through the phases.

Governance

The implementation of an FCP is supported by core governance mechanisms that operate throughout the implementation of the model:

- A **strategic mechanism** through which the partnership group meets regularly throughout the FCP to enable decision-making and stewardship.
- **Reference mechanisms** with membership consisting of key local stakeholders (e.g. employers, young people) that provide expertise, advice and feedback on pathway design.
- An **operational mechanism** that is responsible for managing the delivery of the pathway so that it maintains fidelity to the co-designed model of delivery.

Co-learning

Co-learning, or collaborative learning, is a process in which multiple individuals or organisations learn or attempt to learn something together. Co-learning is an intended by-product of the stewardship and governance mechanisms described above. In addition, three explicit co-learning mechanisms support the cultivation of co-learning practices within the FCP: a community of practice (CoP), delivery monitoring and feedback loops.

A **CoP** is a group of people who have a common concern, set of barriers or ambition for change. They come together to share expertise, resources, experiences and best practice to help progress individual and group goals. A CoP meets to focus on a specific theme, set of issues or milestone, depending on the phase of the initiative. CoP events are organised by the stewardship group and/or coordinating organisation, with varying degrees of involvement from the community depending on its readiness and desire to contribute.

Monitoring enables real-time adaptiveness of the FCP model through the collection and use of evidence from testing the co-designed pathway during the delivery phase. The coordinating organisation collects data directly from those utilising the pathway and feeds it back to the strategic and operational governance mechanisms. This way, FCP members can ensure the experiences and voices of participants are included in co-learning and directly inform any adaptation to the design and delivery of the pathway.

Allowing regular and deliberate **feedback loops** throughout the four phases of an FCP is important for the conversion of information and evidence into lessons, and lessons into change. Feedback loops integrate lessons and insights from implementation into future decision-making. Feedback loops within an FCP can exist between the members of stewardship group, and between the various governance mechanisms.

Co-designing an entry-level pathway (phases 1 and 2)

The co-design phases of the FCP each follow a three-step process. The application of this process aims to produce two outputs: a co-designed training pathway and a co-designed model of delivery for the pathway, including participant supports. Though the outputs and phases are distinct, their development will often overlap, due to the iterative co-design process of the FCP. An iterative approach means that those stewarding the FCP gather evidence of local need and opportunity, test designs, seek feedback and refine what they have designed.

Step 1: From problem to solution

The first step of the design process is to stand back and identify real workforce challenges facing the focus industry. These challenges will vary from region to region and from industry to industry. They could include practices and attitudes, resourcing, information flows, curriculum, structural barriers and much more. Identifying challenges requires the stewardship group to build an understanding of the relevant workforce development systems involved and how they interact, as well as the chosen industry, region and any specific cohorts being targeted. Identifying the challenges they need to address allows the stewardship group to begin to ideate the high-level solution they are working towards; and develop a set of foundational objectives for the pathway. Using these objectives, the stewardship group can identify any gaps in the ideas that emerged from early design discussions. These gaps drive the next step of the iterative design process, identifying further questions to build the evidence base that will inform the design of the pathway.

Step 2: Evidence informing the solution

Design step 2 aims to ground FCP design in a deep understanding of local conditions and local workforce development systems. FCP stakeholders build evidence using diverse local sources of expertise and experience, which serves to refine initial design questions and test early assumptions about the design. They enable the stewardship group to identify the core practical considerations that will shape the design of the pathway and its delivery, including the needs and preferences of jobseekers and employers, and conditions that could affect their participation. This evidence is built through:

- the expertise of the members of the strategic mechanism
- the expertise of the members of the reference mechanisms
- direct consultation with community stakeholders
- direct consultation with cohorts targeted to undertake the pathway (e.g. local employers in the industry of choice, local young people).

Step 3: Designing the solution

Having posed and answered questions on what the pathway needs to do and what local conditions will shape the design, in design step 3 the stewardship group shifts its focus to how the pathway will address these needs in a way that aligns with conditions in the region. Regardless of the approach a partnership group takes to making design decisions, the aim of iterative co-design is to allow opportunities for design decisions to be tested and validated through the reference mechanisms, the CoP and wider community consultations. This process of feedback and refinement also enables the partnership group to identify where existing resources, efforts and initiatives offer opportunities for collaboration with an FCP, and to strengthen community buy-in.

By the end of this step the stewardship group will have a co-designed pathway and delivery model that has been tested and refined with the support of local stakeholders and is ready for delivery in the region.

Testing the entry-level pathway through delivery (phase 3)

Phase 3 of the FCP model is the adaptive delivery of the co-designed pathway. The FCP aims to improve workforce development approaches and outcomes for all stakeholders, particularly for jobseekers and employers. For this reason, a key focus of the delivery of the co-designed pathway is also testing how and to what extent it is addressing the challenges it has identified. Delivery and testing is guided by the strategic and operational mechanisms. The operational governance mechanism is responsible for overseeing the delivery of the co-designed pathway. The strategic mechanism is responsible for maintaining the alignment between delivery and the ambition and values of the initiative that were set out during the first step of design.

Considerations and practices that enable delivery and testing

Delivery will look different across each instance of an FCP, depending on the region, industry and design decisions. However, regardless of its design, several core considerations need to be made to enable the delivery of an FCP pathway:

- One or multiple organisations can be responsible for the **delivery** of the components of the pathway. Where possible, delivery should be the responsibility of local organisations.
- **Resourcing** for delivery encompasses all levels of the initiative, from decisions regarding staffing to enable delivery, to funding of individual components of the pathway, to the resourcing required for individual participants. As place-based initiatives, FCPs are able to draw on community resources to collaboratively deliver the pathway and support participants' journeys.
- **Awareness building** requires a network of local individuals and stakeholders who can spread knowledge of the pathway in the spaces that young jobseekers and employers use. Local partners and the governance mechanisms can play a key role by shaping the specific 'message' of the initiative for community.
- Effective **recruitment** practices are essential for ensuring that participants are the right fit for the pathway, and the pathway is right for them. This enables a more positive experience and stronger outcomes for participants.
- Testing the FCP has highlighted several practical considerations that influence the successful **support of participants** through training and employment. These include:
  - the reliability of methods of communication between participants and initiative staff
  - participant and employer awareness of upcoming initiative dates and milestones
  - participants' access to training and employment sites
  - materials and clothing participants may require for their training and employment
  - the availability of at-home internet access for participants to support training
  - induction to training and employment sites, including OHS awareness
  - clarity of employment expectations through employment contracts
  - participant nutrition during training and employment.

Co-learning and adapting in real time

Evidence building, co-learning and feedback loops are all mechanisms and practices that continue as an FCP moves into its delivery phase. They serve two main purposes. Firstly, they allow for the strategic and operational groups to monitor the degree of alignment between the design of the pathway and its delivery, and the conditions that are enabling and/or disabling that alignment. This enables the groups to monitor whether the pathway is successfully addressing the problems it was designed to solve. This information allows for real-time adaptation of the pathway to best meet the needs of participants and stakeholders and most effectively achieve its ambition. Secondly, they draw lessons from delivery to support the fourth phase of the model (see below).

Sustaining lessons from the innovation (phase 4)

The conclusion of delivery marks the point at which an FCP moves into its fourth and final phase. Participants are transitioned out of the pathway, and the stewardship group looks at ways to sustain the impact the FCP has made. It also provides an opportunity for those who have participated in a stewardship or operational capacity to take lessons from the implementation of the model and the pathway delivery.

Offboarding participants and post-pilot support

The FCP aims to gradually transition participants out of the initiative and away from pathway-related supports they may be receiving. This approach recognises that, although an individual may gain employment, it takes time for pay and stability to address barriers they may be facing, such as housing insecurity, transportation, community connectedness and mental wellbeing. Approaches to this transition draw on current youth transition best practice. This can include:

- having post-pathway check-ins with participants
- supporting participants into further study or employment
- connecting participants to career guidance professions to support career planning
- connecting participants to local support services if necessary.

Evidence building and co-learning post-delivery

Post-delivery evidence building is important to understand the ability of the pathway to achieve short and medium-term outcomes. Evidence building through monitoring and the CoP can lead to insight such as:

- understanding how the pathway helps participants secure ongoing employment post-delivery
- understanding how the pathway meets employer skill needs
- hearing about experience of the pathway and its individual components, and the way individual components and supports enable pathway completion
- providing understanding of community experience and ambition when drawing out the implications of the successes and challenges to delivery in the region
- identifying practices, relationships and structures in the community that enabled the implementation of the FCP and the delivery of the pathway.

Sustainability and sharing lessons

The final phase of the model aims to provide a space for partners and the stewardship group to identify and communicate the core sustainability lessons from the previous three phases and ways they might contribute to the strengthening of workforce development practices, policies and structures.

Appendix C:
AgFutures tools and resources

AgFutures expression of interest form

AGFUTURES
Participation Expression of Interest Form

Full Name

Date of Birth ___ / ___ / ___   Phone Number
DD   MM   YYYY

Email Address

Residential Address

Street   Town

Suburb   Postcode

Parent/Guardian Details (If you are under the age of 18)

Full Name   Contact Number

MORE INFORMATION ABOUT YOU

1. Do you hold a current First Aid Certificate?   No ☐   Yes ☐   Expiry

2. Have you had work experience in the last 6 months?   No ☐   Yes ☐

2a. If Yes: Casual ☐   Part Time ☐   Full Time ☐

3. On a scale of 1 to 5, how familiar are you with the agriculture industry?
Where 1 = Unfamiliar/No experience and 5 = Have worked in industry/family-owned farm

1 ☐   2 ☐   3 ☐   4 ☐   5 ☐

4. Have you previously completed any studies/qualifications in agriculture?   No ☐   Yes ☐

4a. If Yes: High School ☐   Certificate II ☐   Certificate III or higher ☐

5. Are you willing / able to travel to farm?   No ☐   Yes ☐

5a. If Yes: 10 - 20km ☐   20 - 30km ☐   30km+ ☐

5b. If No, would housing support be of assistance?   No ☐   Yes ☐

6. Do you hold a current driver's license?   No ☐   Yes ☐

6a. If Yes: Learners ☐   P Plates ☐   Full ☐

7. When are you available to start?

8. How would you like to be contacted?   Email ☐   Phone ☐

Office use only:

Pre-employment required?   No ☐   Yes ☐   If yes, briefly explain:

Comments:

AgFutures employer recruitment checks

Employer recruitment (for operational staff)

Stage	Step 1: Promotion and consideration	Step 2: Confirmation	Step 3: Onboarding	Step 4: Employment starts
Checklist: Engaging with employer	• First conversation, explaining offer supported by the flyer • Complete employer survey 1 • Farm visit and share the Handshake offer	• Complete employer survey 2 • Sign Handshake • Induction meet and greet with young person • Meet and greet follow-up conversation with the employer to confirm match with young person • Employment start date confirmed	• Give employer the employer handbook • Give employer timetable of touchpoints • Schedule a time for an induction visit for the young employee • Send a post-induction check-in message to the employer • Ask employer if they are willing to sign release form for marketing content	• Contact the employer within the first week of employment to discuss progress and needs • Check in with the employer every 2 to 4 weeks
Checklist: Documentation	• Document employer on master sheet • Save completed appraisal document to folder • Record all contacts and the date on master sheet • Add employer email to mailing list for the AgFutures newsletter	• Add to appropriate cohort sheet in database • Update cohort database to confirm completion of engagement activities	• Update cohort database to confirm completion of engagement activities	• Document check-in notes in the database
Checklist: Resources	• Employer flyer • Survey 1 link and email • Handshake offer flyer • FAQs	• Employer Handshake for signing • Survey 2 link and email	• Employer handbook • Email template for post-induction follow-up • Release form	

AgFutures youth participant checks

Young person recruitment (for operational staff)

Stage	Step 1: Initial contact	Step 2: Follow up	Step 3: Onboarding	Step 4: Employment starts
		No more than two weeks after initial contact This period may go on for several weeks until they are ready to be on-boarded	No less than three weeks prior to commencement of pre-employment	No less than three weeks prior to employment commencement
Checklist	Young person has expressed interest in participating: • Document young person's interest in the database • Record contact information and the date of contact • Send participant a youth flyer with further information • Add young person email to the AgFutures newsletter mailing list	Young person is ready for a discussion about specifics: • Discuss AgFutures and the commitments for pre-employment, training and employment • Discuss young person's educational and employment background to determine which pre-employment activities are required • Discuss young person's support needs regarding pilot coordinators • Complete expression of interest form with the young person	Young person is preparing to commence employment on-farm: • Invite young person to an in-person onboarding session • Support completion of AgFutures onboarding paperwork • Support completion of Certificate II online sign-up with SWTAFE • Provide a copy of the young person handbook • Schedule an induction • Introduce young person to their employer during the induction visit • Complete the pre-pilot survey	Young person is starting employment: • Contact the young person within the first week of employment to discuss progress and needs • Check in on the young person every 2 weeks • Document check-in notes in the database

Youth participant eligibility checklist

Participant name: _____

	Yes	No
Is the participant aged between 17 and 25?	☐	☐
Does the participant live in the South West Region?	☐	☐
Is the participant available for the full AgFutures journey of study and placement (6+ months)?	☐	☐
Is the participant currently attending school? (If they are preparing to leave school within the next two months, the participant may be eligible. Speak to the AgFutures team to confirm.)	☐	☐
Has the participant previously studied agriculture (for example VET in Schools / TAFE Certificate II)? (If they have done a partial or some taster training but not completed a Certificate II they may be eligible. Speak to the AgFutures team to confirm.)	☐	☐
Has AgFutures been thoroughly explained to the participant (Contact the AgFutures team in a farm visit, guest speaker or other exploration opportunity is needed.)	☐	☐

■ Eligible ■ Not eligible ■ Further consultation required

Is the young person eligible?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Comments: _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

The AgFutures 'Handshake'

Thank you for being part of AgFutures

The Employee Handshake lays out the three-way commitment between yourself, your AgFutures employer and the AgFutures delivery team. By signing, you agree to undertake the commitments outlined below to the best of your ability and understand the commitments that your employer and the AgFutures team have made to you. This is effective from the signing date to the end of 2024.

After signing, we understand that circumstances can change. We ask that any change be clearly and promptly communicated and agreed upon with a member of the AgFutures team prior to any final decision being taken which may negatively impact participants.

You (the young person) commit to:

- Participating in a tailored pre-employment program before starting work on their employer's farm.
- Completing accredited training with AgFutures training partner.
- Completing first aid training prior to starting work on their employer's farm.
- Following the direction of farm managers and supervisors.
- Showing commitment to build on their work readiness and technical skills and share their employer's work ethic for the industry.
- Participating in the AgFutures evaluation with the Brotherhood of St. Laurence research team.

The AgFutures employer agrees to:

- Employ a young person on-farm for 6 months in an entry-level role.
- Host a young person for an agreed work shadowing session in their month leading up to commencing employment. Minimum 3 hours, can be up to 3 days.
- Release the young person for one day per month to attend TAFE for training, logbook review and assessment.

- Provide a safe environment for young people to work and develop their farm skills.
- Provide appropriate personal protective equipment for their young employee.
- Provide an opportunity and mentor the young person to grow into the industry.
- Attend a 2-day youth mental health first aid course. Course dates will be offered after signing.
- Participate in the AgFutures evaluation with the Brotherhood of St. Laurence research team.
- Ensure project staff are informed of any issues which may arise during the course of the young person's employment.

The AgFutures team will:

- Provide a handbook for all employers that includes resources for onboarding, inducting and supporting their new employee.
- Provide youth mental health first aid training.
- Provide a dedicated AgFutures Youth and Employer Engagement Officer to support you and your employer throughout the 6 months of employment and for 6 months after that.
- Host events and networking opportunities to connect with employers and young farm workers to share experiences and build connections.
- Refer employers to online professional development modules through local organisations.
- Continue to evaluate, adjust and adapt to necessary changes as part of the AgFutures innovative purpose.

I have read the above and agree to the role I will play in the AgFutures initiative, and understand the role my employer and AgFutures staff will play

Name _____

Signature _____

Date _____

Employer appraisal form

Employer appraisal form

Employer name:

Employee development (How does the farmer invest in employee development and growth? Are there opportunities for training and further career growth?)	**Flexibility and adaptability** (How does the farmer respond to changes? Are they ready to adjust the employee's schedule, release for the one-week block training later? Are they open to new ideas and innovation?)
Farm's culture (Does the farm have a healthy work-life balance? Consider employee turnover, feedback from others.)	**Management and leadership style** (Is the farmer is open to communication, do they encourage employee feedback, motivate employees?)
Clear expectations and communication (Does the employer understand that they are employing a young person who might require additional attention/support?)	**Diversity and inclusion** (Does the farm offer a diverse and inclusive workplace that allows young people to experience a broader range of perspectives and fosters an environment that celebrates individual differences?)

Questions to support employer appraisal

1. Are there opportunities for training and further career growth?
2. How does the farmer promote a work-life balance while supporting career development?
3. Is there a culture of mentorship within the farm?
4. How does the farmer support employees to reach their career goals?
5. Does the farmer offer flexible working hours?
6. How does the farmer handle unexpected changes or challenges in the workplace?
7. What steps does the farmer take to support employees to balance their workloads during busy days?
8. Are there regular team meetings or check-ins to discuss progress and address concerns?
9. Are employees encouraged to share their ideas?
10. Is the farmer ready to adjust the employee's schedule, release for the one-week block training later?
11. What efforts are made to create an inclusive work culture where all employees feel valued and heard?
12. Does the farmer actively support initiatives to improve diversity and inclusion in the industry?
13. What steps does the farmer take to ensure a welcoming and inclusive onboarding process for new employees?
14. Does the farmer have a gender/age preference while hiring a new employee?
15. Are there employees who were employed at the farm for several years?

Participant appraisal form

Participant appraisal form

Participant name:

Young person readiness for study	Young person readiness for on-farm employment
(Have we established the readiness of the young person to participate in the technical training?)	(Have we explored housing, transport, previous work experience?)
Young person's support network	**Clear expectations and commitments**
(Have we recognised the support network required for the young person to participate (parents, guardians, case workers)? Do we need to consider referrals and additional wraparound supports?)	(Does the young person have a clear understanding of the AgFutures journey and their commitment to participate? Do we have concerns?)

Approved for participation (based on above appraisal)	Yes	No	Unsure

Pre-employment recommendations

Questions to support participant appraisal

1. How did you develop an interest in Agriculture?

2. Have you had any influences in the industry that have made you choose this path?

3. What is your previous and current work experience?

4. How did you hear about AgFutures?

5. Have you thought about how you will manage your training at Glenormiston?

6. Are you set up to be able to study? (Do you have a USI number / computer / internet connection?) If not, how can this be supported?

7. How do you feel about starting a career in Agriculture – where do you see this taking you?

8. How will you manage your current lifestyle to fit 'on-farm' work?

9. Are you happy to undertake on-farm safety studies?

10. What is one thing you love about working?

11. What is one thing you dislike about working?

12. What does workplace flexibility mean to you?

13. What is one thing you would like your new employer to know about you?

14. Do you like the idea of face-to-face and hand-on learning?

15. What do you hope to gain from this experience?

Collaborative workforce innovation

A practice guide for developing a Foundational Capabilities Pathway built on lessons from the AgFutures initiative

David Longley and Kira Clarke   2025