

# **Rural Cluster University Partnerships**

*(Rural School Centre of Teaching Excellence)*

## **Background Information**

2011

## INTRODUCTION

This Information Booklet has been developed to support rural education communities and pre service teacher universities to work in partnership to enhance the learning opportunities and outcomes of young people in rural communities through:

- involvement of pre service teachers in a whole of community practical experience
- the provision of professional development for both cluster and university personnel
- the opportunity to undertake research

The “Rural Cluster University partnership” approach is one of four key elements of the Rural Educators Network – a holistic framework aimed at supporting the recruitment and retention of quality teachers in rural communities.

CEP believes it is important to encourage pre service teacher universities and rural cluster of schools to work in partnership to encourage pre service teachers taking up teaching positions in a rural community – and hopefully remain within these rural communities.

The Information Booklet provides the framework upon which to build a partnership between a rural education cluster and a pre service teacher university and outlines a number of steps to assist in ensuring that the partnership is successful.

It is based on previous work undertaken by CEP through similar approaches such as:

- the Yarrawonga Placement project
- the Ararat Practicum project, and
- the last three years of Rural Cluster University partnerships

CEP hopes that this information be extremely useful in assisting rural education communities to develop strong partnerships with pre service teacher universities.



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Executive Officer



## BACKGROUND

In 2007, CEP Inc undertook extensive investigation of how a more co-ordinated approach could be developed to support rural communities in recruiting and retaining quality educators and education leaders within their communities. This investigation explored:

- the previous projects co-ordinated by CEP
- approaches operating in other states of Australia
- strategies being developed overseas, especially in countries such as Canada and the UK.
- approaches being undertaken in other professions that service rural communities – especially in health and local government.

CEP especially explored in depth the approaches undertaken within the health system to support the employment of doctors, allied health workers and other health professionals within rural and remote communities. While these strategies have been developed on a national level, CEP believes that the experiences and learnings from this alliance could be invaluable in the development of strategies and approaches to address similar issues within the rural and remote education sector.

As a result of these investigations, it developed the “Rural Educators Network” in 2007 which incorporates four key areas of focus:

- Developing strong partnerships between pre service teachers, and rural clusters of education communities.
- Supporting new graduates within rural communities.
- Developing staff recruitment and retention approaches specific to rural and remote locations.
- Ongoing, relevant and “rural friendly” professional learning opportunities for educators, education leaders and principals.

Over the past three years, the Rural Educators Network has had a focus on the areas of rural school cluster and university partnerships and supporting new graduates within rural communities. CEP has provided a support and brokerage role within these initiatives.



During these three years the specific rural school cluster and university partnership program has involved:

- over 180 pre services teachers
- 12 rural school clusters
- 5 universities across 9 campuses

These partnerships have resulted in approximately 40% of the participating pre services teachers gaining teaching positions within rural communities.

While each partnership has its own focus to reflect the rural cluster community, the partnerships are centred on three key activities:

- the involvement of a team of pre service teachers in a practical experience within a rural cluster – whole of community experience.
- the support and provision of professional development involving rural cluster; university and pre service teachers
- the opportunity to undertake research or data collection.



## AIM AND OBJECTIVES

To enhance the capacity of rural clusters in delivering quality learning through the development of partnerships with pre service teacher universities.

Within this overall aim the Rural Cluster University partnerships are encouraged to focus on a number of key areas including:

- building the capacity of rural clusters to develop and provide quality learning for their communities
- identifying a curriculum area of focus for the partnership
- supporting the involvement of teams of pre service teachers in gaining “real” experiences within rural settings through working with a rural cluster both within the cluster schools and their wider community
- utilising the expertise and knowledge within cluster schools and universities to support pre service teachers learning and support the professional learning of teachers within the cluster schools.
- building links between pre service teacher universities and rural school clusters within areas such as pre services teacher practical experiences; university staff expertise being available to rural clusters; utilisation of school staff in university programs; research; and professional development
- sharing the skills and knowledge that exist in both school clusters and universities to enhance the learning of school students and teacher trainees
- linking pre service teachers practical experiences to their ongoing learning within universities.
- supporting the professional development of teachers within rural school clusters.
- providing the opportunity for research



## KEY ELEMENTS OF RURAL CLUSTER UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIP

The partnership approach comprises a number of key elements to ensure the best outcome is achieved for all partners.

### **1. Rural Cluster**

A cluster of rural schools working together to form a partnership with a teacher training university to especially allow pre service teachers to gain a broad experience of the variety learning settings within a rural community.

### **2. Focus of Partnership**

The development of a focus area for the partnership - identified by the rural cluster. This could include a curriculum area; school improvement; student support; or cluster area of inquiry.

### **3. Whole of Community**

This is an area specific to the involvement of pre service teachers.

To ensure that they are provided with a true rural education experience, teams of pre service teachers are housed together within the cluster for the time of their involvement.

They are also encouraged to participate in the activities of the community outside of school hours.

### **4. Pre Service Teacher Teams**

Teams of pre service teachers work within the rural cluster.

The team approach allows for peer support, reflection on learning and the opportunity to develop a team approach for involvement within the cluster.

### **5. Professional Development**

Through the partnership formed, and the identification of a focus area by the rural cluster, opportunities will be explored to provide professional development for university staff; cluster staff; and pre service teachers.

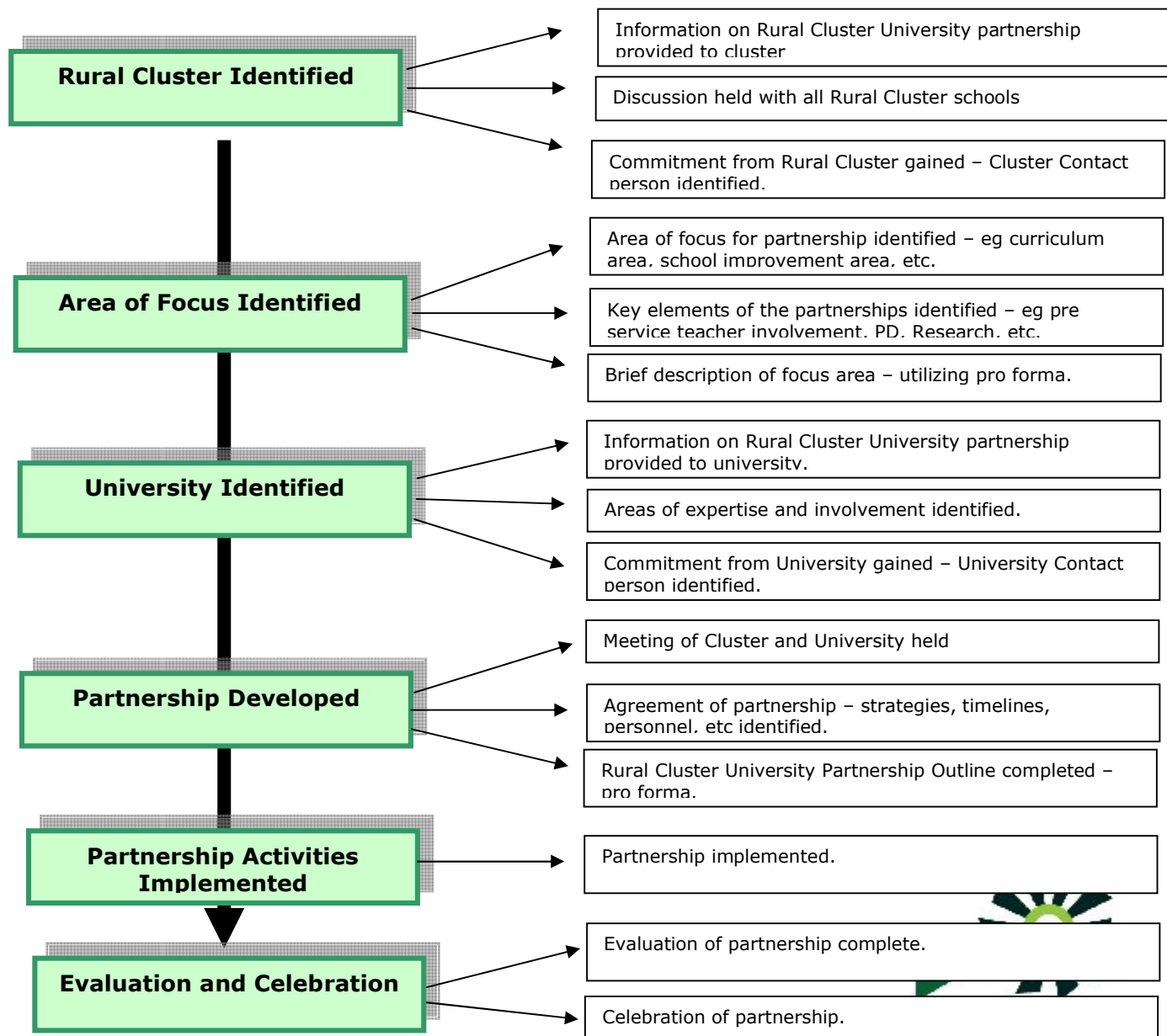
### **6. Research**

The partnership also allows for the undertaking of research activity around the focus area identified by the rural cluster.



## DEVELOPING THE RURAL CLUSTER UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIP

The following diagram provides an outline of the steps that CEP believes are important in forming and implementing a successful partnership.



## ROLES OF PARTNERS IN RURAL CLUSTER UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIP

To ensure the successful development and implementation of a Rural Cluster University partnership approach, there are a number of key roles that have been developed for each of the partners.

From the learning's gained in previous projects, a number of these roles have been outlined below.

### ***Country Education Project***

- provide information sessions for personnel from the rural cluster and university regarding the Rural Cluster University partnerships approach.
- facilitate the discussions at both the rural cluster and university levels in developing the partnership
- facilitate individual partnership meetings
- promote the partnership to staff, student teachers, leaders, etc.
- support access to support incentives and possible scholarships
- provide links to key people and organizations.
- track partnership progress and effectiveness
- support in the collection of data
- facilitate follow up sessions post partnership with all stakeholders
- facilitate an evaluation and document learning and outcomes

### ***Rural Cluster***

- Development:
  - provide a "cluster contact" for the cluster, and a "mentor" in each of the cluster schools to support the partnership.
  - identify an area of focus for the partnership and allocate resources to support the activity across the cluster
  - be involved at the University level if appropriate; eg guest speakers
  - be involved in any evaluation and celebration events.



- Rural Cluster Contact Person
  - provide a “cluster contact” person to co-ordinate and facilitate the partnership on behalf of the cluster
  - communicate with the cluster community and other stakeholders to keep them informed and maintain their support for the partnership
  - communicate regularly with university contact person
  - arrange the required support for teacher trainees (eg accommodation, travel, work areas, etc) using a whole of community approach:
- Pre Service Teachers
  - include and support pre-service teachers involvement in the school and community that enable them to gain an understanding of how rural schools and communities function
  - provide suitable working spaces, ICT and other infrastructure for the team of pre-service teachers
  - provide opportunities for pre service teachers to be involved in professional development, education initiatives, and learning provided through the cluster
  - support pre-service teachers and supervising/mentor teachers meeting with university staff to reflect on practice and plan activities
  - provide opportunities for pre service teachers to be involved in rural community activities and experiences
  - provide support and information to pre service teachers on teaching within rural education settings
  - promote the rural opportunities for employment to pre service teachers.
- Professional Development
  - support the involvement of teaching staff in any professional development activities organized.
- Research
  - support cluster teachers to be involved in research activities conducted in tandem with the partner university



## **University**

- Development:
  - liaise with CEP, and the Rural Cluster, in the development and management of the partnership.
  - meet regularly with cluster contact person and pre-service teachers to monitor partnership
  - identify ways in which the university can proactively support the partnership. Eg personnel, resources, expertise, etc.
  - explore different ways to support pre service teachers experiences and involvement within rural contexts;
  - disseminate information on University systems to partnership
- University Contact Person:
  - identify academic and administration staff to be the “rural experience contact”
- Pre Service Teacher Involvement:
  - promote the partnership to prospective pre service teachers
  - support the development of practical experiences that are rural friendly and responsive to the focus of the rural cluster
  - structure course delivery in ways that integrate the educational theory and practicum components – explore different ways of achieving this.
  - explore the potential for the use of digital learning approaches.
  - allocate teams of pre-service teachers to the rural cluster
  - ensure that the work of any staff engaged in the partnership is integrated at the school and university level to enhance delivery
  - support practicums structured so that pre-service teachers experience working within a rural education community over an extended period of time.
  - visit pre service teacher team as required.
- Professional Development:
  - provide training on mentoring as required
  - involve cluster staff in university learning where appropriate.
- Research:
  - support research activities identified by the partnership



### **Teacher Trainees**

- willing to participate in all aspects of the partnership initiative – including teaching experiences, professional development, research, etc.
- willing to travel to be involved in the partnerships
- willing to work as a team with other pre service teachers
- willing to live away from home and in a shared arrangement
- flexible with teaching approaches and requirements
- prepared to participate in the “whole” rural experience
- explore the potential of digital learning in enhancing rural education provision.

### **Rural Partnership Coach:**

*(This is a role that has been developed specifically for the Rural School Centre of Teaching Excellence pilot clusters – the role is not a Project Co-ordinator.)*

- support the professional learning and teaching development across the partnership focusing on the identified cluster curriculum area
- facilitate forums, workshops, meetings to allow all partners to reflect on learnings and practice and to explore future possibilities.
- support and enable opportunities for all partners to engage in professional development



## **RURAL CLUSTER UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIP OUTLINE**

The following pro forma has been developed as a guide to detailing the focus and various aspects of the partnership.

It is strongly recommended that each partnership complete this pro forma as a tool to develop and manage the partnership.

### **1. Rural Cluster**

- a. Cluster Name:*
- b. Cluster Contact Person:*
- c. Cluster Schools:*
- d. Brief Background of Cluster (including schools and community):*
- e. Key Focus Area for Cluster:*

### **2. University**

- a. University Contact:*
- b. Course/Courses:*
- c. Involvement of Personnel (areas of expertise to support area of focus):*



### 3. Partnership Plan

The table below is a way in which each partner will be involved in the Rural Cluster University partnership. Within the table, detail the various activities and roles each partner will be involved as part of the partnership.

a. *Specific activities of each partner:*

	<b>Cluster</b>	<b>University</b>	<b>Pre Service Teachers</b>
Practical Experience of Pre Service Teachers			
Professional Development			
Research			

b. *Timelines*

c. *Resources Required (both financial and personnel)*

- i. *Supporting Pre Service Teacher Trainees*
- ii. *Professional Development Support*
- iii. *Research Projects*

