

Final Report

Advancing women's leadership across the Australian horticultural sector

Project leader:

Dominic Meachen

Delivery partner:

Women & Leadership Australia (WLA)

Project code:

LP16000

Project:

Advancing women’s leadership across the Australian horticultural sector (LP16000)

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Level 7

141 Walker Street

North Sydney NSW 2060

Telephone: (02) 8295 2300

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Public summary

Over a five-year period, the project ‘Advancing women’s leadership across the Australian horticultural sector’ aimed to offer 100 scholarship supported places in Women & Leadership Australia’s leadership development courses to women leaders across the Horticulture industry. The intention of the project was to increase visibility and momentum for women to lead in the sector, build the leadership capabilities and networks of women working in the sector and help to ensure the industry remains productive, competitive and profitable.

The courses which were offered as part of this project are aimed at junior, middle and senior leaders and focus on applied, work integrated learning contextualised to the needs of the individual. During the courses, which range in duration from 4 – 12 months, participants undertake a range of activities designed to build leadership capacity and capability. Women from the horticulture industry participated in these courses alongside women from a wide range of industries and sectors and in so doing were also able to build supportive professional networks and promote the important work undertaken within the horticulture industry.

Keywords

Leadership; leadership development; women’s leadership; gender equity; professional development; networking;

Introduction

The Workplace gender Equality Agency (WGEA) estimates the agriculture, forestry and fishing industry is heavily male dominated with only 33.7% of the workforce being women. This statistic, combined with other factors such as an ageing workforce, limited access to formal leadership training and declining interest in studying horticulture means that it is hard for women to progress within the sector. This has a knock-on effect whereby young women are dissuaded in pursuing a career in horticulture due to a perceived and actual lack of opportunities in the sector.

The overall objective of the project ‘Advancing women’s leadership across the Australian horticultural sector’ was to assist women who work in the horticulture industry to access high-quality and relevant leadership education, thereby increasing the leadership capabilities of women working in the sector and helping to ensure the industry remains productive, competitive and profitable.

As part of the project, four key objectives were articulated which the development programs would assist in achieving:

1. Build the leadership skills of women working across the Australian horticulture sector by providing affordable access to a range of women’s only leadership programs
2. Expand the professional networks of women working in the Australian horticulture sector via participation in a women’s only leadership program which attracts participants from a broad range of industries
3. To provide a ladder of programs which enable women to develop their leadership skills as they progress through their career
4. Increase the level of educational attainment for women working at a senior level in the Australian horticulture sector.

Methodology

Leadership courses offered by WLA under this project

During the five-year project women from the horticulture sector were offered jointly funded partial scholarships to support their participation in three of Women & Leadership Australia’s development programs. Each year a promotional campaign was undertaken by Women & Leadership Australia and Hort Innovation to promote the programs and scholarships to suitable candidates across the horticulture sector.

Under this project, over the five-year duration, 100 jointly funded scholarships were made available to women leaders across the industry at three key levels.

- 50 Early career and aspiring leaders’ scholarships
- 25 Intermediate level leaders’ scholarships
- 25 Senior and executive level leaders’ scholarships

The Co-Funding Arrangement

The project set up a co-funding investment model where both WLA and Hort Innovation contributed a pre-determined pool of funds for women in the horticultural sector to access WLA courses. The intention was that each year, 20 women working in the horticultural sector would be able to access high-quality, practical, multi-industry leadership training for substantially less than the standard cost.

Under the co-arrangement, each year ten scholarships would be offered for the Leading Edge program (LE), five scholarships would be offered for the Executive Ready program (WER) and five would be offered for the Advanced Leadership Program (ALP).

It is important to note that along with the remaining course fee balance, successful scholarship recipients (or their employer) did have to pay for travel and accommodation associated with attendance of the face-to-face components of their course. This however has not been the case since 2020 as all WLA courses have been delivered online meaning a further reduction in cost to the participant or their employer.

Annual Campaign Approach

Each year, the project involved a range of activities that underpinned a sound and structured methodology:

Activity	Approximate Timeframe
Marketing and promotion of the co-funded scholarships to all women working in the horticulture sector. WLA to provide Hort Innovation with the relevant brochures, application forms, email copy and press release materials as part of this arrangement. Digital assets (eg. website banners, social media tiles) will not be provided by WLA.	August - September
WLA to receive and manage enquiries and applications from interested applicants	August - September
Nominate applicants to Hort Innovation	October
List of successful applicants finalised	October
Inform successful/unsuccessful applicants of outcome	November
Administration, support and training of successful applicants	Whenever next intake is available

Selection Process and Criteria

1. All course/scholarship applicants initially completed a program application form and submitted this to Women & Leadership Australia’s Admissions Department.

2. Each application is assessed for program suitability. Criteria used to determine suitability include:

- How long the applicant has been in their current and previous management roles
- How many people they have reporting to them

- Their perspectives on leadership and management in general
- Their perspectives on their own leadership style
- Their vision for future leadership within their organisation
- Career aspirations and how they see the course assisting with this.

3. Scholarship application forms were then assessed for suitability. The suitability of a scholarship is determined based on the following criteria:

- One of the 20 scholarships per year for horticulture women are available
- The applicant’s personal situation is such that WLA feel that the applicant, their organisation and their sector will reap the benefits of the applicant’s greater leadership capacity
- They have not received a scholarship from WLA previously
- They have the right to legally work in Australia
- They are not a member or employee of WLA.

4. Once the deadline had passed for applications being received WLA assessed all of the applications and identified the applicants that they think are most suitable.

5. WLA then passed these applications to Hort Innovation to work collaboratively on finalising the approved applicants.

6. WLA then informed the successful/unsuccessful applicants accordingly.

7. Successful applicants then commenced their respective courses throughout the first half of the following year.

Marketing/promotional activity which accompanied each year’s campaign

For each of the five years, throughout August, September and October WLA undertook a range of marketing and promotional activities to promote the scholarships including:

1. Email messaging to an existing WLA horticulture database
2. Promotion via WLA’s social media channels
3. Email promotion via WLA’s membership platform
4. A scholarship landing page was also created on the WLA website: [partnership with Hort Innovation](#)
5. Media releases were distributed some of which were picked up in [The National Tribune](#), the [North Queensland Register](#) and independent online news site [Mirage](#)

In addition, WLA undertook an annual targeted email and phone campaign across a growing list of industry partners and associations. Over the years, a significant number of these agreed to support the initiative and send detailed information about the funding to their members. Listed below are some of the associations and organisations which supported the campaigns.

- Australian Macadamia Society
- Avocados Australia
- Bowen Gumlu Growers Association
- Growcom
- Apple and Pear Australia
- Australian Table Grape Association
- AUSVEG
- Hazelnut Growers of Australia
- Australian Honey Bee Industry Council
- Australian Lychee Growers' Association
- Australian Mangoes
- Australian Nut Industry Council
- Berries Australia
- Custard Apples Australia
- Passionfruit Australia
- Australian Lavender Growers Association
- Australian Seed Federation
- Dried Fruits Australia
- Australian Chamber of Fruit and Vegetables Industries
- Australian Olive Association
- Fruit Growers Tasmania
- Fruit West
- Onions Australia
- Permaculture Victoria
- Pistachio Growers Association
- Tasmanian Beekeepers Association
- Almond Board of Australia
- Chestnuts Australia
- Citrus Australia

Results and discussion

2021 Scholarship Funding Results

Prior to this year’s campaign scholarships had been awarded to 20 ALP, 20 Executive Ready and 30 Leading Edge participants. Therefore, during this year’s scholarship campaign a maximum of 5 ALP, 5 Executive Ready and 20 Leading Edge scholarships was available.

The total co-funding amount that was available throughout 2021 was \$165,889, which includes the remaining Apple/Pear Levy of \$1,774. In addition to this year’s total funding of \$165,889 an additional \$12,000 was also available via a one-off Vegetable Levy and \$6,000 via a one-off Potato Levy. These levies were intended be used to cover the full cost for participants from the Vegetable and Potato industries.

Throughout the 2021 campaign we received strong interest in the funding although not quite as strong as in 2020 which was our strongest year. In total, we received 84 applications in 2021 compared with 152 in 2020. From the applications we received, 15 were initially interested in Leading Edge, 4 were interested in Executive Ready and 6 were interested in the Advanced Leadership Program. The other 59 applicants were unsure about which program would be best for them.

As in previous years, Hort Innovation approved each applicant prior to them being awarded funding. In the 2021 campaign, 1 application was rejected as the applicant was deemed unsuitable for the program at this time. As in previous years a small number of applications were rejected as they came from organisations outside of the Horticulture industry.

In total 26 women were approved for funding in 2021 – 5 Advanced Leadership Program participants, 5 Executive Ready participants and 16 Leading Edge participants.

Of the total funding amount available for 2021 (\$165,889), \$147,703 was successfully allocated through the campaign. The WLA contribution was \$108,000, the Hort Innovation contribution was \$39,703.

In addition to this, one full ALP scholarship and one full Executive Ready scholarship (totaling \$9,596) were awarded from the Vegetable Levy. Unfortunately funding from the Potato levy was unable to be used as no applications were forthcoming.

- The Apple/Pear Levy of \$1,774 was not allocated.
- The potato Levy of \$6,000 was not allocated.
- \$9,596 of the \$12,000 Vegetable Levy was allocated, leaving \$2,404 unallocated.
- \$16,412 of the total funding pool remains unallocated. The WLA portion of this is \$12,000 and the Hort Innovation amount is \$4,412.

Program Delivery for participants commencing in 2022

Due to the ongoing situation with COVID-19 and the associated health and safety risks, in 2022 all WLA’s programs will again be delivered as fully online experiences. This continues to be a positive result for women working in rural or remote areas that may not have previously been able to travel to a major city to participate in a face-to-face program.

Interest In Scholarship Funding Over the Project

Over the five years we have seen a steadily increasing interest levels in the scholarships and courses. 2020 remains by far the strongest year in terms of scholarships awarded, applications and interest. Possibly this is due to the fact that in 2020 the scholarships were opened up to non-levy paying organisations meaning a wider number of organisations were eligible. Additionally, in 2020 all courses were run as fully online experiences due to COVID19. This may have allowed a greater number of women from regional and remote locations to consider participation in the courses.

Campaign year	Applications
2021	84
2020	152
2019	78
2018	58
2017	64

Overall Scholarship Funding Results

Over the five years the intention was to allocate funding to 25 ALP participants, 25 Executive Ready participants and 50 Leading Edge participants. Since the initiative began in 2017, a total of 96 women from the Australian horticulture sector have been awarded a scholarship supported place on a WLA leadership development course.

- 25 Scholarship supported places have been awarded to the Advanced Leadership Program
- 25 Scholarship supported places have been awarded to the Executive Ready Program
- 46 Scholarship supported places have been awarded to the Leading Edge program

The below chart shows the current status of the 96 scholarship supported places:

Status	Number of women
Awarded a scholarship supported place on a WLA leadership program	96
Have completed 80% or above of program and been awarded a completion certificate	53
Have participated in a program but have not completed 80% or above and have not been awarded a completion certificate	14
Have cancelled out of the program	2
Have yet to commence or complete a program	27

Outputs

The focus of this project was to help support the growth and development of women across the horticulture industry. To this end, Women & Leadership Australia provided access to three of its flagship leadership development programs and all course related content and activities.

The Advanced Leadership Program

The Advanced Leadership Program is a high-impact and challenging developmental experience for elite female leaders. Over a career-defining, twelve-month journey, participants engage in a deep exploration of their own strengths and weaknesses as they relate to building and leading highly effective organisational communities. Purpose designed to stretch experienced leaders beyond their comfort zone, the ALP challenges participants to develop their critical thinking abilities and begin to unlock their full leadership potential.

The Executive Ready Program

Executive Ready is a seven-month leadership and career accelerator purpose designed to stretch mid-level leaders and rapidly propel them towards executive level performance, behaviours and mindsets. The program challenges participants to see themselves, their responsibilities and their opportunities with fresh eyes, enabling and inspiring them to achieve career and life goals. The significant emphasis on applied learning ensures participants rapidly enhance their leadership abilities along with their capacity and confidence to take on increased responsibility.

The Leading Edge Program

Delivered part-time over four months, Leading Edge is designed to enable the transition of aspiring and early career female managers into confident, capable and motivated leaders. The program equips participants with the knowledge and behavioural insights required for successful leadership, embedding and functionalising new learnings as real-world behaviour and action.

Program Learning Intentions and Modules

Course	Duration (part-time)*	Suitable For	Modules
Advanced Leadership Program (ALP)	12 months	Senior managers, directors, executive level women	Mindful Leadership; Presence and Communication; Building Resilience; Foundations of Empowered Teams; Building High Performance Teams; Strategic Leadership and Innovation; Leading Change; Career Focus
Executive Ready (WER)	7 months	Mid-level managers and leaders	Leadership and Authenticity; Team Dynamics; Communication, Presence and Influence; Team Dynamics; Driving Performance; Leading Innovation and Change; Strategic Thinking and Organisational Learning; Purpose, Priorities and Professional Development
Leading Edge (LE)	4 months	Aspiring talent and emerging managers	Foundations of Contemporary Leadership; Effective Interpersonal Communication; Feedback: The Performance Enabler; Emotional Intelligence and Conflict; Supporting Team Performance; Leading in Times of Change

Program Learning ethos

Women & Leadership Australia's suite of market leading programs provide best of breed leadership development and immerse participants in an experience informed by the complexities and opportunities of being a female leader today. Through a deep understanding of the needs of female leaders at every stage of their journey, we have created a rich and empowering learning environment which is geared to enabling each participant to achieve their own unique vision of success.

The WLA Leadership Suite encompasses a series of targeted development interventions aimed at key milestones in the leadership journey. Each program is carefully engineered to reflect the challenges and opportunities commonly associated with that stage of development and to provide the knowledge and skills commensurate with elevated performance and growth.

Our programs are designed to engage female leaders in highly interactive, peer-oriented development environments. During the programs, activities are undertaken which develop participant connections; allowing cohorts to develop into tightly knit peer networks. The strong group dynamic which exists within our programs is fundamental to their success and greatly enhances the learning process.

Our programs deliver practical learning outcomes designed to be immediately applicable within a professional environment, as such they are most beneficial when undertaken in conjunction with regular workplace responsibilities and commitments.

Learning methodology

Women & Leadership Australia’s learning methodology draws on three interwoven learning philosophies

- Dialogic Learning
- Applied Work Integrated Learning
- Reflective Learning

Dialogic Learning emphasises learning in which dialogue is both the objective and the mode of active learning in collaborative learning environments. Dialogic learning is central to an open, democratic and egalitarian learning setting where everyone can be heard and learning happens among participants (not ‘to’ them). Dialogic Learning should be collective (with everyone encouraged to contribute and participate), reciprocal (as much about listening to others as telling them something), supportive (free of fear of ‘errors’), cumulative (with discussion chains across and deeper into particular ideas) and purposeful (focused on working towards particular goals and objectives).

Applied Work Integrated Learning (WIL) works from the notion that learning that is drawn from and then re-embedded in real work contexts is much more likely to be rich, practical, meaningful and memorable. Based on the themes and challenges engaged within the ongoing coursework, participants are provided with (or build on their own) practical tool kits to take back into their regular work contexts, and are regularly prompted to re-connect and reflect on what they are noticing, applying and accommodating in their real work lives.

Reflective Learning involves considering past and present work and life experiences in the context of trying new things or re-evaluating one’s beliefs, mindsets and behaviours. Reflective Learning is essential in accommodating new ideas, information and experience.

Dialogic Learning underpins rich reflection on applied work-integrated learning and peer interactions. The combination of these elements creates a very powerful learning methodology and is the foundation of WLA’s approach to leadership and applied management development.

Program Completion requirements

WLA’s leadership courses are non-accredited professional development courses and as such do not have formally recognised completion requirements or assessments. There are however a number of basic completion requirements that WLA applies to all its courses to ensure participants get the maximum benefit out of their experience.

- Minimum 80% attendance at workshop days and online sessions
- Successful completion of 80% of applied workplace tasks and activities
- Meaningful participation and collaborative contributions to discussions and activities.

Monitoring participant engagement

Our Program Delivery Coordinator (PDC) team is an essential component to WLA’s continued success. Along with the learning experience itself, this is an important component that drives very high satisfaction and completion rates across all our programs. Our PDC team employs detailed checklists to ensure that program participants remain engaged, actively supported and nurtured throughout the entire learning cycle. All participants are taken through a guided and involved support process as they work through their course. Should participants fall behind in their course significant effort is employed to get them back on track.

Outcomes

The positive economic and social outcomes associated with this type of project are not easily measured however, in terms of measurable outcomes that can be identified as resulting from this project:

Outcome	Alignment to objectives	Description	Evidence
436 expressions of interest/applications for funding received	Build the leadership skills of women working across the Australian horticulture sector by providing affordable access to a range of women’s only leadership programs	This clearly demonstrates a strong desire from women within the industry to participate in these types of opportunities	Applications received via dedicated landing page hosted on WLA website
96 women from the Australian horticulture sector awarded a scholarship supported place on a WLA program	Build the leadership skills of women working across the Australian horticulture sector by providing affordable access to a range of women’s only leadership programs	This clearly demonstrates a strong desire from women within the industry to participate in these types of opportunities	Course enrollments over the five years
All 96 women have been registered into mixed industry courses and have undertaken their course as part of a cohort of 25 -30 women from a wide range of organisations and industries	Expand the professional networks of women working in the Australian horticulture sector via participation in a women’s only leadership program which attracts participants from a broad range of industries	The intention is to help ensure that women from the horticultural industry that undertake a WLA courses will be better connected to a wider network of multi-industry professionals. These women will learn different perspectives and strategies from a diverse and talented community, which they will then take back into their industry	As an illustration of the diversity of our cohorts, in the last 2 years program participants have come from 33 industries. All participants actively network with and learn from a very diverse and dynamic group of passionate and engaged women. Anecdotal feedback from participants across all courses clearly points to the strong connections/networks they

			build as integral to the learning journey. Learning from and supporting each other is a fundamental ethos of the WLA experience
Over the course of the project 25 women have joined a senior leadership development course, 25 women have joined a mid-level leadership development course and 46 women have joined a junior level course	Provide a ladder of programs which enable women to develop their leadership skills as they progress through their career	Since the project began, we have seen an encouraging trend with applications being spread over all three program levels. This is a very positive outcome for the project and clearly demonstrates an ongoing need for leadership development interventions across multiple levels. It is also pleasing to see that women across the Horticulture industry are stepping into leadership and moving upwards in terms of seniority. This is a positive indicator for the long-term outlook on leadership across the industry	Course enrollments over the five years
All graduates of the Advanced Leadership Program and graduates of the Executive Ready Program also have an opportunity to benefit from WLA’s academic partnership with Deakin University and gain credit points towards the Master of Business Administration (MBA) course	Increase the level of educational attainment for women working at a senior level in the Australian horticulture sector	Our partnership with Deakin University ensures that our participants have a streamlined and achievable pathway to further education via an accredited advanced degree qualification	WLA/Deakin academic pathway model

Impact of the programs on participants

WLA program feedback is anonymous and therefore it is impossible to provide specific feedback for each participant. In 2021 WLA partnered with ORIMA Research to explore the impact of our leadership development programs. We surveyed more than 300 graduates from our three flagship programs: Leading Edge for aspiring and early-career leaders, Executive Ready for mid-level leaders, and the Advanced Leadership Program for senior and executive leaders.

We asked our graduates how their participation in our leadership development programs had affected their professional and personal lives. Here’s a snapshot of what they told us:

- Nearly 9 in 10 graduates surveyed (89%) told us the program gave them the confidence to advance to a more senior level of leadership.
- For 78% of our graduates, completing the program helped improve their career progression.
- More than 9 in 10 graduates surveyed (92%) told us the program helped them lead change in their workplace.
- 78% of graduates said their ability to provide effective feedback improved.
- 76% of graduates said their ability to manage conflict improved.

Participant feedback

Over the course of the project, we have received ad-hock feedback from participants about their experience. Included below are some examples.

- *“So incredibly grateful for the opportunity to be a part of the Leading Edge course by Women and Leadership Australia. It came at a time where I had been feeling I needed to grow on my skills and knowledge to progress in my career, but I didn’t know where to start. What a fantastic introduction into the world of leadership. I’ve gained so many skills and insights that are just so relevant and useful, personally and professionally. I feel like a different person than I was at the start, and I am so thankful”. – Ariana Potamianakis*
- *“Making the jump into a formal leadership role is exciting yet challenging, and the Executive Ready program provided a wonderful opportunity to develop the skills and understanding of being an effective leader. For myself it was about developing the tools and confidence. Since completing the program I feel empowered in leading a team, coaching others and leading innovation and change in my organisation. I thoroughly enjoyed attending the workshops and having the opportunity to grow alongside a group of women who were genuine and compassionate. Moreover, managing the workload between other commitments was achievable and required on average three hours per week, the key was to be proactive and set aside time”. Ashley Schott*
- *“The best part of the program is definitely the peer coaching and the relationships I have made with all the women. Also, I really enjoyed module 3 Reinforcing Resilience and Wellbeing for this time of my life (working part-time with travel and being the primary carer of 2 small children). I have found the peer coaching to be transformational for me as it helped coax out what my adaptive leadership challenge was which has been instrumental in bringing a succession plan into place for the family business. Personally, it has been great for me to put work into who I am, what I want to do at this point of my life and what I need to do to get there”. Kate Shaw*



Dear Hort Innovation,

I wanted to take the time to thank you for the invaluable opportunity and scholarship provided to take part in the Women in Leadership Early Entry Career Program.

As of Monday 3rd May, the course has wrapped up and with very coincidental timing, I have had my title change from Co-ordinator to Manager to reflect the remit of work this very same day. The course has truly been an invaluable experience to not only increase my awareness and understanding of others, however gain greater perspective and direction on my own qualities as a leader.

My role title change and development as a leader would not be without the skills, confidence and knowledge learnt throughout the course. My biggest takeaway from the program was understanding how to effectively engage with a multitude of people styles in order to collaborate and ensure each person in the team is putting their best foot forward.

Thank you again, for taking the time to read my application and award a scholarship for the program - I am truly grateful for the opportunity you have given me.

Kind Regards,

Natalie Schuster
Trade Marketing Manager



One Harvest ABN 52 067 682 875
63 Tile Street, Wacol Qld 4076 Australia | PO Box 180, Ellen Grove Qld 4078 Australia
Telephone (07) 3712 3800. |

Monitoring and evaluation

The project was monitored and evaluated on an ongoing basis by both Hort Innovation and WLA as part of a continual assessment process. This information was included in six monthly milestone reports compiled by WLA and sent to Hort Innovation.

The information that was reported on for each year’s campaign was:

- timeframes of particular year campaign
- activities undertaken to promote particular year campaign
- number of applications/enquiries received for co-funding
- number of participants that had completed, were completing or were registered to start courses
- any ad hoc feedback received from participants

On the whole the project seems to have been effective and successful however over the five-year timeframe significant staffing changes as well as major organisational/structural changes within WLA have meant that the continuity of management of the project has been very disjointed and may have been impacted. The impact of COVID19 and resulting changes in program delivery methods may also have impacted the project in terms of participant interest and enquiries particularly in 2020 and 2021. It is recommended that if future projects are considered perhaps shorter overall timeframes could be considered.

Recommendations

Women & Leadership Australia and Hort Innovation have seen great outcomes from this project with many of the participants gaining significantly from their involvement in the programs both in terms of skills development and increased support networks. Based on WLA’s recent research into the impact of our programs we have identified that 76% of graduates have actively sought to help another woman advance in her career since their involvement in the program. This strongly suggests that through the horticulture industries program graduates, this learning will continue to impact the industry for many years to come and will also contribute to greater awareness and momentum around gender equity.

There is however still much work to do to continue to support women leaders and to improve gender equity in leadership across the horticulture industry. Women & Leadership Australia is committed to continuing to support the development of women across the horticulture sector and hopes to be in a position to continue to partner with Hort Innovation in this critical work.

It is therefore recommended that Women & Leadership Australia and Hort Innovation continue to collaborate to explore new ways to support women across the industry following completion of this project.

Intellectual property

No project IP or commercialisation to report.