

# RURAL MANAGEMENT CHALLENGE



## *Participant Manual*

Get ready to learn more about YOU,  
your team members and your council!

“ IF IT DOESN'T CHALLENGE YOU,  
IT DOESN'T CHANGE YOU ”



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## Welcome

Congratulations! You have been selected as a member of your Council's team in the LGMA Rural Management Challenge. You and your fellow team members are about to embark on a highly rewarding experience.

You will have the opportunity to:

- stretch yourself out of your comfort zone in an encouraging and supportive environment;
- get to know people from your council who you may not know very well, or at all;
- learn more about what local government does;
- work and network with local government professionals from other councils;
- learn how to work with people with very different skills, experience, knowledge and approaches; and
- gain greater confidence in your abilities, further develop your communication, negotiation and influencing skills and refine your leadership skills.

The day will be challenging, maybe a little scary as you move outside your comfort zone, exciting and fun!

## What is the Challenge?

The LGMA Rural Management Challenge is a professional development activity. Teams of four people are given a range of council related tasks and activities to complete using a diverse range of management and leadership skills. Some of these tasks and activities may be familiar to you, others will not – which is one of the benefits of the Challenge.

Each team is given a Pre-Challenge Task, which is assessable and required to be undertaken and completed before Challenge Day. This will involve a specific task, requiring research or preparation on a particular topic.

The Pre-Challenge Task is the opportunity for the team to work together, honing your communication, problem solving and decision-making skills. Understanding each person's strengths; areas they would like to develop through the experience; how they like to interact, whether they look at the big picture or are more focused on the details, how they manage differences of opinion and how they manage time.

There are several parts to the Pre-Challenge Task, all designed to help you prepare for Challenge Day. Teams that use the pre-challenge phase well, find Challenge Day to be a more rewarding experience. Good preparation enables your team to concentrate on getting the maximum learnings from each task, rather than trying to navigate interactions between team member's and different approaches.

## Team Mentor's Role

Each team will have a Team Mentor to assist them in preparing for the Challenge and in debriefing the learnings and helping to create professional and personal action plans.

A Team Mentor is a support person and will provide:

- Encouragement and support;
- The benefit of their experience;
- Assistance with access to specialist skills within your council;
- Guidance on what to expect and the approach to take on Challenge day;
- A conduit for information between the team and the Challenge Facilitator; and
- Most importantly, assistance in the debrief phase of the Challenge to extract the learnings and development areas for both the team and each team member.

The Team Mentor is NOT a member of the team and is not the team leader. Their involvement in the pre-challenge phase is to help the team, through a range of activities, to identify strengths, areas of development and to provide feedback on their observations of team interactions and dynamics.

The Team Mentor is encouraged to attend the Challenge as a support person. This allows the Team Mentor to provide meaningful post-challenge feedback, based on their observations throughout the day, help the team to reflect on the experience and how to maximise the learnings by translating these back into the workplace. The Team Mentor will also have an opportunity to observe other teams and to utilise these observations as part of the debrief process.

## Team Preparation

A critical component of the Team Mentor's role is to guide and support the team through a range of activities designed to assist the team to identify the team processes that will work best for them throughout the Challenge experience. The teams who use this time well, obtain a lot of benefit from the experience, far beyond the actual Challenge.

The activities are designed to help identify the team's unique strengths and areas of development and in the process learn how each person likes to communicate, whether their preference is in the detail or the big picture, whether they use logic and facts or feelings and intuition to make decisions and whether they prefer a structured or a more relaxed approach to managing time.

It is through the diversity each team member brings to the experience, that provides the team with the ability to approach any task on Challenge Day with confidence. It is irrelevant whether the team members have an in-depth knowledge about a particular task (and in a lot of cases you will not have the content knowledge).

What is important is how the team uses the collective knowledge of the team and exploring the issue from each person's perspective, which will allow the team to achieve great results.

After you have completed some of the team building activities with the Team Mentor, then the team should approach the Pre-Challenge Task as a great opportunity to learn more about your organisation, your team members and basically test out your processes (leadership, communication, problem solving and decision making), before you arrive at the Challenge.

Often there is a temptation to dive straight in and become totally task-focused, to the detriment of the team formation. It is highly recommended that you start the preparatory process before you start on the Pre-Challenge Task.

The completed Pre-Challenge task involves a number of components. Once completed, the Pre-Challenge Task is to be emailed [by the team](#) to the Challenge Facilitator as per the date and time provided in the Pre-Challenge Task instructions.

If the team has any questions relating to the Pre-Challenge Task, contact the Challenge Facilitator and obtain clarification. Obtaining clarity on tasks is not part of the Team Mentor's role!

## Challenge Day Venue (Extremely Important Information!)

The Challenge is hosted by a Queensland Council in one of their facilities e.g. shire hall. Venues will vary and the team will need to be flexible and adaptable to what will be available on the day.

The venue will have:

- an allocated area with tables and chairs for each team;
- access to a single power point; and
- tea, coffee and lunch.

Your team area will NOT contain:

- a data point/telephone access;
- extension leads or power boards;
- data projector for individual team use;
- whiteboards; or
- computer equipment, printers etc.

## What to bring to the Challenge

- Recommended
  - At least one laptop (maximum of four) with Windows, Microsoft Office Word, Adobe reader; have a working USB port; and up-to-date anti-virus software;
  - A mobile broadband device (to send tasks via email to the facilitator)
  - A small printer
  - Whiteboard if desired;
  - Butchers paper or flipchart paper and marker pens;
  - Pens, paper (A4 writing pads), other team stationery;
  - Extension leads and power boards (remember you may only have access to one power point);
  - Snacks and water. Teams will NOT stop for a morning or afternoon break. Bringing your own snacks allows you to eat as convenient for your team. There will be tap water available to refill your water bottles throughout the day.
  - You will be provided with lunch but not morning or afternoon tea.
- Optional
  - Data projector. we cannot guarantee that there will be a blank wall in your team area to use to project from a data projector. There will be a central data projector in the plenary area. You will need to request usage of this projector from the Challenge Day Facilitator.
  - Information and other resources as your team determines necessary (use common sense);
  - Any personal or medical needs of team members.

## What to expect on Challenge Day

On Challenge Day you will be greeted by the Challenge Facilitator who will welcome and direct you to your allocated team area. Each team will have around 30 minutes to unpack and organise their team area.

The Challenge will begin with a brief introduction by the Challenge Facilitator and then each team will have the opportunity to 'creatively' introduce themselves to the rest of the teams. This is a great opportunity to start the day with a bit of fun and in a way that expresses the uniqueness of both your team and your council.

The Facilitator will provide a broad overview of the day, along with some hints and tips to gain the maximum from the experience.

Then the fun begins! Tasks will either be delivered via paper or USB. Further instructions will be provided by the Facilitator on the day.

Lunch is a great opportunity to get to know people from the other teams. You never know that one conversation over lunch may give you a wealth of knowledge that you can take back to your own council.

Your team can expect a diverse range of tasks. These may include some or all of the following:

- Dealing with staff issues, negotiations with other staff, elected members, managers;
- Written material e.g. reports, media releases, action plans, flowcharts, proposals;
- Presentations, interaction with visitors (i.e. role-playing characters);
- Facilitate forums, community meetings, mock Council meetings;
- Expect the unexpected!

## Getting the most out of the experience

- Enjoy the experience, have some fun at the same time;
- Time invested in team preparation will pay off on Challenge Day. How you, as a team, will respond and manage tasks should be a key focus of your preparation.
- Be clear about how you will communicate, problem solve and make decisions when time is tight, and you are feeling out of your comfort zone. This will be the difference between managing the challenges positively vs being reactive and potentially missing vital information or opportunities.
- If you are involved in a role-play, treat it realistically. Just be yourself and prepare to perform as a management team to the best of your abilities. Think about what it means to be an effective leadership team.
- The journey of the Challenge is more beneficial than the destination. Decide as a team what success looks like. The most successful teams are the ones that are committed to learning and being part of a team that works together to face the challenges. While there is a competitive element to the Challenge, experience shows that the teams that come with the intent to win – don't and therefore miss a fantastic opportunity to learn and grow in a variety of ways.
- BE prepared but resist the temptation to pre-empt what the tasks will be on Challenge day. Focus your preparation on how your team will deal with responding to an unknown number and style of tasks on the day.
- If you get a task that seems outside the team's skills and experience, STOP, take a breath and break it down to smaller pieces – the observers are looking at how you manage the unknown, the process you go through to brainstorm, problem solve and make a decision. Look at the tasks from as many perspectives as you can, and you will be on the right track.

### Most importantly:

- Read the task description and instructions on Challenge Day very, very carefully! As a team, put yourselves into a real-life situation in Council and consider and discuss what you would do to manage the issue **from a senior leadership perspective** – don't provide a cursory response. As in real life, not all the information will be contained in the task description/instructions – consider each issue beyond the obvious.
- Take note of the amount of time given between when you receive the task and when it is due. The longer the period of time, the more in-depth response is required.
- Enjoy yourselves and don't stress, it will be a challenge – but you are more than up for the challenge!
- Don't forget to Celebrate at the end of the day and congratulate yourselves and each other for a job well done!

## Evaluation

The Challenge Facilitator and several observers will evaluate the teams, using pre-determined criteria throughout the day. Where possible, different observers will watch and evaluate each team to provide a balanced viewpoint.

Evaluation, on Challenge Day, will be on the observable aspects – your approach to a task, your communication and interpersonal skills, the degree of input from each team member, your project planning and time management, conflict resolution and presentation skills, as well as how innovative, creative and inclusive the team’s problem solving, and decision-making processes were.

After the Challenge, the Challenge Facilitator will evaluate any written material.

The teams will therefore be evaluated on both the Observables (how you perform in relation to each task) and the Deliverables (what you hand in to be assessed).

The Challenge Facilitator will provide overall evaluation and development feedback via the Team Mentor within two weeks of the Challenge. The report will provide feedback on each task. The intent of the feedback is to provide a further development opportunity. The report is not about being right or wrong, it is simply an opportunity to see where there may be gaps in the team’s knowledge or current experience and to make suggestions on what other approaches or factors could have assisted the team in completing the task.

## Participant Checklist

Participants are encouraged to use this checklist to ensure that all aspects of their role in relation to the Challenge are completed.

### Pre-Challenge:

1. Read the Participants’ Handbook carefully. Pay particular attention to information about the venue and what to bring to the Challenge.
2. Keep a positive and open mind in relation to the team preparation process, which your Team Mentor will guide you through.
3. Accept full accountability for what happens to your team.
4. Think about how you can best work with a group of peers to achieve a good team outcome.
5. Consider what your measures of success will be, both as a team and as individuals.
6. Use the Pre-Challenge Task to test your team processes (how you communicate, how you problem solve and make decisions) and discuss what adjustments may be needed in preparation for the Challenge. Remember, we often revert to our usual approach when under pressure, which may be different to what the team needs on the day.
7. Be creative, innovative and willing to take risks.

### Challenge Day:

1. Be positive and have FUN.
2. Focus on the learning potential which comes from the Challenge.
3. Don’t get carried away with wanting to win. It’s really not that important!
4. Read the task and instructions very carefully and consider what the outcome of the task may be. Look beyond the superficial – don’t just answer the question – look at the issue from all perspectives and incorporate this into your response.
5. Approach all tasks as if they are real (remembering you are the Senior Leadership Team on the day)!



6. Look at opportunities to step outside 'the way we always do things' – the Challenge is an opportunity to really explore different approaches and perspectives.

### Post-Challenge:

1. Use your Team Mentor to conduct a full debriefing session (remember to focus on your success and not just on winning – also focus on team processes, rather than specific tasks).
2. Think about what the Challenge experience means to you personally in terms of strengths and development needs.
3. Complete the Personal Action Plan, which will be provided to you by your Team Mentor. Consider discussing your development needs with your Manager or CEO.
4. Seek to identify (with the team) opportunities to leverage off the Challenge experience for broader organisational benefit.
5. Arrange a briefing session with the CEO and/or senior management team to discuss the Challenge experience, the learnings and opportunities for organisational leverage.
6. Be sure to thank your Team Mentor. Provide them with feedback on how they performed their role, as the Team Mentor role is also a great development opportunity.

## Challenge Facilitator Contact Details

The Rural Management Challenge is a unique experience and a highly rewarding one, if you approach the Challenge with an open mind, a willingness to try different things and to listen to different ideas and approaches and generally step outside of your comfort zone. Your motto could be 'feel the fear and do it anyway!'.

If you would like any further clarification, please contact the Challenge Facilitator:

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