



RFCS future focus

June 2007 no. 14

Grants application process for 2008-11 funding period

The Office of Rural Financial Counselling will conduct a grants application round later in 2007 to select the service providers who will deliver rural financial counselling services across Australia for the next funding period from 1 July 2008 to 30 June 2011. Like the process run in 2006, this will be a competitive grants application process, with grants awarded on the basis of (among others) value for money, past full compliance with government grant conditions, and appropriate management skills and qualifications.

The exact timing for the grants process is yet to be finalised but it is expected to be advertised in September. More information about the grants process for 2008 will be available over the next few months.

Small businesses - who is an eligible rural financial counselling client?

In November 2006, the Australian Government extended Exceptional Circumstances (EC) drought relief to small businesses that derive at least 70% of their income directly from farm businesses. For the purposes of drought relief, a small business is defined as employing **up to 100 staff**.

Rural financial counsellors should note, however, that under the RFCS Program's definitions, a 'small rural business' is a business with **up to 10 employees**. Counsellors should not, therefore, provide assistance to businesses that employ more than 10 people. The rationale behind this is that a business employing more than 10 people should be able to pay for an accountant or other financial help and should not need free government assistance with applications, financial analysis, business options or negotiations with lenders.

Small businesses with more than 10 employees could consider consulting a small business field officer, who can provide free general advisory services and access to government assistance and information. Small business field officers can provide information about business diversification, preparing for export, home-based business, e-commerce, taxation and finance. For more information, visit www.ausindustry.gov.au or phone the AusIndustry hotline on 13 28 46.

The Australian Taxation Office (ATO) can help taxpayers who derive their income from drought-affected areas and who are finding it difficult to meet their tax debts due to the impact of the drought on their income. Assistance can include more time to lodge and pay tax debts and activity statements (without incurring charges), paying tax debts by instalment and fast tracking refunds. For more information, phone the ATO on 13 11 42.

Diary note: Executive officer workshop and forum for chairs, September 2007

There will be a workshop for executive officers and a forum for chairs of service providers in Canberra in September 2007. Dates are as follows:

Executive officer workshop:	Monday 3 September to midday Wednesday 5 September
Crossover session for EOs and chairs:	Afternoon of Wednesday 5 September
Forum for chairs:	Thursday 6 September

Information about travel, accommodation, venues and programs will be sent to all invitees in the near future.

National workshop for rural financial counsellors in 2008

A national workshop for rural financial counsellors will be held early in 2008 (probably around March). We had originally intended to hold the event late in 2007 but have decided that, as the remaining six months of 2007 are shaping up to be extremely busy on every front, it is best to defer it to next year.

Certificate IV in Business (Governance)

Board members seeking training in corporate governance might like to consider undertaking the Certificate IV in Business (Governance). This training will be paid for by DAFF on receipt of a tax invoice.

You can find more information about the course at www.ourcommunity.com.au/certificateiv

Building a better board

The ourcommunity website has some excellent information about non-profit boards. The site includes sample policies, how-to guides, newsletters and information about how to be a good board member. For more information, visit www.ourcommunity.com.au/boards/boards_main.jsp

From the ARC helpdesk

May reports

Before the end of June, we will release a patch to fix the problem we had with the May report. The patch will update the ARC database to collect all data for June as well as May during the 'save to DAFF' period of 1-7 July.

Logins for administrative assistants

In the weeks ahead, we will also release another patch that allows administrative assistants' time and activity to be recorded. This means all administrative assistants will need to log in under their own username and password. If you enter data into ARC and do not have your own username and password, please contact your executive officer. Your executive officer will fill out an ARC new user registration (available at www.rfcs.gov.au/admin). When this form is completed, signed and faxed back to us, we will give the user access to ARC.

This patch will also update the ability to report non-client activities for rural financial counsellors in the service profile report sent to executive officers every month. As this is a major change to ARC reporting, we will send details and user manual updates to executive officers before the patch is released.

Backups

It is imperative to backup your data on a regular basis so please make sure you are familiar with your service's backup procedure. The ARC installation default creates a folder in your 'My documents' folder called 'ARC'. Within this folder there are three subfolders, one of which is called 'Database Backups'. This is the default location for ARC backups. You should copy this folder to an external source (eg CD, DVD or external hard drive) and store the backup offsite.

NEWS

Disaster Assist website—The Australian Government Disaster Assist website gives individuals and families access to information about recovery assistance following a disaster. Here you can find up-to-date public information messages, freecall numbers, information on Australian Government Assistance Packages and links to other websites and information. Visit www.disasterassist.gov.au

FarmBis e-newsletter (3rd edition)—The third edition of the FarmBis e-newsletter is now available. The newsletter has news about the AAA FarmBis program from around the states and a snapshot of the horticulture industry with some case studies about the use of FarmBis in this industry. To view the newsletter, visit www.daff.gov.au/agriculture-food/aaa/farmbis/e-newsletters

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