

RURAL AMBASSADOR AWARDS

Strategic Review



“

The program was exceptional. It was an amazing experience that throws you right out of your comfort zone so that you become confident and able to speak publicly without a worry in the world. Highly exceptional people run the show also.”

–State Finalist



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Background

Summary

The Rural Ambassador Award is a trans-Tasman competition that highlights and celebrates young people who have a genuine interest in rural and regional Australia or New Zealand. The Award aims to provide an opportunity for these young people to promote rural communities and industries, as well as to be involved in promoting the importance of agriculture and food production. The Award serves to identify and recognise the next generation of leaders who have a strong commitment to agricultural industries or a genuine interest in the agricultural show movement.

The Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment has awarded Agricultural Shows Australia (ASA) a grant as part of the Supporting Agricultural Shows and Field Days program to support the resilience and sustainability of its national Rural Ambassador Award (Award) in 2020 and 2021. The expected outcomes of the grant activity is a strategic review of the Award (including standards for selection, brand awareness, relevance of competition and recommendations for its improvement) and support for the affiliated state entities through tailored, effective brand awareness and engagement campaigns to increase the number and calibre of entrants and elevate the profile of the national ASA Rural Ambassador Award.

Approach

This scope and plan was approved by the ASA National Rural Ambassador Working Group, comprising representatives from each state country show affiliate, capital city royal shows, as well as past and present Rural Ambassadors. An independent consultant was appointed to research, facilitate workshops and produce a national strategic review with recommendations on improving brand awareness, engagement, the overall experience, leveraging the existing alumni community, as well as improving relevance to the agricultural industry whilst broadening the appeal of the Award to a larger audience of participants, sponsors and supporters.

Over a period of four months a series of individual interviews, workshops, surveys and research were conducted with entrants, organisers, and sponsors of the Rural Ambassador Award.

Each state was asked to provide at least four representatives with varying perspectives on the competition (namely a recent winner, recent finalist, organiser of the competition and a senior representative of a responsible organisation, usually the overseeing royal or country shows entity) to attend one of seven 2.5 hour online workshops.

[Note: Northern Territory did not attend these workshops and have since informed ASA that they will not proceed with the competition in the short term. New Zealand representatives only participated in the state finalists workshops. New Zealand have since informed ASA that, due to travel restrictions and uncertainty surrounding covid, they will not be sending a representative to the 2021 national competition.]

Process

Step One

Interview a minimum of four individuals per state including:

- A person who is operationally responsible for the state competition (i.e. a staff member, project manager or chaperone);
- A person who is organisationally involved in the state competition (i.e. the relevant councillor, committee president et al);
- A recent finalist of a state competition (within the last 5 years);
- A recent winner of a state competition (within the last 5 years).

Step Two

Interview a diverse cross-section of state finalists who participated in the last five years; send a broader survey to finalists who participated in the last ten years.

Step Three

Survey broader (non-show) agricultural and rural industry members on their awareness of the competition including state and federal government representatives.

Step Four

Interview sponsors on their involvement with the competition.

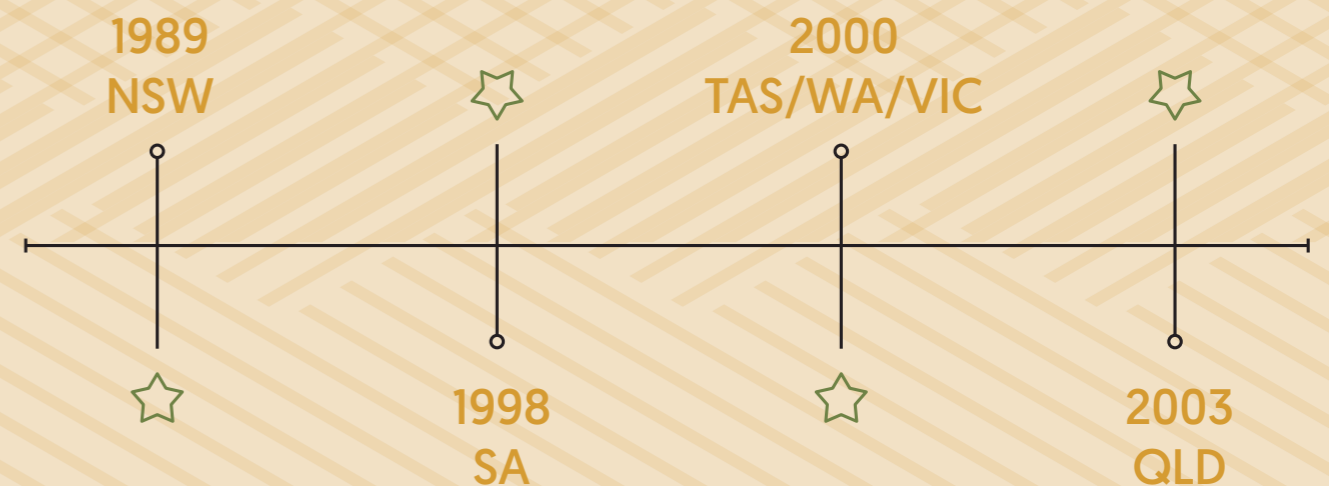
Step Five

Deliver strategic review to ASA.

“We’re sowing seeds of future leaders of the show movement, we’re creating longevity.”
– *Victorian workshop participant*



Timeline of state competitions



Executive Summary

High level findings

1.

A cohesive national marketing strategy addressing four core audiences: prospective entrants, sponsors, shows and industry professionals will elevate awareness, broaden the entrant pool and increase support for the Award.

2.

A structured approach to post-Award activities for winners and finalists is required to get the greatest mileage for the investment, and should include industry, show and sponsor engagement as well as promotional opportunities over twelve months.

3.

Finalists should be encouraged to articulate a plan for how they would use the Award platform should they win, and what message they would deliver, and thereafter supported to execute that plan to industry, the show movement and decision-makers.

4.

An alumni database needs to be created and maintained at a national level, with a strategy around ongoing engagement with this vast network of impressive leaders, with a view to engaging them as ongoing advocates of the Award.

5.

Engaging a national sponsor would assist in covering national Award related costs including travel and accommodation, as well as a uniform to achieve greater visual recognition, as states do not all fund these for finalists.

6.

The Award experience is lacking in several states and this should be rectified to ensure that finalists across Australia are given the greatest opportunity to grow, network, learn and become engaged in the show movement.

7.

Longer term, consideration may need to be given to alternate pathways to state finals due to inconsistent local show interest in hosting a Rural Ambassador competition.

“The aim of the competition is to promote an individual through the whole show movement, in the hope they will continue to contribute at a local level.”

– *Tasmanian workshop participant*

The Rural Ambassador Award is highly regarded by participants and organisers. Alumni over the years have achieved noteworthy feats and made significant contributions in agriculture, rural industries, community, the show movement and beyond.

The program seeks to create succession and connection for future leaders in agriculture and shows. The decision by most states to host the program at their state’s capital city royal shows and host a robust program of activities instils an appreciation of the magnitude of the show movement and its relevance, the roles of the people involved and the opportunities afforded to young leaders.

State finalists learn from each other and from their exposure to royal-level competitions fostering ideas they can take back to their own local show. There is strong anecdotal evidence of finalists going on to drive positive change at their local shows and in their communities.

Experience

Across the nation, participants rate the experience highly. Each state delivers a unique version of the Rural Ambassador Award spanning from one to eight days, and this results in varying experiences for participants. Finalists speak positively of the formative experience of Rural Ambassador. The process increases their involvement with shows, creates professional opportunities, personal networks, increases personal confidence and public speaking and broadens their knowledge of rural and agricultural industries. In recent years, interstate exchanges between organisers and Award participants have improved idea sharing and creating meaningful networking opportunities for finalists.

There are numerous examples of successful elements of state programs within the Rural Ambassador Award that are shared as recommendations in this strategic review for consideration and inclusion in other state programs.

Diversity

Most state competitions strive to achieve balanced geographic diversity in the finalist pool; this is largely structured through geographic zones resulting in one finalist from each key agricultural region. This approach can present problems for less engaged zones where participation and entry numbers are lower; conversely in highly engaged zones many good applicants can miss out due to disproportionately strong competition.

Female entrants dominate the applicant pool in most states, conscious efforts are undertaken to encourage male entrants with a view to achieving gender balance at the state level.

Growth

Broad industry and public awareness of the Award is low, yet there is a desire expressed by both participants and organisers to capitalise on more opportunities for organised publicity, structured exposure at events, ongoing alumni involvement and industry engagement.

It was generally agreed that a lack of formal structure for the post-win responsibilities of the state and national Rural Ambassadors detracts from an otherwise well-orchestrated program. Finalists remarked that while some responsibilities are formalised, the general consensus was that the role of the Rural Ambassador is unclear and underutilised.

It was reiterated throughout the workshops that clearer responsibilities for winners and state finalists after the competition would greatly improve the overall experience. A set of prescribed post-competition guidelines for winners and finalists is required with key focuses being on the continual growth of the participant, and increased publicity and exposure for the Award and individuals after the competition.

These activities could include organised engagements with sponsors and state show bodies, formal responsibilities with ASA, internships with government or peak industry organisations, exposure to industry at related events and liaison with the media.

Similarly, guidelines for agricultural shows on how to best utilise an ambassador could increase and improve engagement between the show movement and its state and national winners. There is an expectation for Rural Ambassadors to actively attend shows to represent the competition, but this lacks structure and purpose and can result in a disappointing experience for the show and Rural Ambassador.

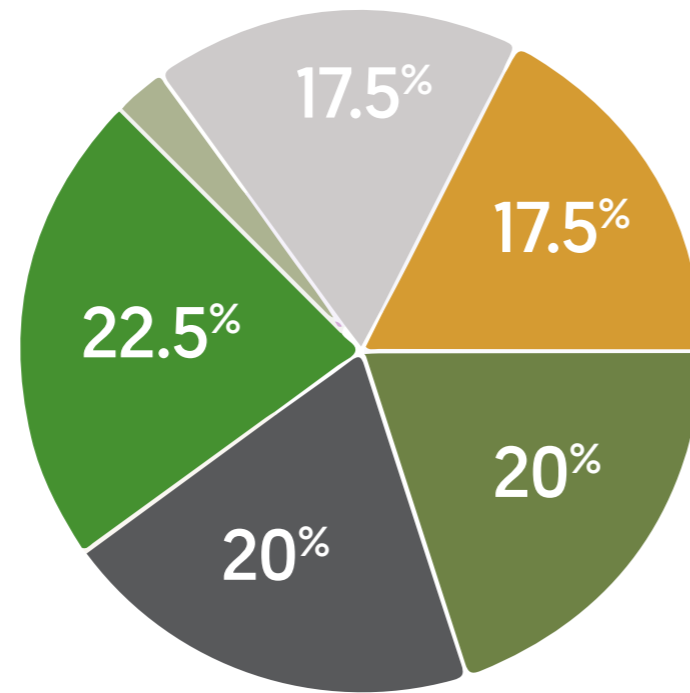


Feedback

Just under 40 state finalists from competitions held in 2009 through to 2019 across six states were surveyed on their experience. The nationwide average rating of the experience was 8.8 (1 = not very good; 10 = exceptional). When asked how likely they would be to recommend the program (1 = not likely, 10 = very likely) the average rating was 9.1. This latter score is evidence of a desire by finalists to advocate for the program.

Finalists surveyed

- SA
- TAS
- VIC
- WA
- NSW
- QLD
- NT



Most beneficial elements for finalists

(note: finalists in each state experience a different program)

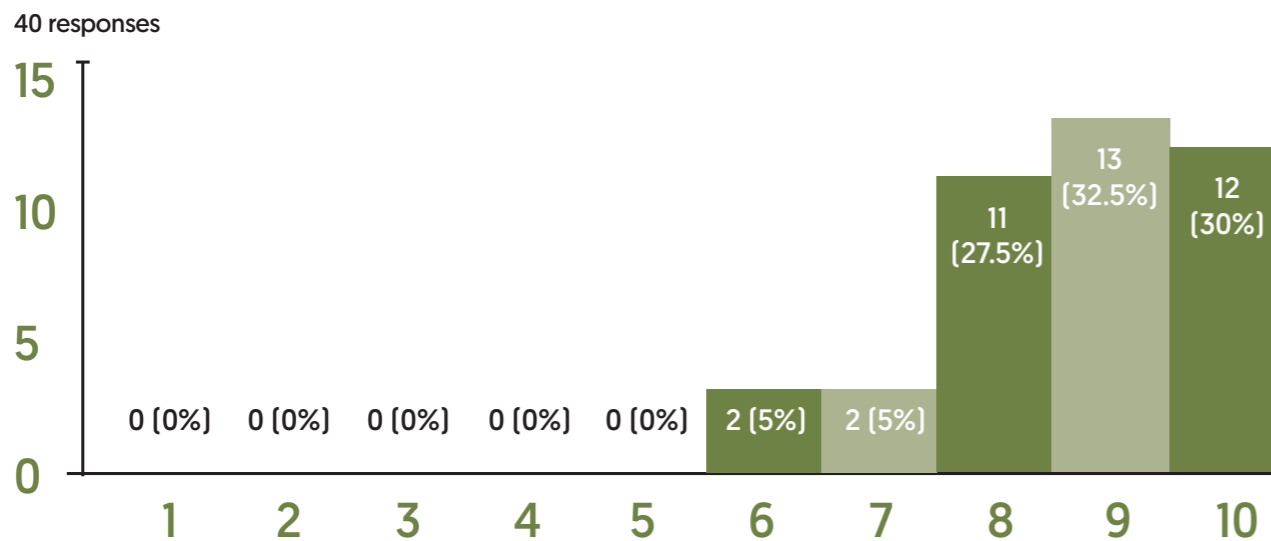
✿ networking with entrants	77.5%
✿ interview / public speaking skills	75%
✿ behind the scenes access to royal show	62.5%
✿ professional development	55%
✿ opportunity to participate in an ongoing way with shows	50%
✿ networking with industry	42.5%
✿ mentoring	7.5%
✿ exposure to new career opportunities	22.5%
✿ stewarding	17.5%

Concerningly, some finalists described a negative post-Award experience when they sought to become involved in state leadership opportunities in the show movement. These finalists articulated a feeling that the title lacked recognition and did not provide a genuine platform for growth in the movement or the broader agricultural industry. Some felt unsupported after the competition was completed and many said that ongoing communication from the organising entities was low. A structured post-Award plan and nationally coordinated mentoring would help provide a more engaged and meaningful experience for finalists for the year following the competition.

Finalists expressed a desire to be more involved at a senior level in the show movement. They seek a stronger platform for representing the movement; a seat at the table of decision-makers.

Rate your state final experience.

1 = not very good. 10 = exceptional.



Industry awareness

A survey of nearly 30 senior leaders from non-show agricultural entities showed a lack of awareness of the Rural Ambassador Award, particularly compared to other agricultural awards and programs, such as the Nuffield Scholarship, the Australian Rural Leadership Program, Rabobank Leadership Award, Farmer of the Year, AgriFutures Rural Women's Award, Young Farming Champions and the NAB Agribusiness Rising Star. This surveyed participants represented organisations including FarmGate Auctions, agribusiness and rural private consultants, pastoral companies, private enterprise, the Australian Lot Feeders Association, KPMG Australia, Picture You in Agriculture, Humans of Agriculture, Future Farmers Network, Rocket Seeder, Grains Research and Development Corporation, Rural Aid, neXtgen Agri Ltd, Australian Farm Institute, Summit Ag, Yacker, Australian Wool Innovation, Stock Journal, Rabobank, Wheatbelt Business Network, Pointer Remote, You thrive Victoria; The Rural Foundation LTD, Outback Beef, NSW Farmers, NT Farmers and Auctions Plus.

Only 3.6% could accurately identify the current National Rural Ambassador.

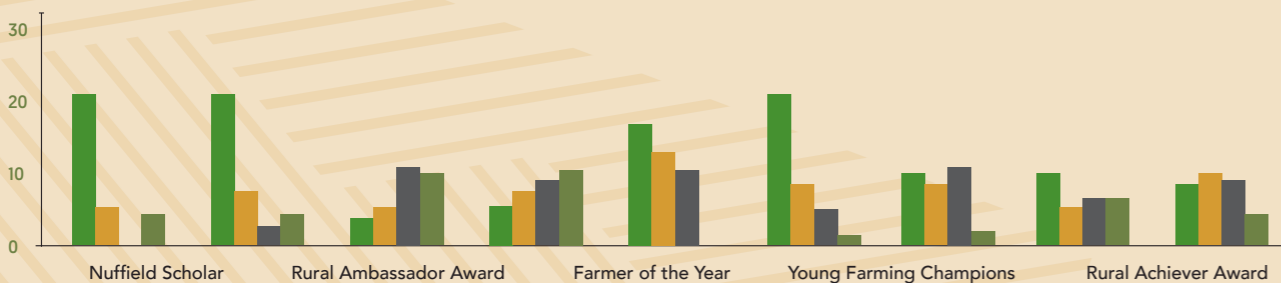
One third correctly attributed the purpose of the competition as a national competition that highlights and celebrates young people who have a genuine interest in rural and regional Australia or New Zealand.

39.3% correctly identified the organisations responsible for the program from a list including Department of Agriculture, Department of Primary Industries, Country Women's Association, Rabobank, Syngenta, Elders, RDCs and state farming organisations, while most chose the option "I don't know."

Rate your state final experience.

1 = very aware of the award/program. 10 = no knowledge of the award/program.

● 1 - very aware ● 2 - somewhat aware ● 3 - have heard of it ● 4 - no knowledge



Publicity

That lack of industry awareness is mirrored in recent mainstream media coverage volumes. Below is a breakdown of print media hits according to Factiva in 2020 (between 1 Jan 2020 and 1 Jan 2021) and the previous decade between 1 Jan 2010 and 1 Jan 2020.

KEY

📄 Print media hits last year

📅 Print media hits over decade

- 🌿 Nuffield Scholar (and Nuffield Scholarship) 239 | 3057
- 🌿 Farmer of the Year 181 | 2412
- 🌿 Rural Ambassador (and Rural Achiever) 87 | 2169
- 🌿 AgriFutures Rural Women's Award 103 | 1141
(note: Agrifutures replaced RIRDC during last decade; both organisations were searched)
- 🌿 Australian Rural Leadership Program 21 | 245
- 🌿 NAB Agribusiness Rising Champion 8 | 164
- 🌿 Rabobank Leadership Award (and Rabobank Emerging Leader Award) 0 | 119
- 🌿 Young Farming Champions 5 | 116 (launched in recent years)
- 🌿 NAB Agribusiness Rising Champion 8 | 164



Most print media coverage is secured in Queensland.

Below is a data sample taken over ten years showing the number of articles published.

Central & North Burnett Times (Queensland)	139
Stock Journal (South Australia)	114
The Land (New South Wales)	99
South Burnett Times (Queensland)	88
Gatton Star (Queensland)	84
Queensland Country Life (Queensland)	78
Chronicle (Queensland)	49
Cowra Guardian (New South Wales)	47
Wimmera Mail Times (Victoria)	43
The Warwick Daily News (Queensland)	40

“It helped build my confidence with public speaking, interviews and general conversations with unknown people.”
- State Finalist

The Rural Ambassador Award is missing from key industry resources like farmhub.org.au/leadership.

Sponsors

Sponsors tend to have a long term view of their involvement with the program despite ambiguous commercial returns on their investment and limited access to finalists. Sponsors interviewed as part of this strategic review expressed a desire for increased exposure to the finalists.

About two-thirds of the organisations who sponsor at a state level have a strong agricultural focus. The competition would benefit from some overarching national sponsorship to cover key costs including marketing, accommodation and travel.

Experience



Agenda comparison state by state

	NSW 8 days	QLD 5 days	SA 4 days	VIC 3 days**	WA 2 days	TAS 1 day
Location	Royal Show	Royal Show	Royal Show	Royal Show	Perth	A local show
Uniform supplied	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗
All expenses paid	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗
Stewarding at show	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Behind the scenes at Royal show	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗
Media/public speaking training	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗
Organised liaison with show leaders and dignitaries	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗
Free time at show	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗
Off-site agricultural activities	✓***	✓****	✗	✗	✗	✗
Networking with past ambassadors	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗
Professional development session	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗
Interview with judging panel	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Interview with show ring announcer in public	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗
Formal function for announcement	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Grand Parade involvement	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗
On stage presentation	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

* Note: WA in the process of moving the Rural Ambassador Award experience to the Perth Royal Show.

** 3 days | 2 at show; 1 information day prior at Whittlesea Showgrounds

*** Parliament House, Government House, farm and historical sites

**** State farming organisation, farms, abattoir, Government House

State-to-state similarities

State-to-state similarities

1. Title of Award

In every state, the competition is known as the [State] Rural Ambassador Award with the exception of NSW which uses the title "Achiever" in place of Ambassador. Some states include the major sponsor or organising body in the title: i.e. Queensland Marsh Rural Ambassador or the NSW RAS Rural Achiever Award.

The state winner of the Award is given the title of [State] Rural Ambassador, including NSW. In most states, finalists are known as [State] Rural Ambassador Award State Finalist with minor adjustments; for example the inclusion of the organising body or sponsors as illustrated above: i.e. RASWA Rural Ambassador State Finalist. However, in Tasmania the state finalists retain the title of their local show: i.e. Campbell Town Rural Ambassador.

It is recommended all state finalists are awarded the title [State] Rural Ambassador Award State Finalist to create brand consistency and prestige around the achievement of competing in a state final. It is further recommended the names of all state finalists are added to the ASA website to celebrate their achievement.

2. Placings

All states announce a runner up to the state Rural Ambassador except NSW where only the winner is announced. Additional prizes include third place (titled second runner up) in South Australia, and a Community Spirit Award in Queensland.

3. Age requirements

All states require entrants to be aged between 20 and 29 as at 1 May the year of their state final.

4. Location

The state finals are commonly hosted at the capital city royal show, with the exception of WA where the competition is held in Perth a month prior to the royal, and Tasmania which allow shows to nominate to host, though recent years have been held at Launceston and Hobart Royal. There is discussion around relocating the WA Award to the Perth Royal Show.

It is recommended all states host their Rural Ambassador Award state final at the capital city royal show, with ample opportunity afforded to the finalist to experience the event.

5. Judging

The judging criteria is not identical but is similar from state to state. For example, Tasmania provides a five per cent weighting towards community involvement where other states provide 15 per cent; and NSW is the only state where a 1:1 interview is not part of the state final judging, instead this interview is the requisite criteria for making the state finals.

The judging panels tend to include three or four judges comprising a mix of former Rural Ambassador winners, representatives from the royal show society and the state country shows' peak body, an agricultural industry leader, and a major sponsor.

QLD 1-2 rural sponsors + agricultural industry leader

NSW Rural sponsor + 2 royal show representative + state show body president

VIC Former rural ambassador state winner + royal show representative + agricultural industry leader

SA Rural sponsor + former rural ambassador state winner + royal show chairman

VIC Rural sponsor + state show body representative + local hosting show representative

WA 3 agricultural leaders from diverse sectors

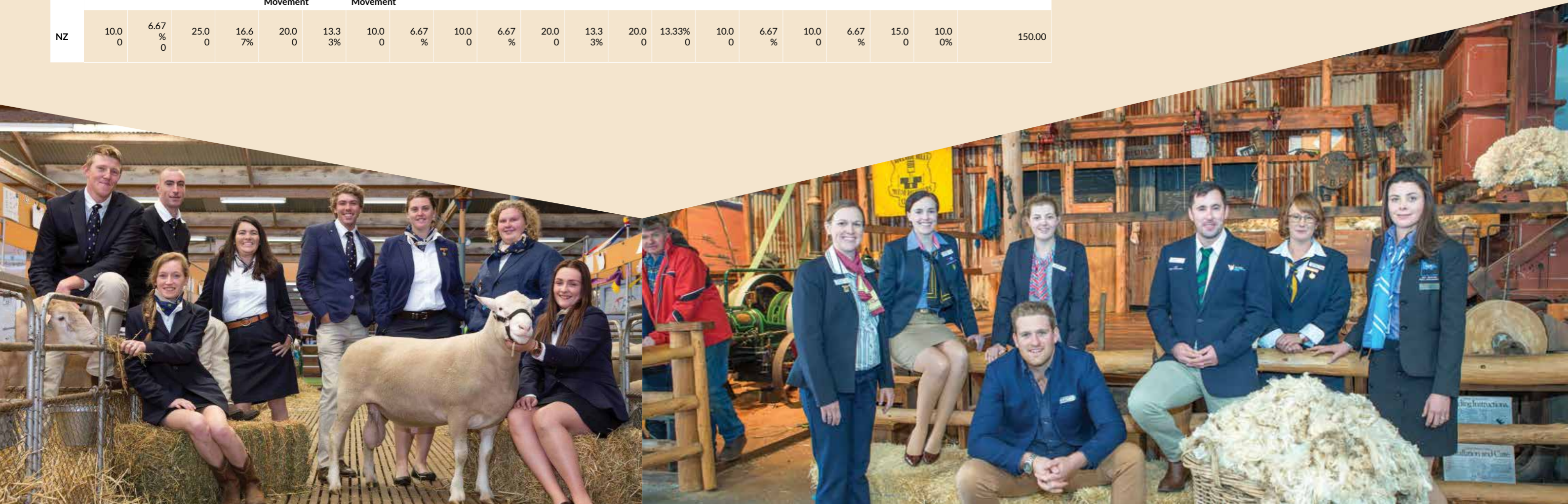


Judging Criteria [Australia]

	Show Involvement		Community Involvement		Agricultural Interest and Skills		General and Rural Knowledge		Potential for long-term RAS involvement		Potential to give back to the state long-term		Personality		Presentation and Grooming		Presentation and Personality (Combined)		Ambitions and Goals		Communication Skills		Communication Skills and Presentation (combined)		Public Speaking		Interests & Hobbies		Public Interview and General Interaction		Total
VIC	25.00	20.83%	15.00	12.50%			20.00	16.67%					10.00	8.33%	10.00	8.33%			10.00	8.33%	10.00	8.33%			20.00	16.67%					120.00
QLD	25.00	20.83%	15.00	12.50%			20.00	16.67%					10.00	8.33%	10.00	8.33%			10.00	8.33%	10.00	8.33%			20.00	16.67%					120.00
TAS	25.00	20.83%	5.00	4.17%			20.00	16.67%					10.00	8.33%	10.00	8.33%			20.00	16.67%	10.00	8.33%			20.00	16.67%					120.00
WA	25.00	20.83%	15.00	12.50%			20.00	16.67%					10.00	8.33%					10.00	8.33%	10.00	8.33%			20.00	16.67%					120.00
NSW			15.00	23.08%	15.00	23.08%	15.00	23.08%	10.00	15.38%	10.00	15.38%	5.00	7.69%					15.00	23.08%			10.00	15.38%			5.00	7.69%			65.00
SA	25.00	25.00%	15.00	15.00%			20.00	20.00%									10.00	10.00%	10.00	10.00%	10.00	10.00%							10.00	8.33%	100.00

Judging Criteria [New Zealand]

	About Yourself		Show Involvement		Future Involvement in the Showing Movement		How can the RAS add value to the Showing Movement		2 Strengths		2 Questions about CV		Current Events		Presentation and grooming		Personality		Public Speaking and Presentation		Total
NZ	10.00	6.67%	25.00	16.67%	20.00	13.33%	10.00	6.67%	10.00	6.67%	20.00	13.33%	20.00	13.33%	10.00	6.67%	10.00	6.67%	15.00	10.00%	150.00



6. Applicant expenses

Most states provide the funding for accommodation, travel and a uniform for their finalists and winning ambassador to compete at state and national levels.

The experience of competing at a state or show final should be funded by sponsors, not by the participant.

7. Promotion

Most states have a partnership agreement or in-kind sponsorship with the major agricultural newspapers in their state (i.e. South Australia and The Stock Journal; Queensland and the Queensland Country Life; New South Wales and The Land) and achieve local publicity in the newspapers on the winner and some of the finalists. ABC Radio Country Hour has also covered the results in some states. However, there is little media coverage achieved beyond this and some states reported a lack of interest from the media.

In terms of owned media, state bodies tend to publicise the results on their website, social media channels and in the organisation's magazines. Digital engagement is highest when video interviews or live streaming of the announcement are used. Broadscale promotion for the Award to shows and potential entrants occurs via state organisation websites, conferences, social media, email newsletters, traditional media (advertising), pamphlets and word of mouth.

A suite of national collateral explaining and promoting the Award will aid shows at all levels to market it to sponsors and candidates.

8. Local shows

In most states, local shows are responsible for sourcing Rural Ambassadors either by directly approaching prospective entrants (nominating and directly appointing) or hosting a competition whereby a winner becomes the Rural Ambassador. Anecdotally, states report that a minority host local competitions, with the majority of Rural Ambassadors appointed via a nomination.

Many shows are disengaged and do not run a competition or appoint a Rural Ambassador. State show organisations promote the competition to shows via their zone level structures, with those structures publicising the competition to local show societies.

A publicly-available competition handbook is produced by most state show organisations and distributed to shows periodically. Shows are encouraged to promote the competition in their show schedules.

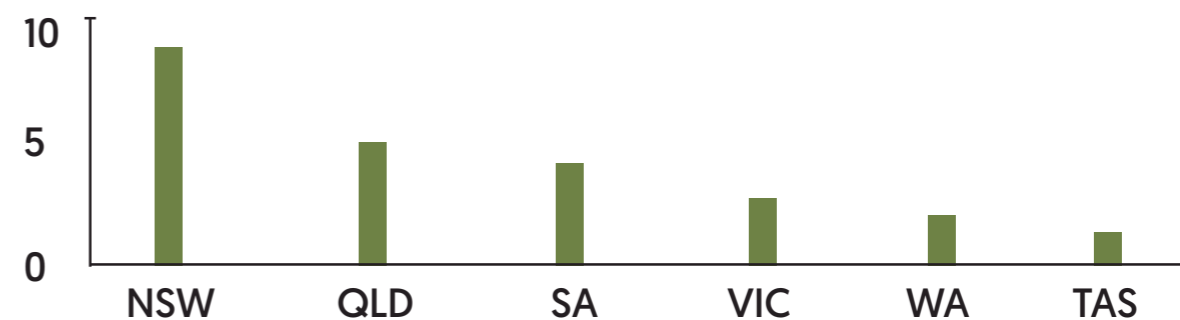
The Award at a state and national level is reliant on the inclination of local shows to host the competition, meaning a broader pool of suitable entrants may not be aware or given the opportunity to participate. ASA may need to consider alternate pathways to participation.

Ramping up social media engagement is essential given the demographic for this competition. Finalists could be provided guidelines and invited to "take over" social media channels for set times to give a behind the scenes insight into the competition.

State-to-state disimilarities

1. Overall experience

Length (in days) of state finalist experience:



The experience for finalists varies significantly from state to state. Some competitions include only an interview and a luncheon, while others include a multi-day, multi-faceted experience complete with networking, meeting parliamentarians and senior industry figures, mentoring with show movement leaders, personal development, public speaking, stewarding, agricultural and behind-the-scenes tours.

A broad experience that creates a lasting impact should be offered to all state finalists.

2. Grassroots engagement

While Tasmania estimates 90 per cent of its agricultural shows consistently hold a Rural Ambassador competition, and Queensland achieves some 52 competitors at its zone competition (sub-chamber), other states report low or inconsistent grassroots involvement. For example, South Australia has experienced fluctuating entry numbers and New South Wales estimates around five per cent of shows host a competition.

The competition requires increased local show participation or alternate pathways to a state final.

3. Primary organising body

In Victoria, Queensland and Tasmania the peak state country show body is the primary entity responsible for each competition. For example, Tasmania Ag Shows run the competition commonly hosted at either Royal Hobart or Royal Launceston Show; similarly Queensland Ag Show run the program from grassroots to the state final, which is held at the Royal Queensland Show (where the royal show body acts as sponsors supplying ground tickets et al). Victorian Ag Shows run the competition in Victoria, whilst the royal body provides facilities, prize money, a judge and sponsorship. However, in South Australia, New South Wales and Western Australia, the royal show body is the primary entity responsible for the Award. In South Australia, the Award is a partnership between SA Country Shows and the Royal Agricultural & Horticultural Society of SA whereby SA Country Shows conduct the competition at a zone (association) and state level, including funding and operations, while the RA & HS of SA hosts and runs the state final experience.

4. Chaperone for finalists

In South Australia, Queensland and New South Wales, a designated chaperone - ordinarily a former Rural Ambassador - hosts the finalists throughout their state final. In Victoria, Western Australia and Tasmania, there is a central coordinator who is the point of contact and organises the agenda.

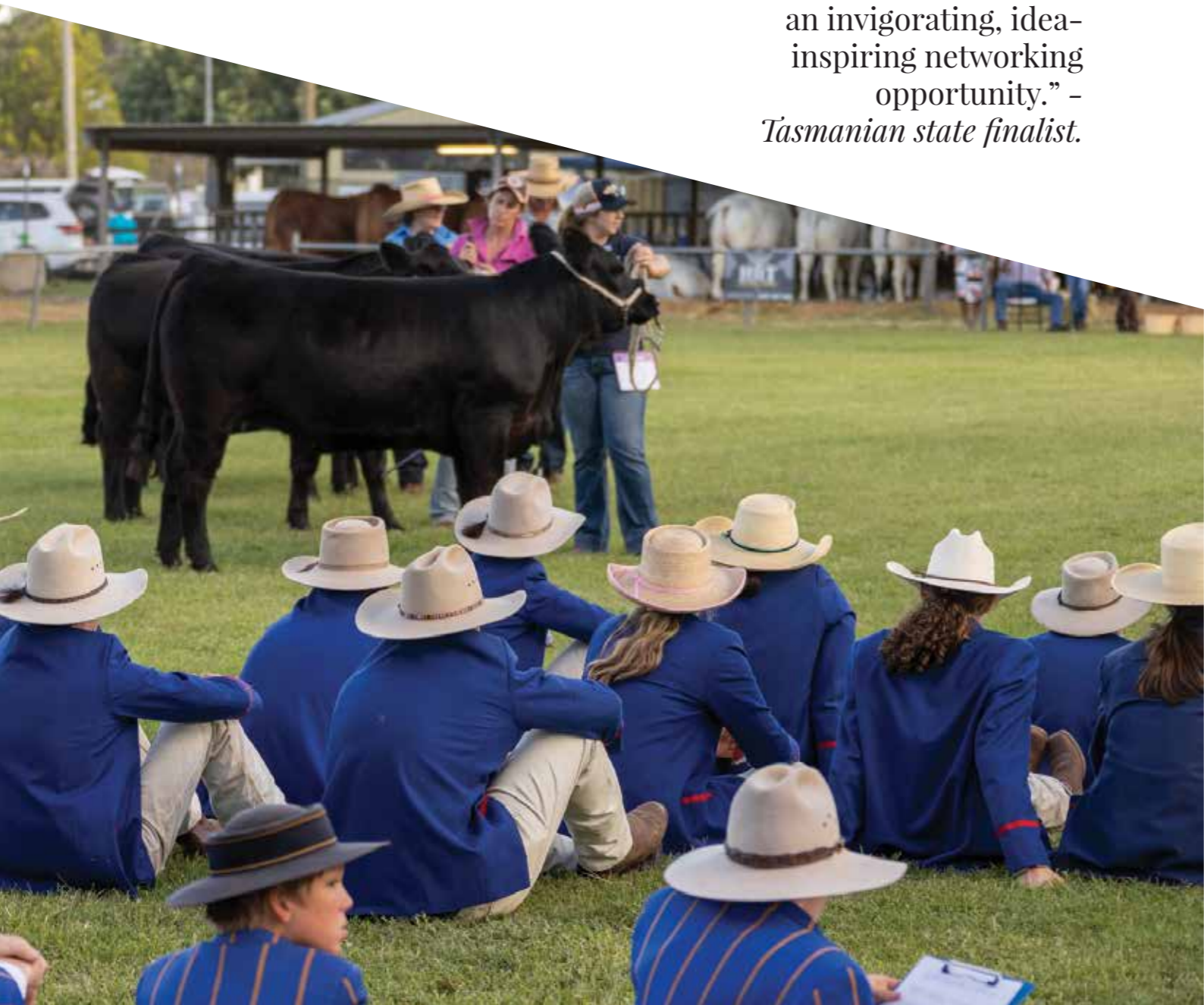
5. Interstate exchanges

Tasmania, South Australia and New South Wales participate in an annual interstate exchange whereby Rural Ambassador state finalists experience a royal show in another state. For example, Tasmania sends two finalists and New South Wales sends all finalists to South Australia's Royal Adelaide Show. South Australia sends two finalists to New South Wales' Sydney Royal Easter Show. All participants surveyed on interstate exchanges reiterated its importance to improve the competition.

6. Show nominated verses self nominated

In most states, the show nominates its Rural Ambassador either through a competition or direct appointment. In NSW, applicants are self nominated.

“The trip interstate is an invigorating, idea-inspiring networking opportunity.” - *Tasmanian state finalist.*



Future challenges

1.

Developing a year-round experience

One of the repeated comments to emerge from strategic review workshops was a need for greater planning to go into the post-competition experience for finalists. Organising entities need to communicate, support, mentor and structure a post-competition program that delivers ongoing growth opportunities and a platform for representing the show movement.

2.

Achieving geographic diversity

The most popular structure for achieving a position at the state finals is via a zone competition. The benefit of this is that it delivers geographic diversity and agricultural sub sector representation. Conversely, impressive candidates can miss out on the state final experience due to the strength of their zone. Victoria overcomes this challenge by hosting an Information Day where the best 12 candidates are selected from the pool of about 20 zone winners and runners up.

3.

Achieving gender diversity

Most states find a slightly higher number of women entering the program. In New South Wales where the qualification process differs dramatically, it reports women tend to put in applications earlier, whereas men tend to be put off by the application process and submit much briefer entries. To address any overt gender imbalance, NSW now takes “expressions of interest” developing a database for outreach.

4.

Achieving career diversity

A lack of awareness about the competition can result in misconceptions around the need to be a farmer, agronomist or in an agricultural career, potentially constrain the talent pool. This can be addressed through case studies and marketing that demonstrates the inclusion of alternate careers in rural areas, i.e. doctors, teachers, journalists, marketers, traders, analysts, bankers and business owners.

5.

Border show societies

Exacerbating disengagement for shows along state borders is a rule in the national competition that excludes individuals competing for a state in which they do not formally reside, even if they are members of the agricultural show in the state they have won.

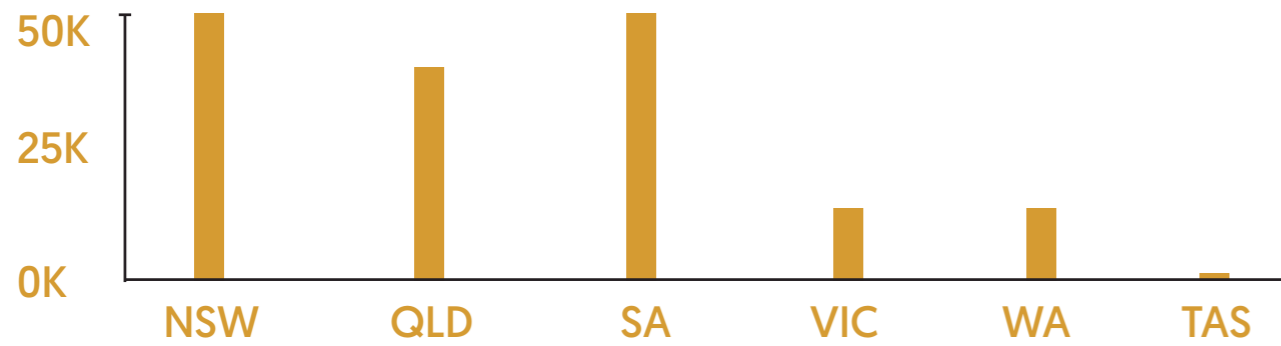
6.

Industry awareness

The emergence of a number of agricultural and rural awards and a lack of publicity for the Rural Ambassador Award has resulted in reduced industry awareness and appreciation. A national marketing and promotions strategy, coupled with structured state-level industry engagement will improve this.







Operational costs & funding sources

Estimated state final annual cost








Sponsorships






SOUTH AUSTRALIA

	\$60k (split between junior and senior competition) towards overseas study and interstate exchange.
	\$7k prize money, facilitate the experience at RAS and resource the chaperone.
	State final meals for entrants (both junior and senior).
	Subsidised package of clothing.
	\$1500 towards running costs.
	In-kind media partnership.

VICTORIA

	Management, administration and coordination, and the CWA lunch costs.
	\$7k prize money + in-kind admission, rooms, morning tea and a judge from the board etc, discounted luncheon ticket.
	\$8k across junior and senior competitions.
	Uniforms worth about \$3.5k.
	In-kind media partnership.

NSW

	\$5k sponsorship for accommodation and meals (major expense) + prize money.
	\$1000
	\$3k for eight hats and belts.
	\$3k in-kind (shirts, pants, vests etc).
	In-kind media partnership.

Sponsorships (cont.)

TASMANIA



Costs of judging day, though entrants/shows fund their attendance.

HOSTING SHOW

Supplies entry tickets.

WA



Accommodation.



All other competition costs.



Pathways to finals

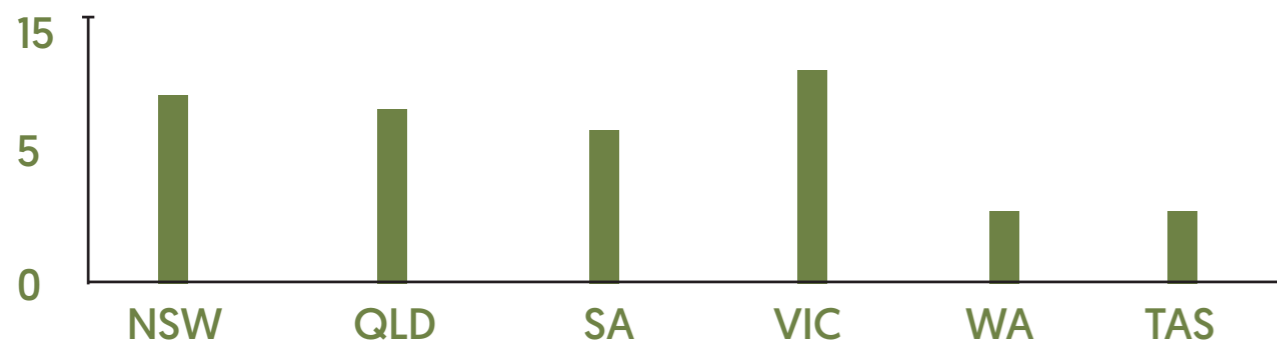
Across Australia, there are a range of ways an individual may become a finalist in the Rural Ambassador Award. The pathway to the finals is different from state to state. Some require nomination by a local show society, others require a win of the formal competition at a local level, while one state does not have a link to the local show competition.

Queensland sources its state finalists from a pool of approximately 52 local winners from 120 shows across 11 zones. The state has achieved strength in the competition from the lows of 2004 when only four state finalists were identified.

South Australia operates a similar model to Queensland, as does Western Australia which sources its seven state finalists from five zones, with between one and four local winners competing at each.

Victoria averages 30 Rural Ambassadors annually which are generated from 120 shows, of which 15-20 are eligible for the state final after the zone competition (securing winner and runner up). In Victoria, the federal rules are also used at state and local levels. Show societies can run a competition or nominate a representative. The representative goes on to compete at the zone level, from which two go on to the state final. A subsequent induction day refines the selection process further, overcoming the disadvantage high calibre candidates in strong zones face when they are awarded runner up at zone level, missing out to weaker candidates who won less competitive zones.

Annual number of state finalists

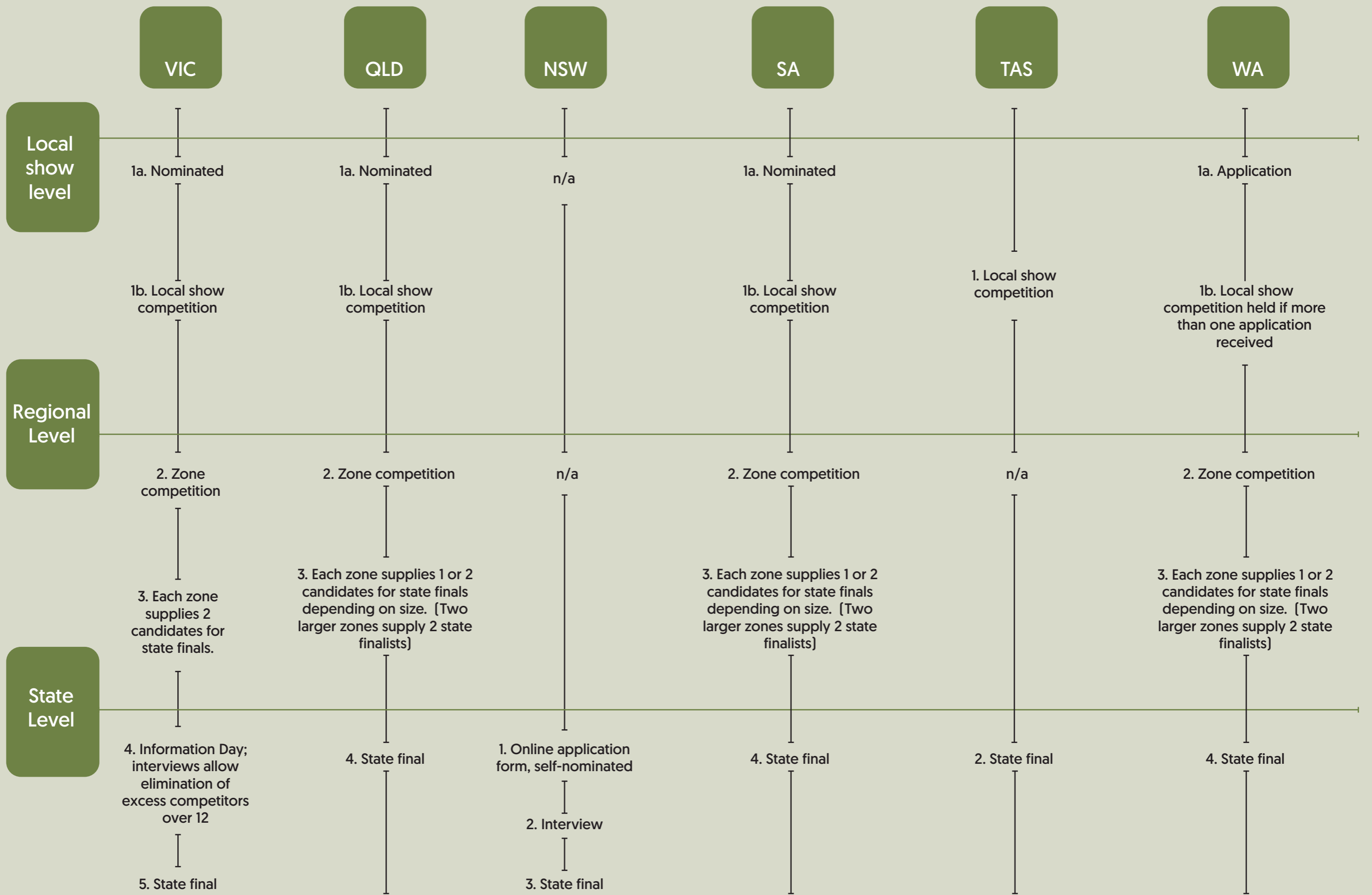


NSW finalists apply directly to the competition; which has averaged 40 applications in recent years.

Both Tasmania and Western Australia reported the local competition is not uniform from show to show. Tasmanian Agricultural Shows estimates that while 90 per cent of local shows run a Rural Ambassador program, rules aren't stipulated by the state body.

The greatest inconsistency in the pathway is the mandatory link to a grassroots show. While guidelines are provided to local shows on how to run and judge the competition, many shows simply nominate a Rural Ambassador in place of running a competition.





Related competitions

Young Rural Ambassador competitions

Only Victoria and South Australia run state level junior ambassador competitions. This competition mimics and acts as an introduction to the senior Award. For candidates aged 16-19 (or 16-19 as at 1 May in South Australia), the small judging variations include less emphasis or need for show involvement and no onstage interview. Rather than being held at the Melbourne Royal Show, the Victorian junior competition is the main feature of the agricultural shows conference weekend which is held regionally. In South Australia, the Young Rural Ambassador competition is held at the Royal Adelaide Show, as is the senior competition. NSW has intentions to commence a junior competition.

“The aim is to engage teenagers - particularly those involved with Young Judges, or the Young Farmer Challenge - before they leave school. This competition also acts as a feeder for our state ag shows next generation body.”
- Peter Angus,
RAHSA South Australia.



Showgirl competitions

In NSW and Queensland a state competition is held for female show ambassadors between the ages of 18 and 25. This showgirls competition no longer runs in other states and in many cases was superseded by the Rural Ambassador competition. For example, in 1998 the showgirl competition in South Australia was replaced with the Rural Ambassador Award to accommodate males and females. There was a similar story in Victoria and Western Australia. It is estimated about 10 per cent of Tasmanian shows run a showgirl competition at a local level in place of the Rural Ambassador Award. This competition does not progress beyond the local level.

Organisations in Queensland and New South Wales articulated the two competitions are mutually beneficial. The showgirl competition has greater longevity and brand awareness than Rural Ambassador (dating back to 1983 in Queensland and 1962 in New South Wales), and successfully integrates grassroots competition through to regional competition before the state final. As the showgirl competition is restricted to younger entrants, the competition experience often acts as a stepping stone for the Rural Ambassador Award, which is perceived to be a more professional competition for mature candidates with the opportunity to compete at a national level.

In New South Wales, the major variation in the two competitions is the requirement for existing show involvement, important in the showgirl competition but not judged as part of NSW Rural Achiever Award.



Prizes

The value and diversity of prizes varies dramatically between states. The richest prize pool is South Australia's where international and interstate tours are provided to winners and placegetters.

Winners prizes per state:

(not listed: sashes, medallions, trophies, certificates etc)

SA	QLD	NSW	VIC	TAS	WA
\$5k in prize money (funded by RAHSA) + Overseas trip (funded by PIRSA) + Trip to Sydney Royal (funded by PIRSA) + Trip to Launceston/Hobart Show	\$1k gift card (funded by RM Williams) + \$2k bursary towards study + \$1k cash prize + Branded overnight carry case + Embroidered blazer + Airfares to attend national finals + ASA conference ticket (if running that year)	\$3k in cash + Travel to finals (funded by ASA NSW)	\$3k to cover travel costs to finals (funded by RASV) + Embroidered blazer for national finals	An interstate show trip to a Royal (Sydney, Adelaide) + Branded vest and blazer for national finals	\$1k towards costs to get to national finals + 12-month RASWA membership

Runner up prizes:

SA	QLD	NSW	VIC	TAS	WA
First runner up: \$1k in prize money (funded by RAHSA) + Overseas trip (funded by PIRSA) + Trip to Sydney Royal (funded by PIRSA) + Trip to Launceston/Hobart Show Second runner up: \$1k in prize money (funded by RAHSA) + Overseas trip (funded by PIRSA) + Trip to Sydney Royal (funded by PIRSA)	\$500 gift card (funded by RM Williams) + \$500 prize money + Overnight carry bag + Royal Adelaide Show exchange + Hat carry case + embroidered blazer + ASA conference ticket (if running that year) + Community spirit award (judged by judging panel and finalists) + ASA conference ticket (if running that year)	N/A	\$1500 prize money (funded by RASV)	An interstate show trip to a Royal (Sydney, Adelaide) + Embroidered vest	\$500 towards costs

All Finalists Prizes:

RM Williams clothing pack (i.e. skirt/pants/shirts/ vest/jumper/ moleskins) + 50% off anything during show) + Trip to Sydney Royal + Accommodation + Meals	PVC suit bag + leather notebook/diary cover + Cap + 2x embroidered shirts + Tie/scarf + \$100 gift card (RM Williams) + Pen + 4 nights of accommodation + Meals*	\$2k prize money + Trip to Royal Adelaide + Thomas Cook uniform including shirts, pants/ skirts, vests + Akubra hat and belt + 8 nights of accommodation + Meals	Full uniform from RB Sellars (embroidered vest, shirt, pants) + One night accommodation + Meals	An interstate show trip to a Royal (Sydney, Adelaide) + Embroidered vest
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Nationwide recommendations

Experience over competition. Former entrants from states where the Rural Ambassador Award is shorter and less involved, communicated a desire for a broader, longer experience. The Award should involve more than an interview, and ideally should be accompanied by industry engagement, behind-the-scenes show insights, networking and personal development as this prepares the successful state candidate for the national finals and delivers a more rewarding, more formative program. The national finals should also have a focus on experience as well as competition, achieving growth for all participants and strengthening their affinity for the show movement.

Structured ongoing interaction. State finalists seek more opportunities both formal and informal for networking, responsibility and recognition post-Award, including involvement in local, state and national show bodies, industry and events. Mentoring is an important post-event program that can deliver strong outcomes for finalists if structured and managed. Leadership roles on show councils, youth groups, subcommittees and organising related events are one way to achieve this.

Local show competitions. Regardless of the link between grassroots qualification and state finals, more agricultural shows running Rural Ambassador programs creates greater opportunity for young people to experience personal development and for shows to recognise young leaders.

Increase alumni engagement. Alumni should be involved in ongoing aspects of the competition, from judging to emceeing functions, mentoring new finalists ahead of the state final, acting as approved spokespeople, chaperoning finalists and promoting the competition. Facilitating a strong core of former finalists via communications channels, events, and appointments to relevant roles in progressing the competition is recommended. A central database maintained by ASA will achieve integrity in contact information of the alumni community.

Increase industry involvement. Stronger links with politicians, policy-makers, agricultural entities and community decision makers is encouraged to expose the winner to the highest levels of people in agriculture, and increase the perceived value, awareness and prestige of the program. This could occur through internships, on-site visits, formal partnerships through ASA, promotional activities, emceeing and keynote speaker opportunities at non-show events. A honorary position on the state farm organisation next generation group, for example, helps expose the Rural Ambassador to important agricultural identities and vice versa.

Cover ambassador costs. Separate to the prize money achieved by both state and national winners, a set amount (i.e. fuel cards, allowance) should be allocated to the state and national bodies to reimburse travel and associated costs for their ambassador for 12 months to attend agricultural events, and shows, so the program can achieve maximum exposure through that individual without burdening them with associated costs. Funding should be provided to the state finalist to cover costs to participate in the national finals, such as accommodation, travel and an optional uniform. The competition's messaging needs to be refined for key audiences; i.e. show movement messaging will be different to mainstream media.

Structure publicity plan. Every state should execute a PR and social media strategy to achieve publicity for the competition in the lead up, during and immediately after. This includes owned media (websites, social media, magazines, podcasts and email newsletters belonging to organising entities and sponsors) and earned media (local, state and agricultural radio, television and newspapers). Well crafted bios, simple videos and professional photography can be repurposed across multiple mediums for the greatest exposure. As a minimum, each organising entity (royal or country shows body) should publish their state finalists on their website, and this should be replicated or linked to the ASA website.

Structure sponsor engagement. Scheduled time for finalists and sponsors to spend quality time together during the competition (meet and greets, mentoring, onsite tours of facilities, cocktail function, head of formal dinner), encourage the use of the finalists, for promotional activities and allow time for finalists to craft personal written notes to sponsors recognising their contribution to the experience.

Hands-on experience. Giving Rural Ambassadors the opportunity to steward and perform formal duties at their royal show increases their knowledge and affinity for the volunteering roles at the highest level, which they can continue to perform for years to come or take back to their local communities to help implement improved standards.

Evidence of impact. A "where are they now" series - via case studies, podcast, video or any other medium - celebrating the stories and successes of Rural Ambassadors would be a worthwhile promotional activity to reinforce and promote the program's benefits and the calibre of alumni.

Media and message. Equipping the winner (and/or finalists) with the skills to speak to journalists, on video and in live interviews will prepare them to take a larger role in the public discourse on key issues. Finalists should be encouraged to choose a topic to champion in their role as Rural Ambassador, and given a platform to promote this issue during their tenure.

Increase visibility. Factor into each Rural Ambassador experience a series of strategic visible public outings for entrants; i.e. Grand Parades, amphitheatres stages, on-camera opportunities in the show's main ring, cooking food for the public, interviews in front of large audiences, manning a "talk to a farmer" stand, live weather crosses with mainstream media. Uniforms are central to increasing curiosity and awareness of the Award.

Key brand messages. Developing state-agnostic marketing materials including brand taglines, video explainers and simple promotional assets as well as case studies and testimonials will resource state bodies, local shows and sponsors with centralised materials to explain the competition and make it more accessible to prospective entrants.

Key ambassador messages. As the face of agricultural shows, the national Rural Ambassador needs to be supplied with key show messages for their tenure.

Centralised information packs. Developing an information pack for the national finals covering interview preparation (factoring in the varying levels of experience different states have to this prior to national finals), attire, agenda and FAQs to help all finalists gain a proportionate understanding of what is involved. Partner former national finalists with new ones to answer questions and form bonds within the alumni community.

Paperwork deters males. Both NSW and Victorian report paperwork has deterred male entrants in previous years and measures are taken to overcome this. Victoria dropped its essay component, while NSW actively reaches out to nominated males to encourage their applications.

Formal or informal networking. Social media and Whatsapp are efficient ways to centralise information and communications ahead of a competition, as well as commence networking between participants and organisers. Alumni should be invited to participate in digital discussions, as well as organisers and chaperones. Former finalists remarked that in-person networking with youth groups (next generation show bodies), show leaders (chief stewards, councillors, leaders), and Rural Ambassador alumni are valuable parts of the experience. The interstate exchanges held by some states often rate as the highlight. Networking with industry, sponsors, parliamentarians and the public are all important inclusions that serve to promote the competition and expose the finalists to more people.

Ag industry outreach. A database of agricultural industry contacts and bodies should be created to assist in annual marketing of the competition and a way to source entrants from further afield, while growing the sector's appreciation and awareness of the Award.

Show-level appreciation. To promote the relevance of the competition within the local show community, shows need to know how to best utilise the state and national Rural Ambassador, who should be given ample opportunity to open events, emcee, and perform formal responsibilities across the local region and beyond.

Central role in conference. The recent implementation of a national shows conference by Agricultural Shows Australia should heavily feature the ASA Rural Ambassador Award winner and state finalists as a platform for promoting the program and a reflection of the program's relevance to the future of the show movement.















State recommendations

Part 1. Post-Award formal responsibilities reinforce the prestige of the win, enrich the experience and keep the Rural Ambassador engaged.

-  Appoint your state ambassador to a guest council position for 12 months on the Royal Agricultural Society. [WA]
-  Appoint a state finalist to an honorary role on the next generation country or royal shows body. [SA, NSW]
-  Invite your state ambassador to judge the state competition three years after their win. [VIC]
-  Ask your state ambassador to emcee the following year's presentation or gala dinner. [NSW]
-  Ask your state ambassador to chaperone the state finalists. [VIC, SA, NSW]
-  Invite your state ambassador to peak industry events as a special guest, i.e. Ag Hall of Fame luncheon. [WA]
-  Encourage all finalists to represent the program and encourage shows to engage any finalist. [Finalist feedback]
-  Ensure they are invited to all show council events for the 12-month period of the ambassadorship. [WA]
-  Encourage attendance at shows and agricultural events, with a councillor facilitating introductions. [WA]
-  Cover the expenses associated with representing the state at a national level. [QLD, NSW, WA, SA, TAS]
-  Bi-monthly contact from the organising show body with their Rural Ambassador is encouraged.













Part 2. A well structured experience increases the likelihood of finalists' ongoing participation in agricultural shows.

-  Supply one clear information pack covering everything from preparing for the interview to outfit suggestions.
-  Partner a new finalist with a prior year finalist as soon as they are selected to act as a pre-Award mentor.
-  An introduction day helps prepare state finalists for the experience. [VIC]
-  Deliver a multi-day, multi-faceted experience; behind-the-scenes, networking and personal development. [QLD, SA, NSW]
-  Provide access to various aspects of agricultural shows, sponsors, media, industry and government. [QLD, NSW]
-  Host the Award at the royal capital city show as this creates a more impactful experience. [QLD, SA, NSW, VIC, TAS]
-  Structure mentoring partnerships during the program that deliver an ongoing benefit and connection. [NSW]
-  Professional development hosted by a third-party provider delivers direct outcomes for finalists. [NSW, QLD]
-  Off site engagement with industry ensures a broader experience with agricultural participants. [QLD, NSW]
-  Schedule time for finalists to meet with sponsors and write individual thank you letters, this increases sponsor ROI. [QLD]
-  Create opportunities for finalists to meet more people; establish ongoing relationships post-program. [NSW, SA, QLD]
-  Increased time together allows the state finalists to build relationships and foster networks. [NSW, SA, QLD]

Part 3. Structured and consistent publicity in the agricultural show movement and in the general public will increase awareness and prestige.

-  Devise simple taglines to better explain the competition to different audiences: shows, public, prospective applicants.
-  Supply media-appropriate bios, photos to finalists' local media, agricultural media and metropolitan outlets.
-  Encourage sponsors to issue a joint press release on the winners, finalists and other key milestones. [SA]
-  Create comprehensive social media posts on finalists including video and imagery in the lead up to the Award.
-  Allow finalists to do a 'social media takeover' for several hours to provide a behind-the-scenes look.
-  Appoint an office spokesperson each 12 months, ideally a previous ambassador, to promote the Award to shows.
-  Supply a manual to local shows on how to promote their Rural Ambassador via earned and owned channels.
-  Engage a group of finalists from previous years to provide content on their experience via video and social media.
-  A common uniform across Australia would aid in visual awareness and branding of the competition.
-  Create a calendar of public events for state finalists to attend as representatives of ASA, outside the show movement.
-  Create a content strategy reiterating the experience and achievements of alumni, i.e. a podcast.
-  Develop a national badge or logo for alumni to publish on LinkedIn and use on CVs as professional endorsement.
-  Livestream announcements of winners and public speaking engagements on social media.
-  Publish short video interviews with finalists on social media in the weeks leading up to the state final.
-  Develop a metro-media PR strategy for increased mainstream exposure.

Part 4. Make it easier and more compelling for shows to host a competition locally; ensure state finalists' experience is continually reviewed and improved.

-  Build simple guidelines to help local shows host a basic competition that aligns closely with national standards.
-  Devise a guide for shows and communities on how to best support and utilise their local ambassador.
-  Where local and zone finals are not prerequisites for state finals, provide alternate interview and speaking experiences.
-  Publish a public database of former Rural Ambassador state finalists who can be engaged for events, shows, judging etc.
-  Implement a communications strategy that re-engages and builds upon the existing alumni of finalists.
-  Collate materials including photographs celebrating the ongoing contribution of Rural Ambassadors to shows.
-  Leverage access to entrants in adjacent junior competitions - paraders, judges, schools involvement, showgirls - to promote the Award during their competition.
-  Create a targeted communications campaign reaching out to young judges, paraders, showgirls, proactive school and ag departments to increase entrant numbers.
-  Develop a social media outreach strategy for prospective entrants to encourage nominations.
-  Encourage shows to invite both their showgirl (Qld, NSW) and Rural Ambassador to perform official duties together.
-  Issue an Net Promoter Score survey within a week of the state finalist to entrants to collect feedback in order to continually improve the experience.
-  Encourage shows to provide pathways and mentoring for entrants to become engaged with local show leadership via stewarding and show society involvement.

Capturing case studies

"Using the real life experiences of state finalists, case studies help capture the diversity, opportunity and benefits of the Rural Ambassador Award to promote to prospective entrants, sponsors and industry."

[Case study 1]

North Queensland's agricultural show movement's got a powerful ally in Anthony Ball



Just a quick chat with Anthony Ball is enough to make you go whack a cake in the oven or try your hand at a new art or craft - whatever it takes to get you involved in your local agricultural show. The North Queensland Rural Ambassador won the state competition in 2015, becoming the first finalist from the region to wear the title.

Anthony first entered the Rural Ambassador Award in 2007 as a young 20-year-old. He may not have brought home any state titles that year but Anthony enjoyed the journey so much he gave it another crack as a 28-year-old with more life experience, confidence and a huge passion for North Queensland's agricultural shows.

While he admits he may have started out just looking to push the show movement and meet some good people, Anthony says the Rural Ambassador

Award win opened so many opportunities for not just himself, but his entire region.

"I never expected to go all the way to the nationals but we kind of blazed a bit of a trail for North Queensland that year and there's been many great young people who've followed and won some fantastic community awards," he said.

"Being from the north, we're so far away and the distance between our shows can be huge. The southern shows are closer together so a lot of people know everyone but when you rock up from the north you don't really know anyone and people don't know you, so having people take me seriously was the biggest challenge.

"Just like anything in life though you've got to get out of your comfort zone and I made contacts that you never know when they'll pop up again; it could be in three days time or 30 years time but they're always there."

Anthony acknowledges that for some, a fear of public speaking holds them back from entering the Rural Ambassador Award. Sure, he's a livestock auctioneer so he's pretty used to that side of the game but he says it's nothing to worry about. Besides, there's more important things to focus on - like your passion for your local show.

"At the end of the day, you could be an amazing public speaker but it's your involvement in the show movement that you're really judged on," he said.

"If you can speak but your involvement in the show is buying fairy floss and a Bertie Beetle bag, well you're probably not going to go on. But if you're just an okay speaker but you've been a steward, you've been a judge and you've shown chooks, and baked a fruit cake and that sort of stuff, that's what you really need.

"Local shows connect us to a past that just doesn't exist anymore. I think it's more important than ever to keep that show movement and the ag side of things going because once those things fold they don't come back."

If you ask Anthony if he encourages other young people to enter the Rural Ambassador Award, there's absolutely no hesitation.

"One hundred per cent, most definitely. Don't even think about it. Every opportunity that comes along in life, you should jump at it and take it and this one's a good one," he said.



[Case study 2]

Last minute entry leads to networks, connections and opportunities for life

As far as last minute decisions go, the Rural Ambassador Award turned out to be a pretty good one for Ashley Evans. She went on to become the national finalist as the Tasmanian representative in 2019.

While the 28-year-old had been heavily involved in the Royal Hobart Show on the Beef Council, she admits she didn't know much about the competition. Fortunately, a fellow councillor did and encouraged her to enter.

With just a few days before closing, Ashley filled out the application that ended up taking her on a journey she says opened her career networks and appreciation for agricultural shows across Australia.

"It was a completely new experience for me which is always great. I got to go to South Australia on an exchange before I went to the finals and that was an amazing opportunity to see how a larger show on the mainland does things. I went backstage, looked at the logistics and the way people manage it and everything that goes with a huge show," she said.

"I'm involved with a few shows and field days in Tassie but because of the population and size of Tassie, to go to a mainland show and see how it's done on a larger scale was a great opportunity."

Ashley's now an agricultural science teacher, educating kindergarten to year 12 students about opportunities across the agricultural industry.

It almost wasn't the case though - she had aspirations to become a corporate lawyer in her teens. Fortunately an inspiring high school agricultural science teacher changed her path and what's the court room's loss, is now many a Tassie student's gain.

She says her Rural Ambassador experience opened up valuable connections across her career.

"It's honestly helped me in so many ways but in terms of networks, I think that's where the biggest gain came from," she said.

"Being able to network with people on the mainland that I may not have ever known otherwise, and also people in Tassie, has helped my career which is a huge, huge passion of mine."

While she enthusiastically says she'd encourage any young person to give the Rural Ambassador Award a go, Ashley admits shining light on the competition has been a challenge in her home state.

"I think the issue we face in Tassie is not knowing about the program in the first place and what it's all about," she said. "There's so many incredible young people involved in shows across Tassie and we absolutely need these people to be engaged in this program and have the opportunities that other ambassadors have."

Between Ashley's involvement in three shows across Tasmania, her various volunteer roles and her work with our next generation, it's a pretty safe bet the Rural Ambassador Award will take a starring role when she's around.

"It was an unexpected but fantastic experience and amazing to think it's something I hadn't thought about previously," she said.

"The skills and opportunity that it's given me have not just helped within the show circuit and that side of the community, it's helped me in my career and everyday life."



[Case study 3]

Agriculture to ambo, all thanks to Rural Ambassador Award

Thomas Hunter's life as a fulltime ambulance officer in Adelaide may be a far cry from the agricultural world he grew up in but the two are intertwined. Without having entered the Rural Ambassador Award in 2016, Thomas says there's no way he'd be where he is today.

Growing up in South Australia, Thomas was a regular fixture at the Coonalpyn Show and a member of the Limousin Youth Beef Society. As all good things start, he decided to 'give it a crack' when the show president suggested he enter the Rural Ambassador Award.

He went on to become South Australia's runner-up - not bad for someone who couldn't name many worse things than public speaking. A self-confessed shy 21-year-old, conversations with one or two people were easy but larger crowds were a whole new ball game.

He soon found himself jetting off to tour farms in the United Kingdom as part of his prize, touring behind the scenes at the Royal Adelaide Show and confidently addressing crowds. He formed valuable industry relationships and built rapport with people from across the country and overseas.

Now aged 26, Thomas says the experience has been the gift that's kept on giving even five years later.

"The Rural Ambassador changed my life. It's turned where I was and gave me the confidence to go where I am today. My leadership skills are so much better because of improving my communication skills," he said.

"I've always used those experiences that I had with improving my communication and interpersonal skills in interviews and it's done quite well for me. It helped me find what I wanted to do; it gave me a different outlook on everything," he said.

Thomas is still partly involved in the beef industry but his career change came not long after his return from the UK.

Boosted by his newfound confidence, he took on a paramedics degree and today he's only two subjects away from graduating.

"Before the Rural Ambassador Award I probably wouldn't have ever thought of pursuing it because I just didn't have the confidence and compassion in myself to be able to do that," he said.

"It's pretty incredible to think about, actually."

And while it's been a life-changing journey for Thomas, it almost didn't happen. He says he was a bit sceptical about a competition he feared may just involve him getting on stage and 'talking himself up.'

"That's not it at all and I think people also think that you have to be heavily involved in a community or your local show too but I think the program actually brings you more into your show and your community and you get a whole new appreciation for both," he said.

"It's brought a lot of relationships and rapport with so many people into my life. It was just an amazing experience."

Example document.

Rural Ambassador guide to making the most of the year ahead

State and national Rural Ambassador finalists will have varying degrees of availability pending responsibilities with family, career, university, farming commitments and financial capacity to attend multiple events throughout the year.

This next year is yours to make your own. We have attached a calendar of conferences, ag shows, meetings, sponsor events, and industry opportunities, so you can plan your year. We encourage you to attend smaller local shows and agricultural events (races and rural events) where possible to spread the word.

Consider the following activities:

1. Join your local show committee
2. Join your state show next generation body
3. Join your state farm advocacy group next generation body
4. Send a letter to you five closest shows to advise them you are available to:
 - ✿ Attend and open their show
 - ✿ Present major trophies
 - ✿ Meet with young agricultural competitors i.e. showgirls, young judges, schools
 - ✿ Steward
5. Write to your competition sponsors to thank them for their support and advise you are available to:
 - ✿ Emcee their functions
 - ✿ Undertake an internship/work experience to better understand their business
6. Write to your local MP and advise them of your role, make yourself available to them
7. Write, film or capture elements of your year as Ambassador for the public
 - ✿ Share it on social media
 - ✿ Share with local media
 - ✿ Share it with agricultural media
 - ✿ Share it with sponsors and organisers
 - ✿ Share it with local members of parliament



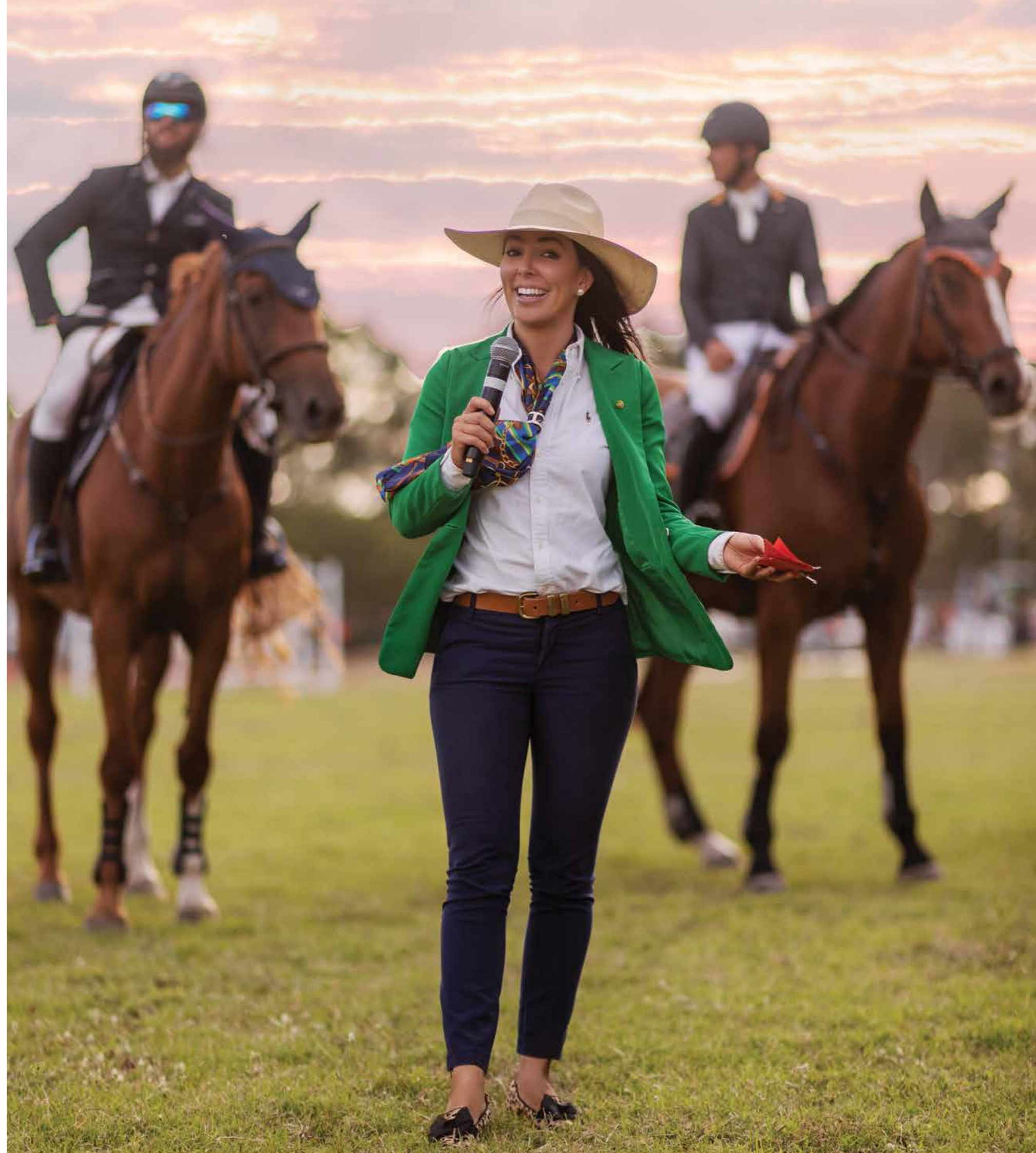
About the author.

This strategic review was commissioned by Agricultural Shows of Australia. The consultant and author is Lyndsey Douglas, director of strategic communications agency Writers Who. The agency develops content for organisations in property, finance and agricultural/rural industries. Agricultural clients include EvokeAg (Department of Agriculture), AuctionsPlus (livestock sales platform), Agricultural Societies Council of NSW, FarmBot, Rural Aid, Australian Lot Feeders' Association, Royal Agricultural Society of Victoria and numerous stock and station agents.

She is the 2013 NSW Rural Ambassador, a former director of Agricultural Shows of Australia, and a life member of Condobolin Pastoral, Agricultural and Industrial Association. Throughout her professional career, Lyndsey has managed communications for agri-political lobby group NSW Farmers, headed up public relations for the largest real estate brand in Australia, managed external affairs and investor relations for three ASX listed companies, and was the head of innovation for a national rural stock and station agency.

Lyndsey was a member of the recent consultation process for the wool industry's strategic ten year plan, Wool 2030, and authored the foreword. She is chairman of Australian Wool Innovation's woolgrower industry consultation panel and the WoolPoll selection committee, and is a director of the foundation board of Eastern Suburbs Rugby Union club.

On weekends, Lyndsey is the main ring announcer at over 25 agricultural shows annually including shows in Sale (Victoria), Esperance (Western Australia), Alpha, Callide Valley, Capella, Springsure, Emerald, Pittsworth, Sunshine Coast (Queensland), Narrabri, Young, Condobolin, Kiama, Camden, Berry, Nowra, Orange (New South Wales) as well as the Royal Shows in Adelaide, Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne and Bathurst. She is also the commentator at Dalby Australian Stock Horse Sale and Campdraft, and a range of events for the Show Horse Council of Australasia and the NSW Riding Pony Association.





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