



**Social  
Enterprise  
Network**  
Victoria

**SENVIC Regional Mini-Conference  
&  
Social Enterprise Leaders Fellowship  
Residential Retreat**

16 – 18 March 2022 | Old Beechworth Gaol

Hosted and supported by





## **SENVIC Regional Leads manifesto**

March 2022 | Old Beechworth Gaol

### **Context**

*Victoria's rural and regional communities are in transition.*

Many communities are uniquely placed to take advantage of macro economic transitions and opportunities, especially those influenced by climate change (food production, energy) and local supply chains (social procurement).

Economic decline is often a driver and catalyst for change in rural and regional communities. New economies can be developed and achieved by taking a more holistic view of Social Enterprise.

### **A manifesto for accelerating social enterprise in rural and regional Victoria**

This manifesto is a response to challenges identified by rural and regional social enterprise practitioners. It outlines fundamental requirements for a thriving, social enterprise sector in rural and regional Victoria.

### **Our pledge**

As SENVIC Regional Leads we pledge to

- share stories of change, transformation and impact supported by social enterprise,
- build each other up and build the social enterprise economy by exploring ways to sell things to each other
- use our collective voice to advocate for social enterprise in rural and regional communities.

## Identified challenges for rural and regional Victoria

**Misconceptions:** People think that rural and regional people lack capability. In reality, many rural and regional communities, especially their leaders, have high capability (including remnant know-how from sunset industries) but lack the capacity needed to develop new localized economies (networks and resources).

**Social enterprise is widely misunderstood:** The diversity of social enterprise in rural and regional Victoria is extraordinary, yet the business model is not widely understood.

- Systems thinking is the 'heart beat' of social enterprise. The concept is multi-layered and complex, so it can be hard to understand
- Social enterprise is not just about jobs – it's about meaningful livelihoods
- Local Government plays a critical role in rural and regional communities, yet this sector generally has low literacy in relation to social enterprise and how it can creating an enabling environment for it to develop.

**Funding models:** Single focus grants do not meet the interconnected needs of rural communities.

**Gaps:** Young people can be agents for change in rural and regional communities but often lack opportunities to access entrepreneurship learning and development opportunities.

**Pressure points:** Rural and regional communities are experiencing different pressures

- *Decline:* some places are experiencing market failure with industries withdrawing and services closing down
- *Growth:* some places are experiencing a surge of interest and population growth post COVID but lack appropriate services (eg affordable housing). Many are simultaneously dealing with pressures on natural environment and infrastructure.

**Propensity to default to startup:** Opportunities to scale social enterprise in rural and regional communities are limited because the sector often take a default startup approach instead of buying, scaling and transitioning an existing business into social enterprise.

- This approach is exacerbated by a lack of appropriate capital.
- A default startup focus is time consuming, exhausting and risky.

## A manifesto for accelerating social enterprise in rural and regional Victoria

**Develop new investment models:** the social enterprise sectors needs access to appropriate capital. Systems funding mechanisms will enable change.

- Develop and offer investment options for social enterprise that incorporate a risk appetite and long- term view.

**Offer integrated education and capacity building:** regular and consistent capability and capacity building is needed in rural and regional communities.

- create opportunities and role models for young people
- embed grass-roots entrepreneurship and critical thinking into the education system for young people and adults.
- offer social enterprise education for Local Government so sector can become more effective enablers.

**Recognise and utilize key drivers:** Place-based approaches are critical to achieving impact.

- reconciliation presents opportunities: Many Aboriginal communities are leading and creating in their communities and require investment and support
- creative sector is agile and entrepreneurial. It has the ability to disrupt outdated thinking, and drive inclusion initiatives. Internationally, creative industries are a key driver of rural and regional employment.
- nature-based initiatives are emerging.

**Utilise core principles:** Social enterprise in a rural and regional setting requires relationships, reputation, trust and cross-sector collaboration.

**Stimulate opportunities via systems change:** encourage exploration of opportunities to purchase distressed/devalued businesses that can transition to social enterprise.

- Support established businesses to be capable and available to take up social enterprise opportunities
- Passion and good will is not enough. Social Enterprises need business strategy, business models and alliances to build capacity and create change.

**Recognise the role of social enterprise in transforming rural and regional communities:** social enterprises are genuinely ‘filling the gaps’ and addressing market failure

- Social Enterprise is working in rural and regional communities
- sector collaboration and partnerships are important
- community asset ownership creates anchor organisations and a culture of aspiration to accelerate change.