

LESSONS IN DISASTER RECOVERY

LEARNING FROM FRRR'S RESPONSE TO THE 2009 **VICTORIAN BUSHFIRES**

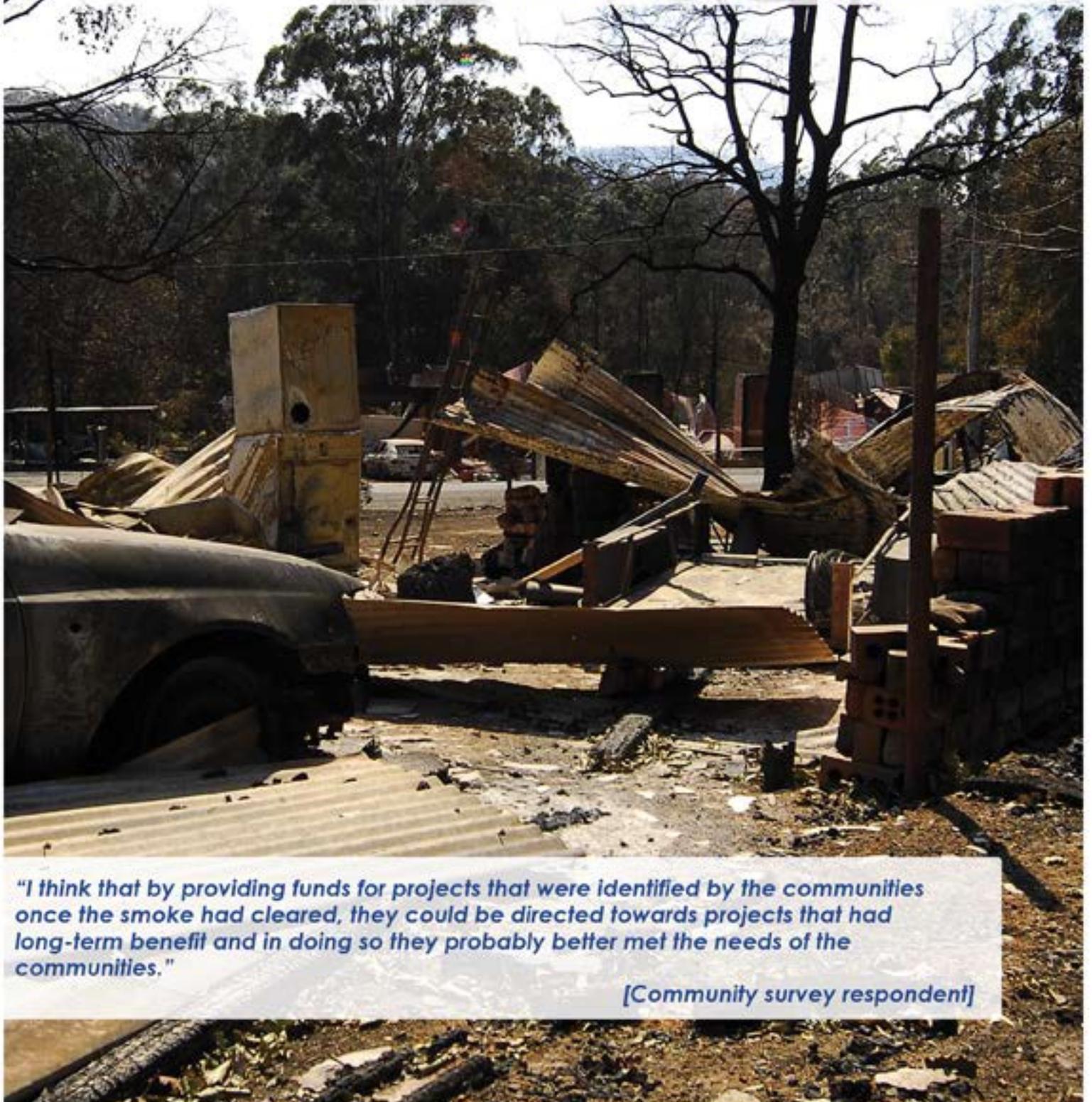


"The RRR Program did a whole lot more than just give money. They promoted and supported structural change in communities. The innovations in grants also meant wider impact and showed us the flexibility needed in disaster recovery."

[Donor Foundation CEO]

"Various donor responses to the review indicated that, but for the collaboration, they might not have allocated funds for bushfire recovery. Therefore the pool of funds available to communities was increased."

[Helen Morris, Author, Review into FRRR's Response]



"I think that by providing funds for projects that were identified by the communities once the smoke had cleared, they could be directed towards projects that had long-term benefit and in doing so they probably better met the needs of the communities."

[Community survey respondent]



Contents

What Happened?	Pg 2
What Did FRRR Do?	Pg 2
Who Else Was Involved	Pg 3
What Did We Learn?	Pg 5
Role of philanthropy	pg 5
Benefits from collaboration	pg 6
Government and philanthropy	pg 7
FRRR's leading role	pg 8
Early engagement but delayed investment	pg 8
Multi-faceted program	pg 9
Program flexibility	pg 9
Administration	pg 10
Staffing	pg 10
Leverage opportunities	pg 10
Building trust	pg 10
Facilitating community access to funds	pg 10
Directing funds appropriately	pg 12
A clearinghouse	pg 12
Putting The Lessons into Practice	Pg 13
Acknowledgements	Pg 14

What Happened?

Following a number of smaller bushfires in Victoria in January 2009, the Black Saturday bushfires of 7 February 2009 were a sudden catastrophe that cost many lives and caused devastation for thousands of people across the State.

Seventy-six Victorian communities were affected by the 2009 bushfires. The largest fires were extinguished within two days and the Victorian Government, Emergency Services and relief organisations were immediately active in relief and recovery planning.

Three days after the fires, the Victorian Government established the Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction and Recovery Authority (VBRRRA) to coordinate the rebuilding and recovery of the fire-affected communities and to manage donations from the public into the Victorian Bushfire Appeal Fund (VBAF).

Within days hundreds of millions of dollars poured into charities and service organisations who had to quickly find ways to distribute funds to those most in need.

The immediate emergency response, essential in the first months after the fires, was what most people had in mind when they donated to the public appeals. Many philanthropic foundations also gave directly to these appeals.

There were other foundations, including the Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal (FRRR), who envisaged a different role – supporting the recovery phase. This is when the emotional, community and cultural damage is addressed. Practical problems become real and people are often angry and disillusioned.

What Did FRRR Do?

FRRR initiated a recovery program which built on FRRR's previous roles in disaster funding and knowledge about disaster recovery in the philanthropy sectors of Australia and other countries. FRRR's CEO began taking a lead role in recruiting collaborating donors, with the assistance of a seconded staff member from the Community Enterprise Foundation (CEF). The CEO also directly approached the Victorian Government through the Department of Premier and Cabinet, offering a partnership in the recovery program.

After some deliberation, and in consultation within the sector, FRRR decided to focus their support efforts on assisting the bushfire affected communities during their medium to long term recovery, rather than the immediate emergency relief phase. This would be a collaboration with other donors, Government and communities involved in the recovery process.

FRRR's response involved four parts:

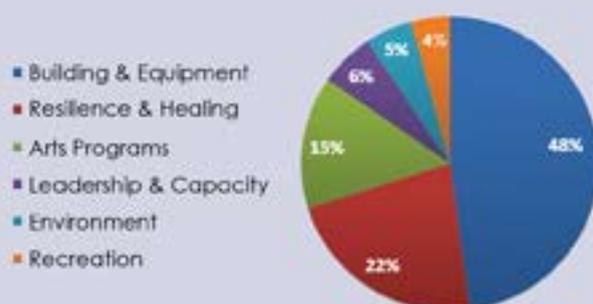
1) The Repair-Restore-Renew (RRR) Grants Program

The primary objectives of the program were to provide a simple, accessible grants program comprising donations from participating philanthropic funds as a one-stop facility for affected communities, and to provide an opportunity for philanthropic foundations to add value to their response to the bushfires through collaboration and hands-on involvement.

The eligibility criteria were determined by the participating organisations and changed over the course of the program to adapt to the changing needs of affected communities. Those needs, as expressed by the communities, were less for infrastructure and more for issues like psychological recovery, volunteer fatigue and support for emerging leaders.

The RRR Program closed in November 2010. The 21 members of the collaboration funded 123 organisations with grants ranging from \$110 to \$62,000, totalling \$2.1 million in grants.

Distribution of the 123 RRR Program Grants



2) Regional Donation Accounts

Donation Accounts allow FRRR to hold tax deductible donations from donors who wish to use these funds exclusively for projects in specified regions or specific purposes or projects. Under the provisions of the Accounts, donors cannot decide who receives grants, but they can advise FRRR as to what the communities need. This way, FRRR's funding decisions can reflect donors' choices of geographic region or specific projects, within the context of FRRR's approved purposes.

Thirty-two Donation Accounts were established after the 2009 Bushfires. Contributions to these combined accounts grew from a few thousand dollars to \$3.8 million, more than double the amount the RRR Program collaboration raised, and it was still growing at the time of writing this report. These funds enabled community funded projects to continue for at least another two years after the fires.

3) A Clearinghouse Service

FRRR has a long history of networking and liaison with other funders, referring proposals, applications and suggestions to the most appropriate source. This was the basis for the clearinghouse concept. Through this, grant seekers could apply to one organisation and submit only one grant application and feel confident that it would reach the most appropriate donor.

This included organisations like the Salvation Army and Rotary International, who had raised large amounts of discretionary funds that could be applied more flexibly to areas of need, such as small business support and sports grounds, which would usually be outside government and philanthropic provisions.

The RRR Program also communicated regularly with local governments and VBAF Community Engagement Coordinators providing them with a place to refer grant seekers that they were unable to assist. These relationships within the clearinghouse process effectively increased the pool of flexible funds available and greatly expanded the benefits to fire-affected communities. VBARRA also established a clearinghouse service and FRRR worked alongside its staff to provide the pathway into the philanthropic world.

4) A Leverage Mechanism

With the bushfires, it was imperative to expand the sum available for recovery grants which meant that FRRR took a proactive role in linking other funders into the communities. This was a way to use its relatively modest funding capacity to encourage others to give, thereby increasing the size of the funding available for grants.

Through proactive leverage, FRRR offered Government, not-for-profit organisations, businesses and individuals an opportunity to become a partner and develop responses that met community needs, as well as the partners' needs. Through this, they could be involved in proactive development of responses by working closely with communities and or partners to complete substantial projects that might not have been otherwise achieved.

FRRR's reputation as a competent organisation and an honest broker often meant that other organisations would join a project if they saw FRRR was involved.

Who Else Was Involved?

On 17 February 2009, ten days after the Black Saturday bushfires, Philanthropy Australia joined FRRR and other of its members in co-hosting a strategy meeting at Melbourne Town Hall. It was attended by Victorian Government Ministers and staff, as well as Red Cross. During the following months, a core group of donors joined the collaboration, under the framework of the Repair-Restore-Renew (RRR) Program.

The CEF and FRRR initiated the donations and other donors joined in at different times over the RRR Program's operational period. Some RRR Program members were actively recruited by FRRR, several were invited by the Pratt Foundation, and others were encouraged as Philanthropy Australia members.

Some contributors to this Review felt that the corporate donors would have joined in larger numbers if they had known the benefits of collaboration with FRRR. A number of people mentioned wasted opportunities because the Government did not always have the means to accept offers of corporate donations, and they were lost.

In total, there were 21 participants in the RRR Program, as listed below. These were a mix of philanthropic and corporate foundations, businesses, community organisations, a service club, a school and individual donors who funded a total of 123 projects.

RRR Program collaborating partners

The Pratt Foundation/VISY	\$460,000
Sidney Myer Fund	\$375,000
Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal	\$250,000
Community Enterprise Foundation	\$250,000
School Aid Trust	\$250,000
RE Ross Trust	\$100,000
The Jack & Robert Smorgon Family Foundation	\$100,000
The Thomas Foundation	\$80,000
Deutsche Bank	\$75,000
The Collie Foundation	\$50,000
The Reym Fund	\$35,000
Mars Stride Foundation	\$20,600
The Calvert-Jones Foundation	\$25,000
The Grosvenor Foundation	\$10,000
Bamford Family Foundation	\$10,000
Labelmakers Group Pty Ltd	\$10,000
Private Donors	\$7,000
Wesley College	\$3,500
Australian Broadcasting Commission	\$3,161
	\$2,114,261



Critical Partnerships

The William Buckland Foundation was the vital force behind the collaboration. Driven by its policy of collaborating with other foundations, the foundation granted \$180,000 to enable the RRR Program to employ and resource a Program Manager, without whom, it was believed, the collaboration could not be viable.

The other critical partner was the Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction and Recovery Authority (VBRRRA) which sat within the Victorian Department of Premier and Cabinet. VBRRRA was authorised to coordinate the recovery and rebuilding program across all communities affected by the fires including a Donation Management System, initially advised by relief agencies, business, service clubs and philanthropy.

VBRRRA was a single point of contact and the conduit for information between the three levels of Government and between State Ministries and with the Victorian Bushfire Appeal Fund (VBAF). FRRR and VBRRRA discussed forming a partnership and this was confirmed by a Memorandum of Understanding in August 2009. That memorandum provided for trusts and foundations to have a coordinated interface with Government in the recovery process and it set out working arrangements between FRRR and VBRRRA.

Between July and September 2009 VBRRRA led a community engagement process across the fire affected communities, divided into 32 regions. Community Engagement Coordinators consulted residents in each region to develop a plan for projects that would assist in the renewal process. That planning process was short and intensive, setting deadlines for completion in a matter of weeks.

The plans formed a platform for the philanthropic sector to work in partnership with government and the not-for-profit sector, to address those identified needs. FRRR had identified gaps in many communities that had not been picked up in the formal community engagement process, and advised that many projects could not be identified at that early stage. Accordingly VBRRRA acknowledged the need for an independent grants program in partnership with the philanthropic sector.

Philanthropy Australia was not a member of the RRR Program collaboration, however the organisation assisted in its establishment through hosting meetings, canvassing its members and reporting on the program's progress. Through its members' affinity groups and other joint activities there is a long-standing practice of encouraging members to share knowledge, to cooperate and to collaborate on issues and projects.

What Did We Learn?

To understand what worked and what didn't, and what the organisation and sector should do differently, FRRR commissioned a formal review of its actions. It was funded with a grant from VBRRA and undertaken by an independent researcher, Helen Morris, who has a long and distinguished background in the philanthropic sector.

The review had two stages, the first comprised interviews and a focus group with donors and the second was an online survey, interviews and a focus group with people from the bushfire communities. The balance of this report outlines the key lessons from that review.

There is a unique and valuable role for philanthropy in disaster recovery

The usual rules, conventions and processes in grant making do not necessarily apply in a disaster. This is true of Government grants, business donations and the individual donor who puts a coin into an appeal tin. The way traumatised communities access and utilise grants is also different from the traditional approach to grant applications.

"You could see the enormous leverage effect of philanthropy through the RRR Program. It felt like they had a whole lot more money to distribute because of this effect."

[VBRRA CEO]

This review confirmed that the philanthropic sector was an important source of funding the response to the fires. It was small in dollar terms but large in impact because of its status, collaboration and its preparedness to be in there for the long haul.

Governments have to move on for political reasons and often because the next disaster or major issue takes over. Corporations can have similar pressures to move on once the company has made the initial effort and received the benefits of its gift. Philanthropy is more likely to be free of such time constraints and is untrammelled by political or shareholder agendas. Foundations are set up for the long term, and they generally have the ability and freedom to think and act in the long term. In addition, their special taxation status provides flexibility in funding.

The flexibility and variation in focus across the philanthropic sector is an important characteristic that should not be lost in formalising any formal program set up in conjunction with Government and relief agencies. This ability to find ways to respond to identified community needs was one of the most important elements to the success of this Program – it enabled communities to get support for the things they felt were important.

The collaborative response brought something additional to the table that could not have been achieved by Government or corporations alone. In designing this unique response in the special circumstances of the bushfire disaster, it became clear that there is room for strategic, targeted grant making, greater collaboration, more flexibility, increased resources and easier, simplified community access.



A collaborative response delivers benefits for communities, donor foundations, companies, and government

In addition to a flexible, accessible and responsive grants Program for bushfire communities, the structure of the program and the collaborative approach enabled communities to seek funding for the things they had identified as important to recovery, rather than what others had decided they would need. This encouraged community ownership.

By having the clearinghouse service, there was one touch-point and less intrusion on communities affected by the fires. At the same time, the Program was a way for the partners to learn about what was happening in the fire communities and understand the emerging needs.

It delivered other benefits too. FRRR provided philanthropic and corporate donors with a well-resourced mechanism for strategic giving into those

"It was one thing to have the right policy and another to have the right execution of the policy. The RRR Program ticked all the boxes and gave them the opportunity to lead a new way for philanthropy to work effectively in disaster recovery."

[William Buckland Foundation]

communities. This meant that bushfire-affected communities benefitted from the collaborative philanthropic response to the bushfires in ways that individual foundations might not have been able to deliver. Many foundations have a mandate to collaborate with other foundations on major social issues. This means that there is a strategic incentive for these organisations to work together.

Working together on programs also provided attractive economies of scale. It enabled some organisations which had limited administrative infrastructure to respond to the bushfire recovery program in an effective way, but with little additional overhead cost.

Collaborating also meant that foundations got to see more of how other foundations operated and garnered some new ideas for things they could do differently.

For Government, it also meant that organisations like VBAF could refer projects that were worthy of support but outside the guidelines for their funding schemes to alternative sources. For example, the Kinglake Radio station - VBAF staff wanted to help but could not as it was deemed to be outside VBAF funding guidelines, despite being identified as a priority in the Kinglake Community Recovery Plan. Instead, most of the funding was negotiated through the RRR Program via the Collie Foundation, ANZ Trustees and Rotary International.



There is a greater opportunity for philanthropic organisations and Government to collaborate in disaster recovery

The FRRR program helped to build a greater level of collaboration between Government and the philanthropic sector. As a partner with the Victorian Government through the Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction and Recovery Authority (VBRRRA), FRRR was able to widen the Government's recovery funding scope, and demonstrate the benefits of partnering with philanthropy.

A VBRRRA respondent to the review thought that, having learned about the value of philanthropy, the Victorian Government would probably invite philanthropy into a future recovery program much earlier, making them a major player from the start for the planning and implementation of recovery programs. Even at the emergency relief phase, philanthropic collaboration could help manage offers of assistance pouring in from donors and make their experience less frustrating - and make their funds more effective. VBRRRA was of the view that this could also help stave off those donors trying to get into direct contact with the traumatised community to "help" people who are not yet able to cope with well-intended outside offers.

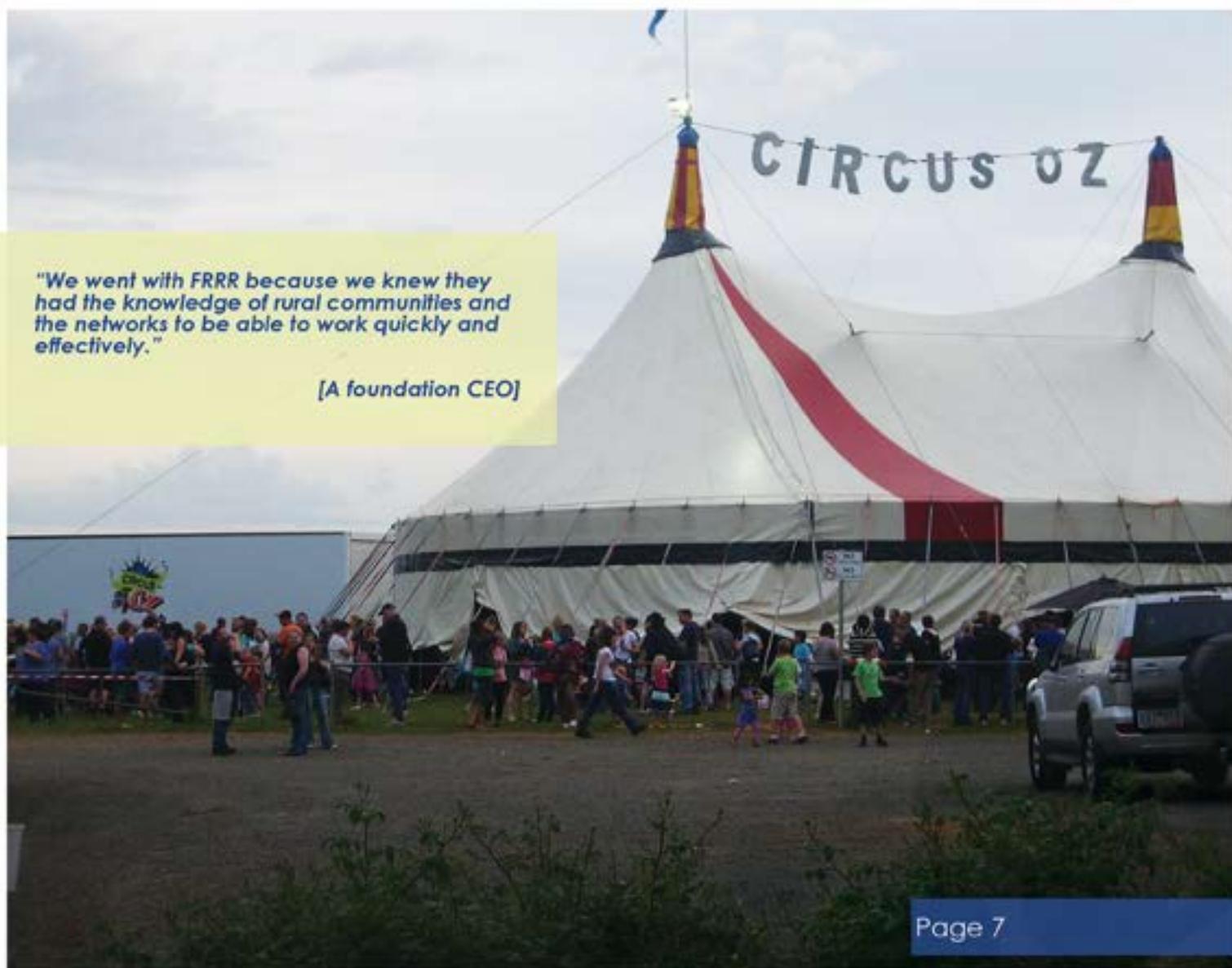
The ability of FRRR and the collaboration to dynamically engage with communities and match donors to people and projects filled a gap unable to be filled by Government. It also gave VBAF greater access to broader funding opportunities through FRRR's extended grants capacity, thanks to their special tax status. The RRR Program Manager's knowledge of the philanthropy sector provided invaluable insight to the Government about the range of funding options available outside VBAF.

FRRR also contributed to VBRRRA staff's understanding of what was happening on the ground in fire communities. In a sense, FRRR was seen by respondents as an enabler between the VBRRRA and community organisations - a conduit for exchanging information about the recovery progress. The FRRR partnership with VBRRRA gave it community credibility - some faith in the process. VBRRRA staff thought this credibility brought in more donations for recovery.

The collaboration was mutually beneficial. The formal Memorandum of Understanding between FRRR and VBRRRA enabled FRRR to keep up to date with Government recovery activities and thereby keep its own partners and the communities informed. It also gave FRRR opportunities to contribute to VBRRRA's constantly developing policy and practices. Through this process, they were able to demonstrate a proactive, practical and coherent response from philanthropy.

"We went with FRRR because we knew they had the knowledge of rural communities and the networks to be able to work quickly and effectively."

[A foundation CEO]





"The RRR Program approach allowed communities to take a deep breath and not dive into projects that everyone would regret."

A corporate foundation CEO

FRRR is well-placed to lead the philanthropic sector in disaster recovery for rural and regional communities

Due to its wide reach across Australia, long experience in working with communities at the grass roots level and its special tax provisions, FRRR is well-placed to lead the sector in any disaster recovery in rural and regional areas.

The special tax status is a particularly important factor, as it enables grants to be directed to rural communities in a way that had been unavailable before because few rural community organisations have Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR) status under the legislation.

FRRR is also highly respected by other trusts and foundations. There is a belief, based on past performance, that FRRR is a competent and respectable broker and manager of collaborative funds, these having been key *modus operandi* since it was established. With FRRR's reputation for making things happen in rural Australia and universal high regard for the organisation's method of working with partnerships and communicating at the grass-roots level, FRRR is the natural leader in rural and regional philanthropy.

Early engagement is required, but granting should not start until at least 12 months after the original event

The RRR Program began in September 2009 and expended all funds by November 2010, however, implementation of the program was continuing well into 2012.

This timing gave the community and donors a chance to think and plan strategically, away from the pressure of deadlines and public opinion. Support for community development is a realistic and compatible way for foundations to help reduce the impact of, or even prevent, future disasters.

This was confirmed by respondents who joined the review's community focus group, some of whom felt that when VBAF wound back its community grants program in early 2011 there were still projects waiting for funds and many project ideas still to come forward as formal proposals. As one focus group member commented, "It was only then, after two years, that we could focus on community project development." This shows the importance of allowing communities time to determine what they need in the long term.

However, had FRRR and the other organisations not acted promptly, while the emergency relief measures were underway, they would not have been in a position to begin this support program 12 months after the event.



Through the collaborative model, FRRR created a programmatic approach to recovery, offering donors engagement with a longer term program, instead of seeking to identify a specific project at a time when the community is not ready to act. This satisfied some donors' need to do something immediately after the disaster but enabled a delay before it placed pressure on the fire-affected communities.

In this way, the RRR Program bridged a gap between the needs of donors and the needs of the communities. It could immediately show the donors that they were making a difference in the region and in funding the type of project of their choice. At the same time, the donors and boards were educated as the program unfolded. Having a diverse range of funders meant that the collaboration maintained a wider pool of funds more likely to satisfy community needs.

Any philanthropic response must involve more than just a grants program

To be truly effective, a recovery program needs to include elements beyond a grants program.

Other mechanisms such as Regional Donation Accounts (allowing communities to collect and administer funds for their own programs), a clearing-house service (allowing grant seekers to submit only one grant application to one organisation and feel confident that it would reach the most appropriate donor) and a leverage mechanism (attracting additional funding by applying a co-funding principle, ensuring that the impact of donations were maximised), were important to the success of the overall recovery efforts and should be replicated.

The program must be flexible enough to meet evolving community needs

A clear theme from the review is the need for philanthropy to break out of its traditional ways of working and allow its response to be shaped by the particular circumstances of those affected.

Community respondents to the review reported changing recovery needs as time progressed after the fires. For example, initially they saw communications and equipment as a priority need, reflecting the desire for a feeling of safety. Later they referred frequently to the value of the arts as a means of communicating grief and promoting healing and hope. Also there was the need to restore what was lost - for example, to repair the football ground where families used to meet. They wanted to resume activities that were part of life before the fires. Any future program needs to have the flexibility to adapt to these evolving needs.

Future programs should also ensure there is a plan to transition from recovery to a program of community strengthening and leadership, as grant funds will eventually run out and community needs will continue to morph. Volunteer fatigue is now a real issue in bushfire-affected areas and programs like FRRR's Skills, Training, Engagement and Practical Support program are an important transition step.

The administrative structure of any grant program must be simple, accessible and flexible

A simple, accessible single application process is another key attribute of a successful program. Community representatives are under pressure and don't have the time or capacity to complete complex applications, nor to complete multiple applications. When combined with simple application forms, the one-stop-shop approach, or clearinghouse enabled communities to access funds for priority projects. It also encouraged donors to become involved, as it was perceived as not being too onerous for grant applicants.

The ease and flexibility of the grants (including around closing dates), the spirit in which they were given and the additional moral and practical support given by the Program Manager were the value-adds that made these grants stand out. Half of the surveyed organisations referred to additional support and practical assistance from the RRR Program alongside a grant.

In addition, the program has to be structured so that groups of people who may not have a formal incorporated entity can still undertake recovery initiatives. The different arms of FRRR's response made it easier for funds to be distributed and managed and meant local communities didn't have to set up a new entity just to be able to receive funding.

"There had been a general government-community partnership understanding in place for some time but rarely a specific formal relationship. The relationship with FRRR was different because of the scale of the disaster and it became clear that true partnership was needed."

[VBRA staff member]

"They (FRRR) could fund equipment which was not allowed under the VBAF guidelines. Local community emergency services do not receive government money for things like communications equipment. With the fires many were caught short or had their equipment burned so FRRR funds were vital to recovery."

[Community volunteer]

Respected staff are crucial

The success of any program depends on having the right people to administer the program. The successful execution of FRRR's response was due in no small part to the skills and attitude of the Program Manager. Several comments were made during the review process about her ability to bring people together, to identify opportunities and to support communities in developing proposals.

It was also crucial that the FRRR CEO had the credibility and competence that would make a partnership attractive to other donors and to the Government Agencies.

Recruiting the right people will therefore be important to the future success of any collaborative recovery program.

Leveraging funds from multiple sources is an effective way to ensure support for relevant community recovery projects

The FRRR bushfire program continued the organisation's policy of maximising its grants through leveraging other contributions. While FRRR contributed only \$250,000, it attracted an additional \$1.8 million from other sources. The organisation's reputation opened coffers that might otherwise not have been directed toward these recovery initiatives. The RRR Program grants meetings provided a natural market place for this leverage.

There were also instances of the RRR Program not contributing any funds at all, instead acting as a broker using leverage from one donor to another. This approach meant that a good idea could flourish if enough donors shared a vision.

While there was less flexibility in the way Government funding was executed, it was reported that VBRA staff felt inspired by the RRR Program to extend their own informal leveraging activities as an effective way of achieving successful programs.

Rigorous processes and transparency are essential to building trust and enabling collaboration

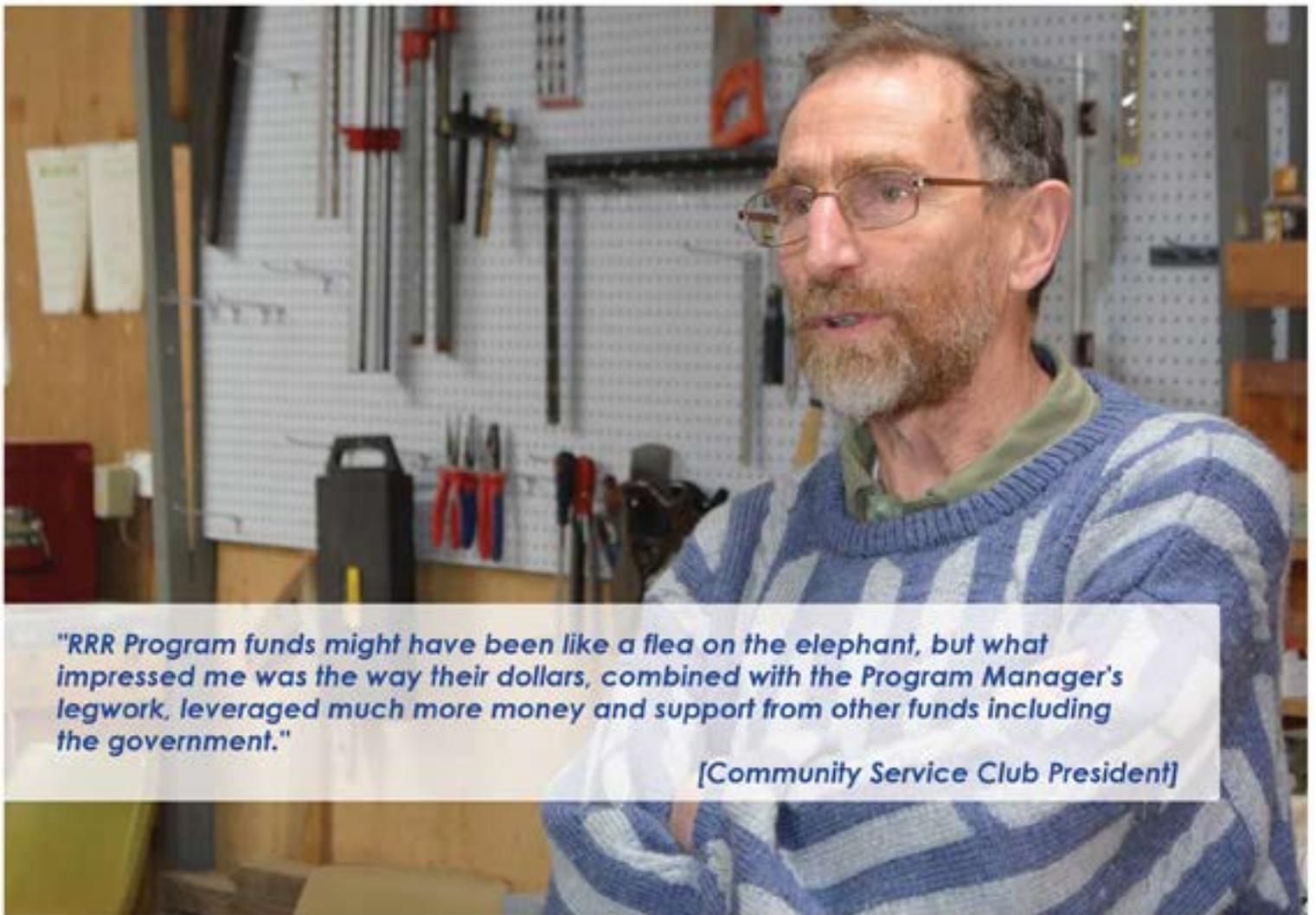
Some Foundation Trustees were initially concerned about losing control of their funds by donating them to the RRR Program.

To allay these concerns, all donors were invited to attend the RRR Program quarterly meetings, enabling them to keep track of the funds and report back to trustees. Written reports on the program's progress were circulated biannually, grant distributions were reported quarterly, progress presentation meetings were held annually and bulletins were sent intermittently with news of interest to the collaborating partners. These communications were key to ultimately winning the trust of collaborating foundations and ensuring their ongoing involvement.

Regional Donation Accounts play an important role in community access to funds

During the course of the FRRR recovery program the Regional Donation Accounts emerged as an invaluable mechanism for holding and managing localised funds. They expanded beyond expectations as they began lifting the barriers to donors contributing to particular communities. They also enabled bushfire communities to "self-help", addressing a specific project or issue within the local area such as restoration of the public hall, creating a well-being program or an arts program. Where these projects could be initiated, coordinated or conducted by a local not-for-profit community group, an FRRR Regional Donation Account could assist by providing a tax deductible receptacle for donor funds to the project.

Not only did Regional Donation Accounts give communities a localised fund, it also gave them time to consider their needs at their own pace and avoid the anxiety of a rush to grab some of the dwindling VBAF funds.



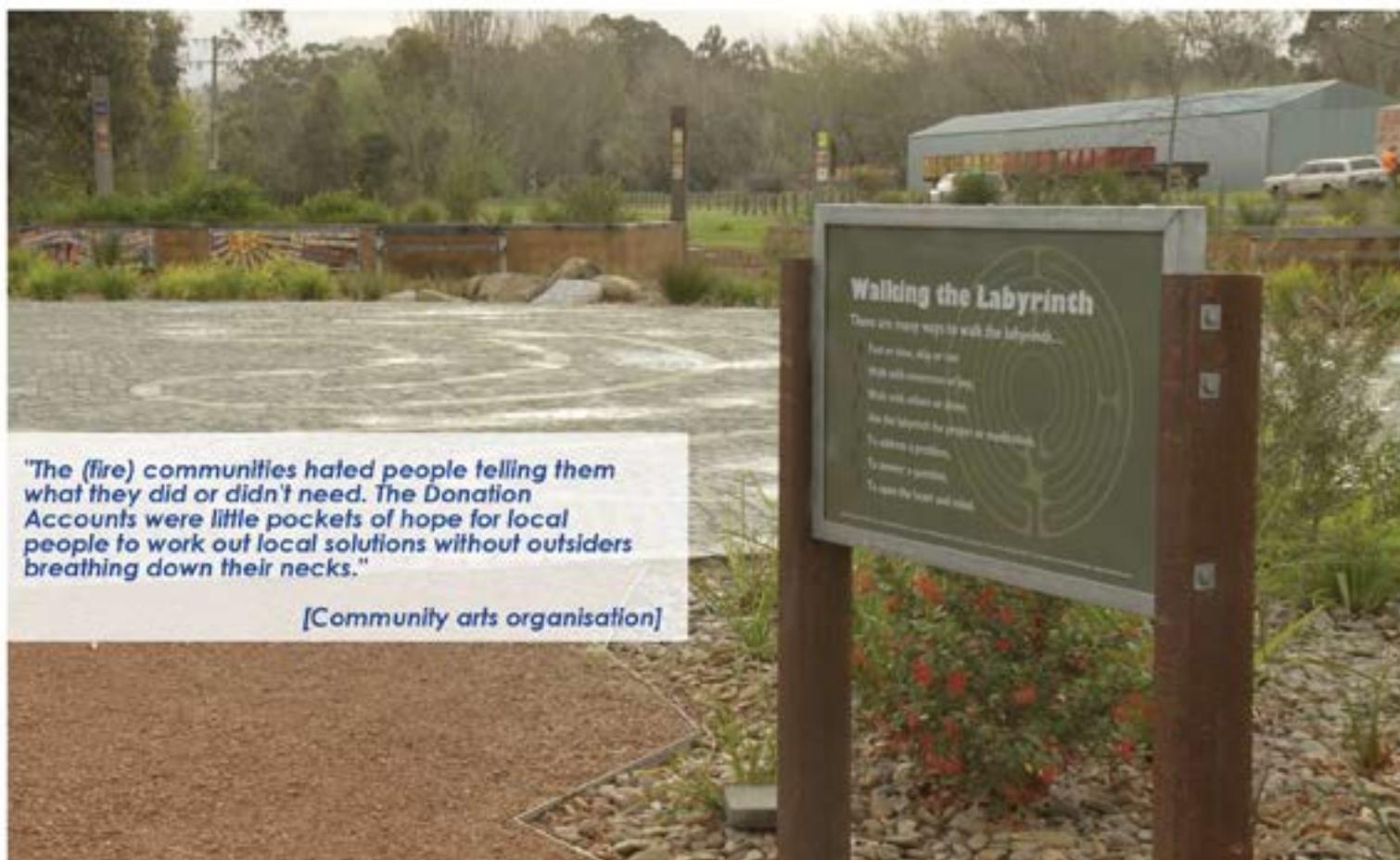
"RRR Program funds might have been like a flea on the elephant, but what impressed me was the way their dollars, combined with the Program Manager's legwork, leveraged much more money and support from other funds including the government."

[Community Service Club President]



"We would not have been able to achieve some of our most needed and substantial projects (without the Regional Donation Account). We would send a proposal to FRRR and with their approval we would send the funds into their donation account."

[Community Service Club Chairman]



"The (fire) communities hated people telling them what they did or didn't need. The Donation Accounts were little pockets of hope for local people to work out local solutions without outsiders breathing down their necks."

[Community arts organisation]

Regional Donation Accounts enable donors to support specific communities

The Regional Donation Accounts attracted donors who wanted to support a particular community or specific project within that community. In the 15 months between September 2009 and December 2010, almost \$3 million was deposited in the accounts by such donors. Many might not have made that contribution but for the tax deductibility of their donation through the Donation Accounts.

For example, Rotary International and Regional Arts Victoria both funded major projects through Donation Accounts that they deemed unachievable otherwise. Rotary gifted more than \$800,000 for a youth centre in Kinglake and for economic development in Marysville - projects that could not be funded by Government.

The Community Enterprise Foundation of the Bendigo Bank found that the bushfire had created new community funding models and that the FRRR Regional Donation Accounts and their Bendigo Bank network of Community Banks could work constructively to support localised recovery models. This form of funding was less accessible to government so it was crucial to getting several major projects to a viable starting point.

In future it is envisaged that donors who want to do something immediately after a disaster but find the community is not ready to act, could be encouraged to identify a program or focus area they wish to support and deposit the funds in a Project Donation Account. These funds could be held for the community to use when ready. Donors could rest assured that their grants are in safe hands with FRRR and not in a small community organisation unaccustomed to financial management.

A Clearinghouse is an important element of any program

Both VBRRR and FRRR set out to provide this clearinghouse service as an essential part of their lead agency role in community recovery. Through the clearinghouse model, communities could gain information and submit applications to one organisation instead of writing several following different and often complex guidelines. Grant applicants were also given advice on how to prepare submissions for various grants and take the first steps in planning and implementing a project.

Donors also benefitted from the clearinghouse model because they could access grant applications and directly fund individual programs that met their own funding aims. FRRR could share its knowledge of rural communities and philanthropy with the sector at large, as well as information and understanding about disaster grant making, and specific resources relating to the bushfire communities.

The Helen McPherson Smith Trust was one such foundation with \$2 million allocated to bushfire recovery grants. The Trust had been a partner with FRRR in the past and, though it did not join the RRR Program collaboration, it worked closely with the program with cross referrals where appropriate.

"Having the range of options introduced by philanthropy, it was like a supermarket - all the products are there and people could go and pick off what they needed."

[VBRRR staff]

Putting The Lessons Into Practice

Following this review into its response to the Victorian Bushfires, the FRRR Board has committed to a Natural Disaster Framework. This framework governs the way in which FRRR will respond to any future natural disasters – and indeed, we have already implemented it following the floods earlier this year. In addition, we have committed to undertaking the following actions:

- ✦ Work with collaborating partners and Philanthropy Australia to prepare a disaster funding handbook which maps collaborative roles in the philanthropy sector
- ✦ Foster funding partners and sources to deliver a range of products and programs that are available for community recovery, through simple and responsive processes
- ✦ Further research and communicate the key funding focus areas through which philanthropy could be most effective in the medium to long term after disasters
- ✦ Advocate for continuing community resilience and strengthening programs as a priority funding focus amongst funding partners
- ✦ Keep rural communities informed of the continuing Natural Disaster Recovery Program and the range of funds available for disaster preparedness and response

- ✦ Work with partners to further explore complementary roles with FRRR in fundraising, community accounts management and disaster grant making

- ✦ Seek a seat on relevant key Federal and State Government disaster planning bodies

- ✦ Where appropriate, seek engagement with State Governments in an advisory role immediately following a disaster, and continuing later in a partnership funding role

- ✦ Build on the Donation Accounts and support the development of rural community foundations to increase local capacity in the face of and following disaster

- ✦ Continue to engage skilled staff prepared to roll out the Natural Disaster Recovery Program in the event of a disaster, generally commencing up to twelve months after the event

- ✦ Maintain maximum flexibility for disaster grant making under taxation law so that the definition of charity can embrace special circumstances such as support for local business recovery and the use of private land for temporary housing

- ✦ Consider the establishment of an Australian Disaster Relief Fund as part of FRRR's future disaster responses, to broaden the range of available funding options

We welcome the opportunity to collaborate with other trusts, foundations, individuals and corporations, as well as Government agencies in ensuring these lessons are shared and that we build a stronger disaster relief framework to support rural and regional communities.





Forever Changed, we remember the fires of February 2009
Smoke, embers, driving winds
Orange, hot red
All are singed
Silence
Ash
Black despair
Slowly stirring on the wing
Hope, new spirit
is borne again.
Seared into our hearts, the memory of Black Saturday.
[K.H. a bush fire survivor]

"Forever Changed, we remember the fires of February 2009
Smoke, embers, driving winds
Orange, hot red
All are singed

Silence. Ash. Black despair

Slowly stirring on the wing
Hope, new spirit
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Seared into our hearts, the memory of Black Saturday."

[K.H. a bush fire survivor]

Acknowledgements

FRRR wishes to formally thank the then CEO of FRRR, Sylvia Adnams, for her vision and tenacity in leading FRRR's response. We also want to acknowledge the outstanding work of the RRR Program Manager, Jo Mason. Her personal commitment to making this program work for the benefit of the communities affected by the fires was a key factor in its success and has set the benchmark for how any future programs will be administered.

We also wish to thank the various donors and government agencies who shared our vision of how

the philanthropic sector and government could collaborate to help fire-affected communities. The levels of trust, cooperation and willingness to try something different have forged a new model for how our sector can respond to future natural disasters.

Finally, we wish to acknowledge the strength and resilience of the community leaders who are still helping their towns recover. Without their commitment and vision, belief in themselves and their ability to bring their neighbours together, the recovery process would have been far slower.



Championing Rural & Regional Australia

**A summary of a report written by Helen Morris
Published by FRRR, December 2012
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