



# Black Summer Bushfires, Five Years On

Supporting communities to recover and prepare



**FRRR**

Foundation for Rural  
Regional Renewal

HOPE

# Acknowledgement of Country



The Foundation for Rural & Regional Renewal (FRRR) acknowledges the Dja Dja Wurrung People as the Traditional Custodians of Jaara Country (Bendigo) where we are headquartered and extend this acknowledgement to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nations where we fund organisations and activities. We are grateful for the opportunity to walk alongside First Nations Peoples in this work and for the cultural knowledge they share so generously.

We pay our respect to Elders past and present and to the continuation of the custodial, cultural and educational practices of Australia's First Peoples.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are advised that this report may contain images or references to people who have passed away.

FRRR is grateful to GlobalGiving for funding the development of this report.



*COVER: Lake Conjola by David Pope, courtesy of The South Coast is Calling initiative from Australian Community Media*

## Contents

Executive summary	4
FRRR's response to Black Summer 2019/20	6
Mobilising FRRR's donor and partner network	8
Getting funds to communities	10
Supporting and catalysing local NFPs	15
Impacts and outcomes	17
Learnings, insights and recommendations for funders	20
Our generous supporters	42



# Executive Summary

The Black Summer bushfires in 2019/20 were truly unprecedented. The loss of life, homes, wildlife, businesses, livelihoods and the impacts on mental health and the social fabric of so many places was enormous. The effects were compounded by the lockdowns and restrictions that came with the COVID-19 Pandemic, as well as devastating flooding in parts of the country just months after the fires.

We acknowledge the blood, sweat and tears that have been invested by so many individuals and community groups into the recovery process to date, the work that is still ahead and the ongoing efforts in communities that are at-risk of future disasters.

The response to our bushfire appeal was overwhelming, with the depth of generosity reflecting the breadth of impact and the shared desire to assist. We are grateful to the thousands of donors who trusted us to get the funding to community groups in the affected areas, when the time was right for them. Thank you for your support, which made FRRR's granting and capacity building activities possible.

The report sets out how the \$26M donated to our Foundation has supported communities in their recovery to date. We have shared a few stories from the 920+ projects undertaken to date to showcase the difference the funds have made.

The remaining funds will be distributed to not-for-profit (NFP) organisations in bushfire-affected areas to support ongoing recovery in the years to come. Grants will be made through our Strengthening Rural Communities (SRC) program and Investing in Rural Community Futures (IRCF) Bay and Basin program. Capacity building support will also continue through IRCF Bega Valley, IRCF Shoalhaven and the Volunteers of Kangaroo Island programs.

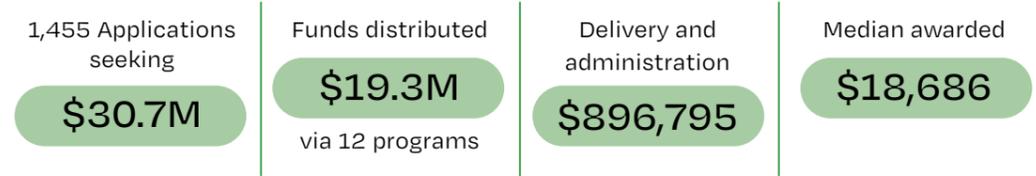
This report also shares some lessons and makes recommendations for future recovery funding programs. These include:

- FRRR has long championed the importance of funding medium to long-term recovery to respond to community needs, as they evolve, other disruptions occur and when the time is right for them. This review has reinforced just how important this is.
- The catalytic role of small grants and how they can be leveraged by communities to secure more funding and additional or expanded projects.
- The importance of events and local facilities in recovery and resilience building.
- In light of their critical role, there is a need to invest in the capacity of volunteer-led community groups and not-for-profit organisations (NFPs), especially in small and remote places.
- Patient and trust-based giving enables communities to build back better.
- Granting and capacity building programs need to be inclusive, particularly of marginalised groups to ensure existing disadvantage isn't exacerbated.
- It's especially important to learn to walk alongside First Nations Peoples with an embedded intention around strengthening self-determination.
- Investment in preparedness needs to happen alongside recovery efforts.
- Money is important, but it needs to come with empathy and support, so people feel heard and understood.
- FRRR is an effective connector and enabler between donors and communities, harnessing its special tax status to support projects and ideas that would have no other means of securing funds.
- Funders, especially philanthropy and government, play different but equally important roles in supporting recovery and need to collaborate.

This report confirms that if we target the investment in the right way, together we can empower local communities to create a stronger, more resilient remote and rural Australia.

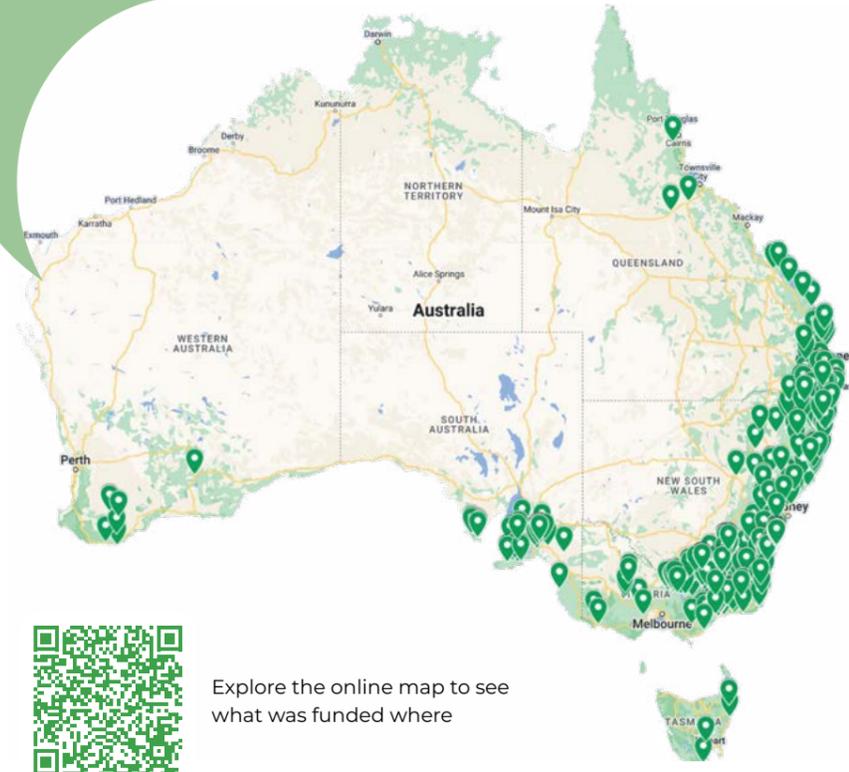
# What your support enabled

Funds raised  
**\$26M, via 11,940**  
donations from more than 6,633 unique donors



Funds awarded  
**929** projects and activities  
**240** communities

Including  
**65** capacity building activities through NEMA funding





## FRRR's response to Black Summer 2019/20

The Black Summer Bushfires began in September 2019 and were at their worst in December / January. Thankfully, most were out by March 2020. Nearly every state and territory was affected, almost simultaneously, something unprecedented in recent Australian history.

The Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements<sup>1</sup> reported that more than 24 million hectares were burnt, 33 people died, more than 3,000 homes were destroyed, nearly three billion animals were killed or displaced and the estimated national financial impact was more than \$10 billion. The impact is still being felt.

"The Gosper's Mountain, Kerry Ridge and Palmers Oaky fires all impacted our towns. For weeks roads were closed. Many surrounding areas including farm properties were damaged. We struggled for more than 11 weeks not only to breathe but to try and remain positive as a community. We lost many thousands of hectares of farming and bushland in these fires and our local community rallied to save each other, our possessions and our local flora and fauna, we are still trying to recover both mentally and financially. Our farming community had already lived through one of the worst droughts in history, these fires have impacted our people more than the general public can imagine. Fire aid and support groups are still active in our area."

Kandos Branch - CWA of NSW

In early January, when the devastating impacts and scale of the fires became all too obvious, FRRR activated a **Bushfire Recovery Appeal**, connecting with our network, writing to past donors, posting on social media and promoting it in the media. Recovery needs evolve over time and recovery takes years, if not decades. So, we put the focus of our appeal on medium to long-term recovery, encouraging potential donors to split their contributions across immediate relief and recovery efforts and the medium to long-term recovery needs of communities.

**In total, \$26M was donated to FRRR to support bushfire recovery. Contributions were channelled via our Bushfire Recovery Appeal and our Disaster Resilience & Recovery Fund.**

Beyond fundraising, our aim was to leverage our trusted connections across the sector, respond to feedback and ensure we were supporting the local organisations who were well-placed to support their communities. We listened to Bushfire Recovery Coordinators, spoke with agencies undertaking vital work in the initial response and contributed what we were hearing from communities into forums such as the National Bushfire Recovery Agency's Charities Roundtable and convening of the Public-Private-Partnerships forum, which brought together government, philanthropy and business leaders to consider opportunities for coordination and information-sharing. Later, we also convened conversations with funders working in specific regions, such as the Shoalhaven, where we'd been working deeply with community, encouraging collaboration to make it as easy as possible for impacted communities to access the support they needed.

"The loss and devastation are widespread, not just people who were directly impacted by the fires. It is also the people who didn't lose anything but watched their neighbours' devastation. The fear we all had on that horrific day - will my house be ok, who won't make it out of this, hearing reports on the radio that Mogo was completely gone. The fear didn't end once the fire passed; the days and weeks after were just as traumatic not knowing if it would reignite, no food, no electricity, no phone service at times no contact with loved ones, even six months on there are many homes still with no telephone or internet, families are living in tents, caravans and sheds."

Mogo Village Business Chamber

The sheer scale of the simultaneous disaster events saw people everywhere digging deep and wanting to help. Funds flowed in from across Australia and internationally.

FRRR was named as a beneficiary of several high-profile events, such as the Down to Earth concert and the Fire Fight Australia event. For the latter, we partnered with ANZ's Shout for Good, who worked alongside the organisers of the concert, TEC, to facilitate online and text donations. FRRR's then website host, CeRDI, played a key role alongside our communications team, JAW Communications, in preparing the FRRR website for significantly increased traffic (up 3,000% on FRRR's normal volumes) and in monitoring the site's performance as donations rolled in.

FRRR appreciates the support of all our partners and supporters. Thank you.



<sup>1</sup> <https://www.royalcommission.gov.au/natural-disasters/report>



# Mobilising FRRR's donor and partner network

## Bushfire Recovery Appeal

There were more than 8,800 donations to FRRR's Bushfire Recovery Appeal, from 4,257 unique donors who together contributed more than \$18.6 million. Contributions ranged from \$1 to more than \$1 million, with the median donation around \$13.50, highlighting what can be achieved when even the smallest donations are pooled.

Businesses, corporations, philanthropy and individuals all made generous contributions to FRRR's Bushfire Recovery Appeal. This ranged from individuals, including school children and families; to small businesses like bakeries selling a particular item and donating proceeds or sometimes donating a whole days' takings; to corporations, family foundations and philanthropic organisations. The entertainment industry stepped up broadly, from the high-profile events like Fire Fight Concert and the Down to Earth concert at Sidney Myer Music Bowl, to pubs hosting gigs, raising funds and donating proceeds to a range of charities including FRRR.

Many of our donors were long-term supporters, like ANZ, but more were new, such as Go-To Skin Care which donated directly and invited their customers to give too, which they matched.

The remaining funds from the Bushfire Recovery Appeal will be awarded to not-for-profit organisations across the bushfire affected communities to support their ongoing recovery journey.



"As a school community we felt for the needs of the Families who were affected by the bushfires. Having to ask to leave their homes to evacuate, bushfires burning close and surrounding their homes. Fighting the fires themselves, along with firefighters. This was a traumatic experience for families as their homes, sheds, livestock, farms were close to or unfortunately destroyed. The smoke surrounded the community for weeks on end, affecting the health and wellbeing of the community. It was a time to pray and thank God for the firefighters and volunteers who sacrificed their time and lives in helping those within our community and other parts of Australia."

Back to School program School Partner

## Disaster Resilience & Recovery Fund

In September 2019, FRRR launched its new Disaster Resilience & Recovery Fund (DRRF), at a parliamentary roundtable in Canberra hosted by then Deputy Prime Minister Michael McCormack. This is a perpetual fund, where donations are pooled and invested, with returns used to fund projects that enable medium to long-term recovery and preparedness.

The Fund was seeded by a gift from the closure of the Aussie Farmers Foundation and we are grateful to Wilson Asset Management, who helped boost this Fund by matching donations. This saw more than \$1 million going into the DRRF. By the end of 2022, more than \$4.7 million had been donated to the DRRF from bushfire recovery donors. Like the Bushfire Recovery Appeal, there was a wide range of contributors, with the median donation being \$80.

By contributing to this perpetual fund, our supporters have ensured we will be able to support ongoing preparedness and recovery. The \$4.7M in the DRRF continues to be invested and the earnings will be drawn on to support ongoing recovery and preparedness efforts.

"We wanted to make sure that the money was going to go where it was needed. We liked how FRRR operated - people from regional and rural communities would apply for grants, be assessed and then be provided with funding. We communicated to our 90,000 shareholders and said we were happy to match funds up to half a million dollars of our money with your money. By the start of the new year, a million dollars, broadly, had been raised."

Geoff Wilson  
Wilson Asset Management

## Black Summer Bushfire Recovery Fund Grants

FRRR was also successful in securing funding from the Australian Government, through the Black Summer Bushfire Recovery Fund, overseen by the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA). This \$2.7M grant was specifically focussed on boosting the capacity of not-for-profit organisations in two of the most severely impacted regions - the Bega Valley and the Shoalhaven area.

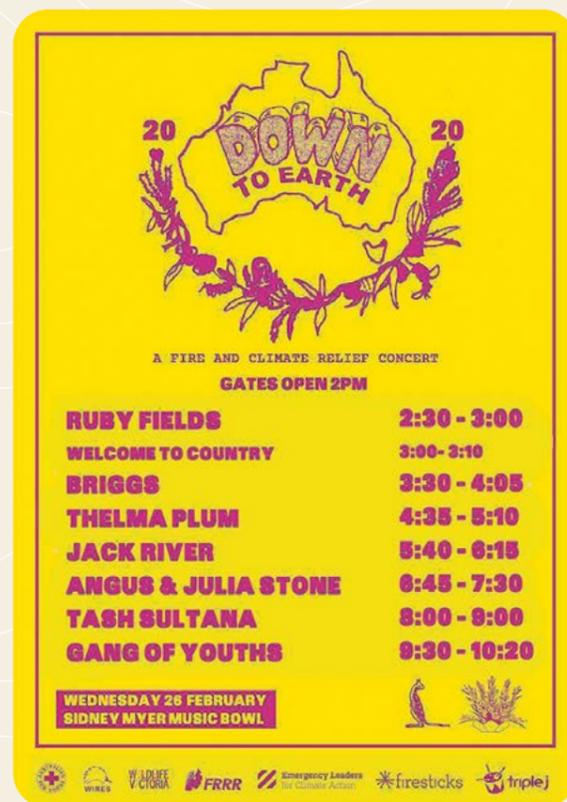
We are incredibly grateful to all our partners for their support, especially in light of what it activated for so many impacted communities.



# Getting funds to communities

At the time of the fires, there were 186 FRRR-funded community projects active in the fire-affected areas. We automatically extended the acquittal timeframes and offered variations to these projects, if the funds could be better directed in light of the fires. We also applied a disaster lens to other granting, transferring applications focused on bushfire recovery to focussed programs, while adding bushfire recovery to other program eligibility criteria.

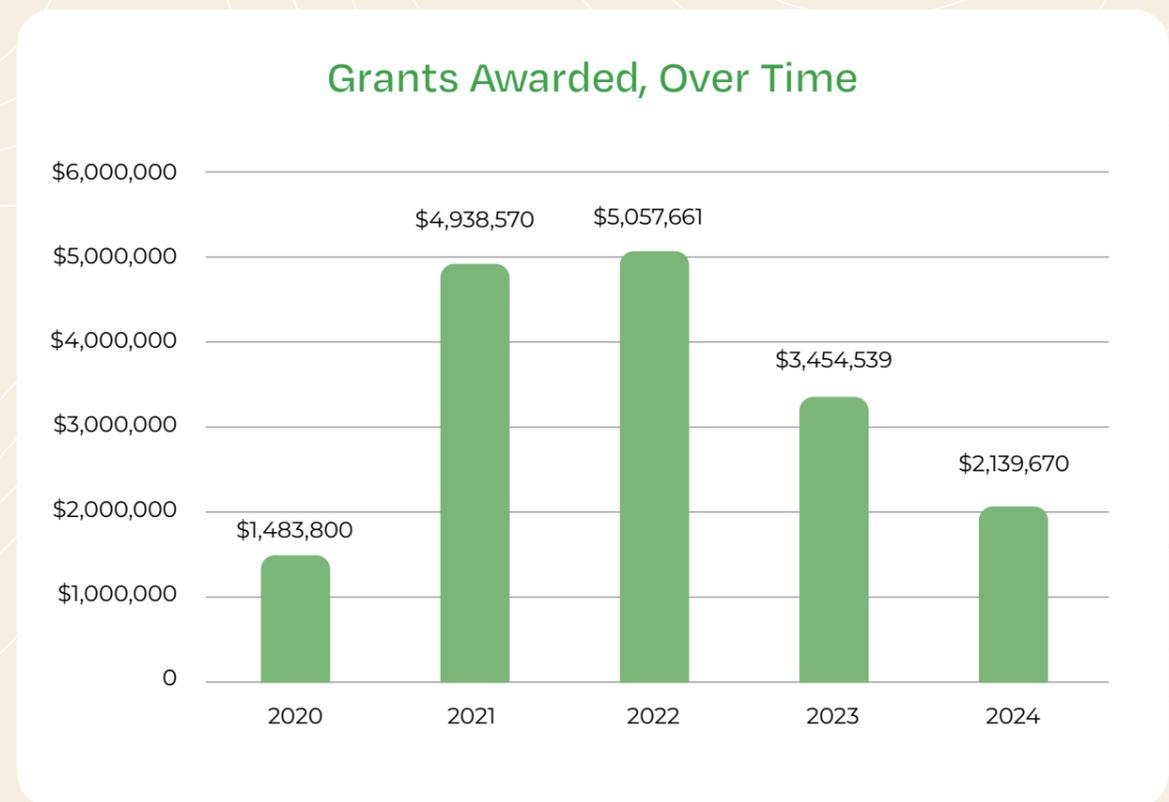
As at 30 June 2024, more than \$19.3M of the \$26M received, had been distributed or invested in community groups to support recovery. The bulk has been in grants (\$17.1M) but there have also been significant capacity building investment, such as leadership programs and training (\$2.2M). The remaining funds from FRRR's Bushfire Recovery Appeal and the balance of the Australian Government Grants will be distributed in not-for-profit organisations across the bushfire affected communities to support their ongoing recovery journey over the coming years. A further \$4.7M is invested in perpetuity and the returns will ensure funds are available for ongoing recovery and preparedness initiatives.



# Grants Awarded

The impacts of the fires were not the same in any two communities and so we knew our response had to be community-led, broad and flexible, enabling NFP groups to submit requests that fitted their needs and their context.

In distributing funds so generously donated, FRRR's focus was on medium to long-term recovery. While many specific government and NGO recovery programs and supports were available for the first two to three years after the fires, the recovery from the Black Summer fires has been unique in that in some regions, catastrophic flooding occurred during the early recovery period and COVID occurred at the peak of the early recovery phase, fundamentally changing the way and timeframe that recovery activities could be delivered. FRRR's approach to medium to long-term funding has remained vital, however the 'typical' timescales have not been possible and the pace and changing needs and priorities of communities have required flexibility and agility.



To date, FRRR has awarded nearly \$17.1M through 12 different granting programs, each of which involved applications being reviewed by our granting team, who made recommendations to a Program Advisory Committee, before either being endorsed by the Board, or the CEO under the delegation of authority. A further \$2.2M of training and workshop activities were also supported directly by FRRR via sub-contracted delivery partners. This rigorous process ensured that grants went to genuinely deserving projects in affected communities.

## Broad recovery programs

Most funding went out through the **Strengthening Rural Communities** program, our most flexible program. This collectively-funded program awarded grants of up to \$25,000 for projects to help communities to prepare and recover. This was by far the most popular program, with 870 applications requesting \$15.4M in funding. Thanks to the generosity of our partners and supporters, FRRR awarded 542 grants, valued at \$8.7M through this program.

Other FRRR core programs through which we supported recovery included **Back to School**, which awarded nearly \$1.3M in \$50 vouchers via special rounds of the program to assist families in purchasing the basics that they needed to get back into a regular routine with education. This program had a number of individual donors but was mostly supported by **News Corp** and long-term partners of this program, **Origin Energy Foundation** and **Portland House Foundation**.

➤ **Strengthening Rural Communities:** small flexible grants supporting medium to long-term recovery or future preparedness initiatives.

➤ **Back to School vouchers:** distributed by local organisations, these vouchers were redeemable at select retailers.

We also partnered with **News Corp**, establishing a fund that supported fire-affected communities to rebuild, with a focus on community infrastructure, emergency equipment and facilities, as well as mental health and wellbeing.

*"You have no idea how much this is appreciated. With the fire and everything the things that are so needed are simple items, such as socks and underwear. The soot and dust go through everything. Thank you so much, not many people realise just what we are going through!"*

Back to School Voucher recipient

## Targeted issue and place-focussed programs

FRRR also established five programs in partnership with specific donors. These were split between funds for particular regions where our partners had strong links, such as The Pratt Foundation supporting Tumut and surrounds through the **Visy Tumut Region Recovery Fund**; **The Yulgilbar Foundation Fund** funding into the Clarence Valley and Surrounds; and the **Bushfire Recovery Fund**, established by Helen Macpherson Smith Trust and Sidney Myer Fund working together to support backbone organisations in areas of regional Victoria that were badly affected by the fires.

Other donors wanted to reach specific cohorts, such as the Lachlan and Sarah Murdoch Foundation, who supported first-responders through the **Volunteer Emergency Services Fund**.

Several of our **Community Foundation partners** leveraged their FRRR fundraising accounts to direct support toward local recovery efforts, with more than \$1M being distributed back into those communities via 27 grants.

➤ **Donor Advised Programs:** new programs established after donors approached FRRR to partner with them to support a region or specific recovery issue or theme and get their funds where they were most needed.

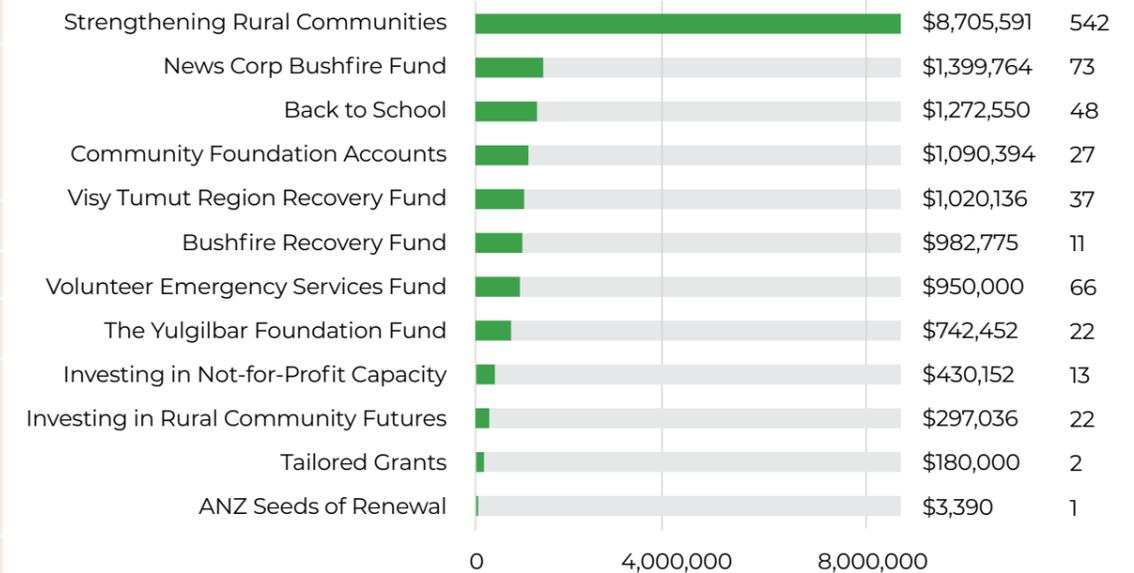
➤ **Local Community Foundations:** FRRR hosts Fundraising Accounts that enable Community Foundations to attract donations to an approved cause. Several Community Foundations established specific sub-funds or launched recovery appeals.

## Longer-term place-based programs

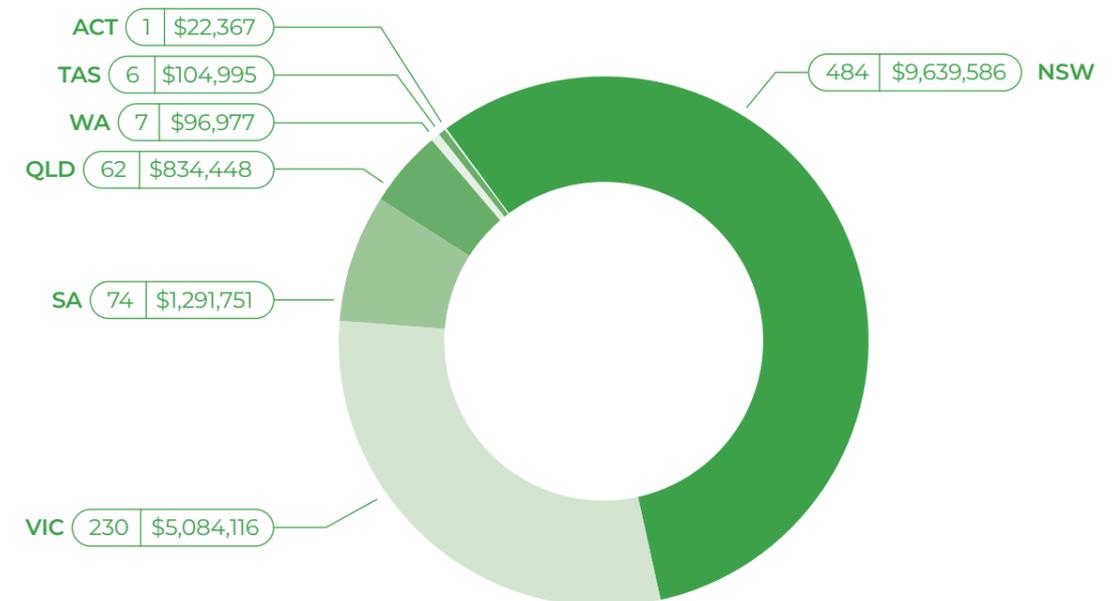
FRRR also received funding from Bendigo Bank's Community Enterprise Foundation to expand our Investing in Rural Community Futures program into the Bay and Basin region of the NSW South Coast, to support capacity building of local NFPs.

## Where did the money go?

### Grants by Program



### Grants by State or Territory



With most of Australia affected by Black Summer bushfires, we awarded grants to most states and territories. The most severely affected LGAs received multiple grants, including:

- East Gippsland, VIC – 94
- Bega Valley, NSW – 70
- Kangaroo Island, SA – 26
- Scenic Rim, QLD – 21
- Break O'Day, TAS – 4
- Katanning, WA – 2



Online map of funding locations

Several communities received multiple grants, including:

- VIC – Corryong – 27; Mallacoota – 16; Bairnsdale – 13
- NSW – Bega – 15; Eden – 14; Tumut, Albury, Adelong – 12
- SA – Kingscote – 11; Lobethal – 8; Parndana – 5
- QLD – Boonah – 7; Stanthorpe – 6; Beaudesert – 4
- TAS – St Helens, Seymour – 2
- WA – Katanning – 2



The type of organisations supported across all the programs were diverse, although most were incorporated entities or a public company. Importantly, 575 of the grant recipients (67%) did not have deductible gift recipient (DGR) status, meaning that FRRR was one of the few organisations that could provide them with funding support.

While the impacts were widespread and many peri-urban areas were affected, nearly \$9.4M went to communities in outer regional, remote or very remote areas. Of further note is that nearly half of the grants awarded went to organisations in communities with a SEIFA index of less than 40. This highlights the important role of FRRR in getting funding to communities that are often hard to reach and that have limited capacity to fundraise, coupled with high levels of disadvantage.

## Supporting and catalysing local NFPs

FRRR targeted local NFP capacity building through several place-based initiatives. This deliberate focus was in recognition of the critical role of NFPs and the extent to which they are under-resourced. By investing in their capacity, we were able to strengthen these locally-driven organisations, so they were able to better serve their communities.

“FRRR has been the most valuable and supportive organisation after the bushfires and here is why. You recognised that other organisations only wanted to pay for actual goods for functions and they expected everyone to volunteer their time for advertising, marketing, building and maintaining websites, grant writing and acquittals, accounting and book keeping, and anything that is required by any business.

You provided funding for capacity building, which, for us, meant that we could have a really good website professionally made, amongst other very necessary functions required for running a NFP in its early stages. We were losing faith and energy because of having no money to pay for the enormous back end required and I personally felt that FRRR listened to our needs and delivered.

I was feeling tired, weary and jaded after a long time of volunteering and I felt heard AND you took action. I don't think I would have carried on with the Cobargo Wellness Group if you hadn't structured your meetings in a collaborative way so that everyone was heard and taken action on your findings.

Thank you from the bottom of my heart for your involvement in all of our organisations after the Black Summer Bushfires.”

Cobargo Wellness Group -  
Ginger the Frog Community Arts  
Project Tour

Funded via SRC, with the  
support of GlobalGiving



The **Paul Ramsay Foundation** supported the Bega Valley, Glen Innes, and Taree and Wingham communities through the [Investing in Not-for-Profit Community Capacity in NSW \(INFPCC\) program](#). Recognising the integral role that NFP organisations play in building and supporting resilient communities, both socially and economically, INFPCC's primary aim was to support the capacity of local grassroots organisations, helping them to respond and recover in the face of challenges and disruptions.

Additionally, in 2021 funding from the Australian Government enabled FRRR to extend the **Investing in Rural Community Futures program** into the Bega Valley and parts of the Shoalhaven, including Lake Conjola and Kangaroo Valley. The grant, through the Black Summer Bushfire Recovery Program enabled activities that responded to the priorities of local community groups. This included training in leadership, governance, fundraising and strategy; fostering collaboration and strengthening networks; and in some cases paying for consultants or staff to increase capacity and drive efficiencies. In total, more than \$2 million has been invested in these communities. As we write, these programs are in their final stages but we have seen that building capacity and strengthening networks creates a ripple effect.

In the **Shoalhaven**, organisations have become more resilient, more connected and better able to serve their local communities. As they work together, the collective strength of these organisations is amplified, leading to new ideas, stronger partnerships and greater impact. Strong collaborations have emerged around collective fundraising and exploration of community foundations; collaborative innovative programs to support youth; and confidence to explore different approaches to social enterprise.

In the **Bega Valley**, the partnership between the local Council, FRRR and ARLF has been very effective, highlighting the importance of networking and collaboration, particularly in disaster-affected communities. It was recognised with a **Highly Commended Award in the NSW Resilient Australia Awards in 2024**. Grassroots organisations report increased ability to connect in times of need, as they have formed strong networks. Leadership was a strong theme in the activities in the Valley, leading to stronger NFPs, as well as a thriving community. Relationship building and collaboration between groups, with each contributing their strengths and knowledge rather than competing for funding and resources, emerged as a highly effective yet underutilised method of creating a more self-sufficient community. Looking ahead in the Bega Valley, an alliance has formed to ensure the community connection is sustained into the future.

A program is also still underway on **Kangaroo Island**, SA to support the capacity and resourcing of local volunteers and not-for-profit organisations to grow and thrive. The goal is to enable them to better fulfill the important social, environmental and economic role they play. The program seeks to support the local community to navigate their recovery journey, take on current challenges and create local solutions to local issues.

Managed locally, the program involves a range of activities such as workshops, events, resources and networking opportunities, thanks to The Ian Potter Foundation and the Maple-Brown Family Foundation. Grants are still to be awarded but to date, more than \$70K has been invested on the Island through this initiative.

In addition to these structured programs, FRRR staff provided significant support to local communities. In many cases, this was over the phone or email, as COVID restrictions limited visits to communities.



## Impacts and outcomes

As they do time after time, local community leaders stepped up to guide their community through recovery. However, their efforts were hampered by COVID restrictions and, in many communities especially in NSW, severe flooding. This made recovery complex and multi-layered.

Many of the activities that are typically so critical to recovery – especially those that involve people coming together to share their experiences – were forced online, were significantly delayed or simply didn't happen. However, once again, NFPs adapted their practices and still proactively sought support to address critical local priorities.

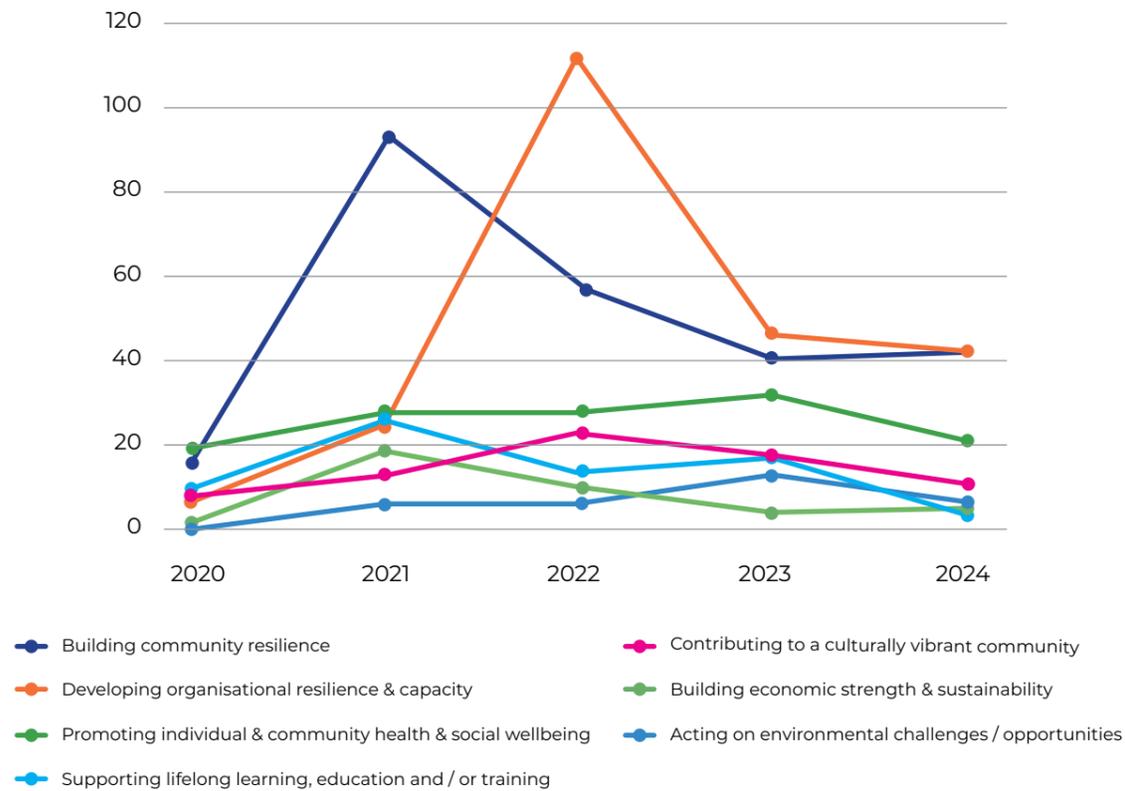
Most of the grants FRRR awarded went toward projects that increased community resilience, closely followed by developing organisational resilience and capacity, then promoting individual and community health and social wellbeing. This is consistent with most of FRRR's granting and reflects that there is an overwhelming need for this kind of support for 'soft infrastructure', yet not many funders work in this space.

Project focus areas	# Grants	Funding
Building community resilience	256	\$5,363,874
Developing organisational resilience & capacity	239	\$4,608,915
Promoting individual & community health & social wellbeing	133	\$2,205,930
Supporting lifelong learning, education and / or training	76	\$1,682,044
Contributing to a culturally vibrant community	78	\$1,488,437
Building economic strength & sustainability	45	\$1,141,349
Acting on environmental challenges / opportunities	37	\$538,691
<b>Total</b>	<b>864</b>	<b>\$17,074,241</b>

Typically, in recovering from natural disasters, the needs of communities evolve – from relief (food, water, shelter, medicines, social connection and access to timely and accurate information), to early recovery (temporary accommodation, geographic dislocation, children returning to school, complex insurance processes, and adaptation to a 'new normal'), to medium to long-term recovery and preparedness over years (rebuilding physical structures, renewed opportunities to improve individual livelihoods, mental health and wellbeing focus, resumption of community life, restart local economies and preparedness activities to be better informed about, and prepared for, future climate-related events).

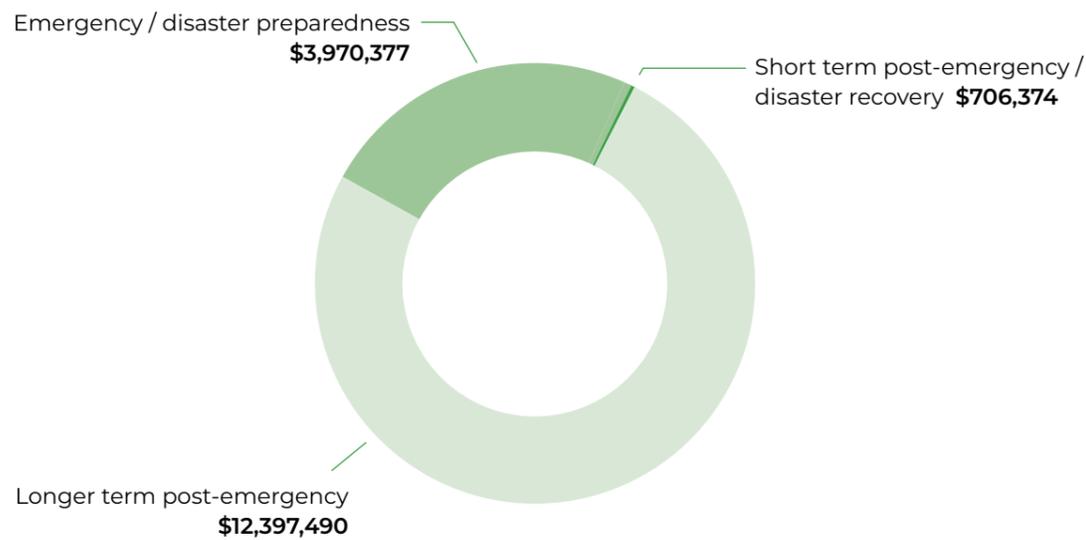
As indicated in the chart on page 19, in FY22 there was a marked jump in requests for organisational resilience and capacity projects. This most likely reflects the volunteer fatigue and ongoing demand for support on local NFPs, particularly as community groups faced the impacts of COVID and floods. In this context, it is important that community organisations have access to flexible, tangible and accessible support, as their needs evolve.

## Grants by Focus Area, Over Time



Consistent with FRRR's approach, the majority of projects funded focussed on medium to long-term recovery efforts. Pleasingly though, there was also significant funding for preparedness activities, reflecting our community and funding partners recognising the increasing importance of these efforts.

## Disaster cycle phase

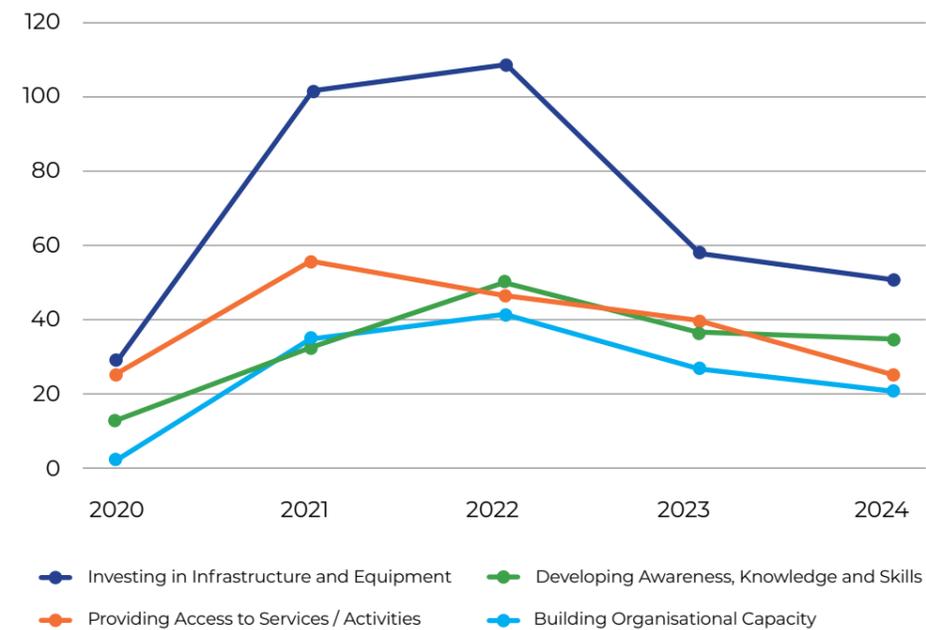


In terms of the lever or approach, as we would expect in the early to medium stages of recovery, there was a big focus on either infrastructure or equipment that made people feel safer in case of future fires, with nearly \$1M distributed to the Volunteer Emergency Services Fund alone. We also saw enhancements to local community facilities, particularly those that encourage people to come together and recover. The next most common funding area was ongoing provision and access to services and activities, many of which were significantly disrupted by the fires. This included things like mobile early years education, access to fresh food, mental health support and programs like arts recovery or music events.

Change Mechanism	# Grants	Funding
Investing in Infrastructure and Equipment	350	\$6,382,174
Providing Access to Services / Activities	203	\$4,296,750
Building Organisational Capacity	139	\$3,454,507
Developing Awareness, Knowledge and Skills	172	\$2,940,810
<b>Total</b>	<b>864</b>	<b>\$17,074,241</b>

As the chart shows, infrastructure and equipment funding was most in demand in each of the last five years, although two to three years post fires, there was increased demand for both building organisational capacity and increasing knowledge and skills. This ranged from governance and leadership training, through to increased understanding of cultural burning. At a community-level, we know that a community with high levels of skills, knowledge, capacity, capability, relationships and interconnectedness is better able to provide an 'elastic' response to disaster; not slow, disjointed or broken. It is this 'elasticity' that requires a deeper understanding and recognition of, and greater investment in the future.

## Grants by Change Mechanism, by Year



# Learnings, insights and recommendations for funders

In this section of the report, we have drawn on our experiences, as well as feedback from community groups to make a number of observations about what should be funded and how.

## What to fund

### → Recovery over the medium to long-term

A long-term approach to disaster response, recovery, mitigation and preparedness is essential. Every community is different but recovery is always a marathon, not a sprint, and needs will change over time. It is important that flexible funding is available to support communities through their medium to long-term recovery.

As the significant investment in projects designed to strengthen resilience shows, it takes time for communities to process what has happened to them and to begin to rebuild.

"Since the fires the community has not had a chance to properly heal. Aid in terms of compensation for physical losses is becoming available, however there is a more subtle impact on a community that has been stretched to its limit. During the fires many people talked about the effect of running on adrenalin and then after the feeling of emptiness that followed. There was no time to come together before the community was once again under threat. The fires had denuded the landscape and when the rains came, many roads and properties were further affected by floods and mudslides. The clean-up started again.

Then community events planned to recognise the resilience demonstrated were cancelled due to COVID restrictions."

Macdonald Valley Association



## Triumph Over Trauma

The first-responders to events like the 2019/20 Black Summer Bushfires see and experience things that many of us can only imagine. As a result, many go on to experience PTSD and other mental health issues due in the main to the trauma they have experienced.

After the bushfires, the 4 Aussie Heroes Foundation received an increase in enquiries for their support from some of the firefighters, as well as others who had been affected by the fires. As they wrote in their application, "this demographic saves lives, and the community has a responsibility to look after and support them particularly when they are suffering and struggling mentally as a result of their efforts."

Thanks to News Corp's contribution, FRRR was able to award a \$23,000 grant towards hosting two small-group, 11-day live-in 'Triumph Over Trauma' programs, and a three-day 'Refresh' follow up, three months after the initial program. The program is made up of evidence-based and evidence-informed sessions and activities. It was delivered close to Boonah in the Scenic Rim in south east QLD, which experienced significant fire impacts.

In addition to the clinical therapeutic sessions facilitated by mental health practitioners, they also offer activities such as equine therapy, canine support, nutrition and healthy eating, and yoga. Partners and children also attend part of the program, which is free to participants.

"Participating in the Program has been incredibly beneficial to me as part of my recovery journey. It is hard to explain in words what it felt like to arrive at the Program, but I can say that I left the Program with many new tools that I am confident will help me move forward."

November 2021 Program Participant



## → Preparedness activities

With disasters currently costing the Australian economy \$38 billion per year and predicted to increase to at least \$73 billion per year by 2060<sup>2</sup>, a paradigm shift to preparedness and general resilience is becoming a more prominent part of how the emergency management, business and community sectors are seeking to mitigate the human, financial and ecological cost and impact of disasters. While recovery may well be the focus of a granting program, it is important to also fund preparedness activities, as these activities build the resilience of community organisations to future disruptions.

"The Bushfire Fuel Management group had conversed with community members over the last three years to pinpoint areas of concern relating to fire. Much of their fears were based on ignorance. A booklet was prepared which covered topics that the community could find useful, including fuel management processes and decision making, house and garden preparation to reduce risk and access to further information. A series of presentations and workshop activities were conducted and advertised to the community as a whole. They included a Traditional Burning session... cool burns were another area of interest!"

Preparedness info sessions / resources  
Mallacoota and District Recovery  
Association

"The community response is one of pride in its completion and the feeling of readiness now should we be faced with an incident like the 2019 bushfires again. The community is better prepared, trained appropriately and with a strong band of volunteers."

Incident response trailer  
Southern Yorke Peninsula Community Hub  
34216



"We are so thankful that project has been enabled by FRRR. Thanks so much for the support and we are confident the money has been used to great, high impact long-term effect."

VIC SES Yackandandah  
Unit

## Resilient Emergency Services in Yackandandah

One of the first things that often occurs during a bushfire is the loss of power. While food going off in fridges is bad enough, it also affects the ability of emergency services to respond and support their community.

The Victoria State Emergency Services (SES) Yackandandah Unit knows this only too well and has been working to transition to a self-sufficient energy system and deploying renewable technology, such as battery powered chainsaws and recovery tools. They started by installing solar and then added a battery for storage. But as a back-up, they also wanted to install a 10KVA Diesel Generator 240v that was hard-wired, enabling automatic backup of their power supply and to ensure capacity in the event prolonged smoke haze or clouds prevent solar generation. In addition, they wanted a cover to house the generator to enhance its longevity.

A \$13,500 grant from FRRR, through the Volunteer Emergency Services Fund, supported by the Lachlan and Sarah Murdoch Foundation, went toward the cost of the generator, with a further \$27,000 from other partners, coupled with volunteers and local contributions.



The guaranteed power also meant that volunteers would have a safe and comfortable space to return to refresh, rest and debrief, in addition to ensuring they could better serve the community.

## → Local facilities and programs

Our experience over the last nearly 25 years has underscored the critical importance of communities having a space where they can gather. This was reinforced time and again in the feedback about these facilities, either in applications or in the acquittal process. So funding their repair or enhancements is essential to any recovery efforts.

"During this time, the importance of our hall has been highlighted through community feedback and attendance. It's the glue that binds and connects us and we want to ensure it is improved and still standing for the community in years to come due to its critical importance in our rural and remote village that has experienced such loss since the firestorms in November 2019."

Bobin School of Arts

"This community was suffering badly and many in a dark place mentally and physically.... everything seemed too hard. Then along came an exciting fresh face to our community hall, standing proudly for all to witness. Yes, someone does care and life will be wonderful again. It is beyond belief the positive difference these works have made to the Corryong Memorial Hall and its community. This is the first building when entering the business area of our small town - now setting the feeling of welcome and community pride. A place to stop, explore and smell the roses, while injecting tourist dollars into a fragile community. [The] Memorial hall committee is extremely thankful to all donors and FRRR for enabling these works to occur. Without this funding there would have been no Steps to Recovery!"

Corryong & District Memorial Public Hall Inc

"We now have a facility that can better support our Firefighters & Red Cross in peacetime (meetings, gatherings etc) and in disaster times...The grant has allowed the Corryong Fire Brigade, Corryong Group, and Corryong Red Cross organisations to meet & socialise in a facility that sports modern energy efficient facilities. This grant specifically addressed an ageing and energy hungry kitchen & contents. Our successful opening event allowed members & partners to come together for a social evening, share a meal & support the Matildas."

Corryong Fire Brigade



## Building Blocks: Play and Learn Together

The bushfires impacted all parts of society, including families and children. For those in relatively low socio-economic areas, they exacerbated the challenges, including the ability to access high quality early learning programs or home learning materials.

In and around the community of Break O'Day in northern Tasmania, including St Helens, Fingal, St Marys and Falmouth, there are limited quality early learning environments. Fingal Valley Neighbourhood House saw an opportunity to purchase a new, long-wheel-base van, which would allow them to take a wider range of resources into diverse locations in the Break O'Day area. The concept was to use community facilities such as parks, playgrounds, local halls and other spaces to deliver programs that supported peer-to-peer connection and engagement. In addition to supported playgroups and other early learning programs, the team offered parenting advice, referrals and resources.

A \$25,000 grant from FRRR, thanks to the Fire Fight Australia donors, helped the Neighbourhood House buy a new van and deliver more than 100 sessions across the community. The vehicle helped to connect people from isolated areas through outreach activities. It supported these bushfires impacted communities to build social bonds with each other and link with community support services. It also supported volunteers and service providers to broaden their capacity to support local communities, enhancing human recovery capital.



"I am most proud of how we were able use the new vehicle to improve the quality and type of programs on offer with a broader range of equipment, resources and information available. The larger vehicle enhanced our capacity to meet the needs and interests of children and families and enabled us to support community events, support health and wellbeing and build community networks. There will be a long lasting impact from the resources and capacity development as supported through this funding."

Coordinator, Fingal Valley Neighbourhood House

Providing funding to ensure that local people can still access services and activities helps to recreate a sense of normality and helps to retain people in the community. This includes things like playgroups, exercise programs and other things that help to make it a nice place to live and work.

## Cultural Burning Creates Connections, Builds Understanding

In November 2019, fire destroyed nearly 90 homes, as well as infrastructure and damaged hundreds of acres of the natural environment in the Nymboida Valley, in the NSW Clarence Valley. The community wanted to increase their resilience and hopefully avoid such a devastating event in future, by learning ways to better manage the land to minimise the impacts of future bushfires and protect the local ecosystems.

After consulting with the community, Nymboida Community Groups Inc saw an opportunity to run a workshop, in partnership with the local Land Council, where people could start to learn about Aboriginal-led cultural burning activities, under the guidance of an experienced practitioner, and decide if they wanted to pursue its implementation.

An \$8,077 grant funded from donations during the Fire Fight Australia concert saw around 40 people participate in the workshop. Many more families and neighbours benefited from the knowledge they went on to share. This workshop was a much-needed step in the community's recovery from a devastating bushfire.

**"We all learnt A LOT about the very important philosophy and practice of Aboriginal cultural fire practice and ways we can implement them as a community and individually. We also planned ways we can continue to learn and implement on an ongoing basis with the support of local Gumbayngirr peoples."**

Nymboida Community Groups

## How to fund

### → Flexible, inclusive funding

Recovery comes in all shapes and sizes, covering a multitude of needs and delivery mechanisms, so a flexible response is important. FRRR's special tax status (endorsed as an organisation able to receive deductible gifts specifically listed at Item 13.2.2 of s30-105 of the Income Tax Assessment Act 1997 (Cth)), coupled with its broad and flexible funding options, means a diversity of projects and ideas was supported that might otherwise not have been funded. Retaining this flexibility in program approach is important in any future disaster recovery funding.

Specific consideration and investment are also required for remote, rural and regional communities where geographic isolation amplifies the complexity of disasters, particularly when it comes to accessing tradespeople and recognising that supplies often cost much more, given the distances and lack of competition in their supply.

**"When the project started, we had set a budget that looked realistic - but we did not anticipate the supply issues and cost increases experienced by our local contractors over the past 12 months. Also, we did not anticipate how busy our local contractors would become - and therefore trying to push them to complete our project became a challenge - especially given they were doing some of the work at much reduced pricing."**

Lobethal Recreation Ground

**"As a tiny town which was directly impacted by drought then the 2019/20 bushfires, we are very proud of the efforts of a small band of volunteers who have developed a Master Plan for the Hall and other assets in the town. Our isolation and distance from major areas has been a challenge as freight cost to get items up here are exorbitant. A lot of volunteer hours were utilised to pick up some items from nearest large town."**

Ensay Mechanics Institute Hall



It's also important to ensure that granting and capacity building programs are inclusive. Connecting with and listening to marginalised groups is vital to reduce the likelihood of further disadvantage. This may manifest in many ways, from having funding set aside for particular cohorts, to adopting a flexible approach to how applications are lodged, such as staff assisting groups to complete the application or lodging them via video, for example.

## → Being responsive and empathetic

It's important to be responsive to the pressures and changing circumstances facing community organisations and to allow as much flexibility in the process as possible. For example, with COVID following hot on the heels of the bushfires, many projects were delayed due to supply issues. As a result, FRRR granted many extensions and project variations.

Be sensitive to the experiences that those working on behalf of their community have been through. Sometimes the most important thing is just to listen and let the applicant know they've been heard.

**"The last 14-15 months have been a surreal and challenging time for our community. We are definitely in the recovery stage and hope to move into the rebuild stage in the next 12 months. Throughout the entire process, we have found FRRR staff a pleasure to deal with and we have nothing but praise for the FRRR team. All staff demonstrated sensitivity to our needs and the associated trauma of the bushfires."**

Association of Bell Clarence Dargan Incorporated

## → Investing in backbone and legacy organisations

As recovery gets underway, local community leaders know what will make the biggest difference. Trusting these local leaders and supporting them to take action on those priorities is important. In some places, like Big Swamp, the immediate focus was on preparedness in case of a future disaster; for others, it is about restoring services; and others bringing community together. Often the outcomes will be multi-faceted.

More than a million dollars was distributed through Community Foundation fundraising accounts, demonstrating the power of groups leveraging FRRR's special tax status to support this kind of activity in future recovery programs.

One such partnership enabled Border Trust to scale their capacity to meet the challenges of distributing \$3M in charitable funding into the Towong LGA and, more broadly, to ensure the ongoing delivery of support for their community.

**"We started from a very low resource base and these funds gave us the certainty to increase our FTE, undertake strategy and risk planning, and improve our efficiencies and data management through new systems. A significant project, Vital Signs, Stage 1 of which is now complete, will provide valuable measures of local equity, social prosperity, and community development to inform future activity."**

Border Trust

## New Kitchen Sees Big Swamp Refuge Prepared for Future Disasters

The bushfires highlighted the need for better refuge facilities in many communities. One such area was the disadvantaged Lower Eyre Peninsula community of Big Swamp, SA. Their Community Centre is the local refuge but it did not have a functioning kitchen. With a \$21,025 grant from FRRR, supported by **Center for Disaster Philanthropy**, they demolished the dilapidated lean-to at the rear of the hall and constructed a new kitchen addition. The work was undertaken almost entirely by volunteers, with funding used for materials.



**"I think that the thing we are most proud of is what we have achieved together with our own hands. This was a huge project for us, an addition probably valued at \$70,000. With our skilled team of volunteers supplying virtually all the labour, we were able to complete the kitchen extension on budget requiring only a nominal amount over and above the FRRR grant money!"**

Big Swamp Community Centre Inc

The installation of a kitchen increases opportunities for fundraising and to create more social events for the community as well as a gathering place during times of bushfire and other disaster events.

## → Funding leadership and capacity of NFPs

FRRR strongly believes that grassroots community organisations play a vital and often under-appreciated and under-funded role in both preparedness for, and recovery from, disasters. Because of relative isolation, community organisations in remote, rural and regional Australia are often the first called upon in a disaster effort – for immediate relief – and remain supporting the community in its long-term recovery.

They hold knowledge, networks, expertise, and organisational infrastructure that is drawn upon in crisis yet not formalised to the extent that they can be effectively deployed throughout the disaster spectrum.

Therefore, investing in leadership and capacity building to enable and support a backbone community-led organisation will yield long-term benefits. They undertake diverse roles such as providing information, support, access to services or advocacy, as well as deeply practical things such as providing volunteer ‘people-power’ to activate local resources, maintain local community assets, fundraise on behalf of other groups and host local events. Each requires financial and in-kind support, and general recognition of the work they do and role they play and increased community capacity to recover more effectively from disasters over the longer term.

Due to their capacity, they are often unable to compete for government funding, or secure funds through appeals and other fundraising activity, yet are expected to deliver complex outcomes. Because recovery takes years, local leaders often experience fatigue, especially if they too were personally impacted. Investing in paid roles and not relying solely on volunteers can be a critical enabler of recovery. Simple access to agile resourcing for community organisations is vital and such funding should recognise the unique role community organisations play, as needs evolve.

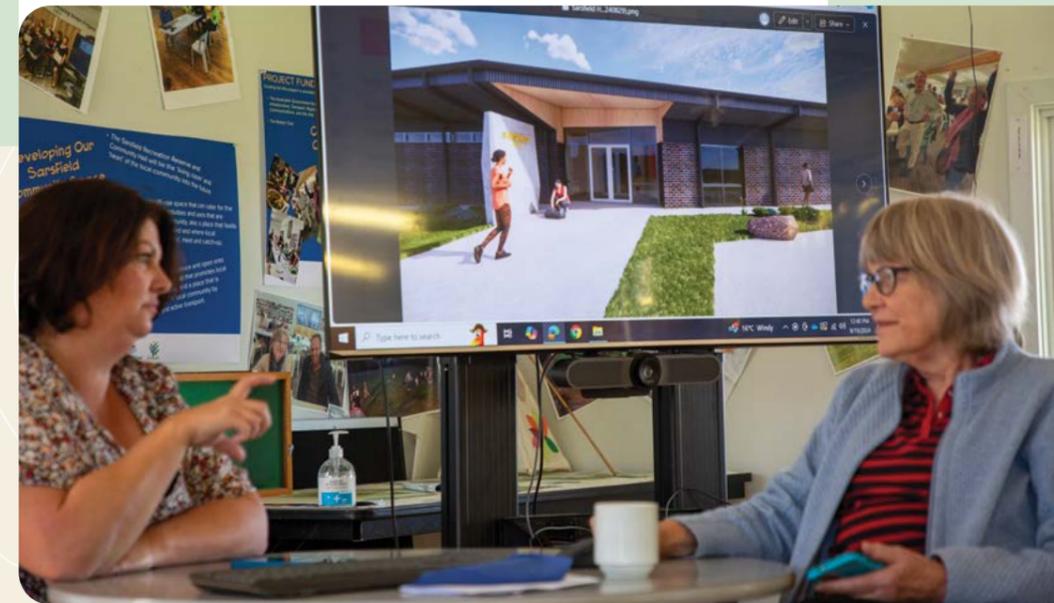
**“We appreciate the courage of FRRR to fund something that is outside of the norm or traditional projects. We believe participatory practices are really powerful for building community cohesion and capacity to self-organise and share leadership. Thanks for being the first Australian philanthropic organisation to fund Art of Hosting capacity building!”**

Campfire Co-op Ltd



**“The Sarsfield community has significantly changed since the black summer fires. Through adversity we have become more connected and compassionate towards each other.”**

Sarsfield Community Association



## Sarsfield Volunteer Support Worker

Sarsfield in East Gippsland, VIC, was once a thriving town. But closures of the school and sporting clubs and other factors over many years meant the community was largely disconnected, almost a satellite of the commercial centre Bairnsdale.

On December 30, 2019, Sarsfield changed forever. Half of the land in the town was burnt and 80 homes were completely destroyed. A further 120 homes were impacted by the fire, making Sarsfield one of the most bushfire impacted towns in Victoria.

The volunteer-run Sarsfield Community Association (SCA) led local recovery efforts. Bringing people together at events facilitated connectedness and improved the community's mental health. SCA also led development of community and other plans, designed to sustain the newly found community identity and goodwill. As devastating as the fires were, they have galvanised the community.

Projects underway include a hall upgrade; website update and redevelopment; environmental projects to engage youth; a community history project; a road safety project; support for local businesses; and developing a second community space.

However, the Committee members – who were impacted by the fires themselves – were becoming fatigued. After consulting the community, in 2023 they applied for a funding to employ a part-time Volunteer Support Project Officer.

Through the Bushfire Recovery Fund, which is supported by Helen Macpherson Smith Trust and Sidney Myer Fund and supports backbone organisations in recovery, they received \$105,622, to be paid over two years. The employee joined in February 2024 and is already helping to prevent burn out and enabling the Committee to deliver major projects.

## → Bringing people together through the arts and events

One of the most damaging impacts of bushfires was the social isolation that resulted from people needing to either tend livestock, clean up their properties and/or often restrict their spending, in the face of economic disruptions. Yet research<sup>3</sup> regularly reinforces the value of bringing people together to share their experiences, to process what has happened and to connect them to services that can support them.

"We went from a community trying to recover from a bushfire where there was no real assistance for individuals, to having a strong supportive network. We needed this recovery to start much, much sooner, which now that we have formed the relationships and are more aware of the support available from varying different organisations, then the process should this ever happen again, will be so much simpler."

Orara Valley Progress Association



Funding arts projects has been a very effective way to support recovery and should continue to be a part of the funding provided.

Supporting events is also critical and about far more than just connecting people, as events can not only attract visitors and be an important economic catalyst, but also help people reconnect with what makes their place unique and special.

The exhibition worked effectively as a catalyst for conversations between artists and visitors.... encouraged multiple conversations about the 2019/20 bushfires and experiences with the artworks. The feedback forms demonstrated the feeling that we hadn't talked enough about the impact of the fires prior to the start of COVID!"

Modern Art Projects Blue Mountains Assoc Inc

"The thing I am most proud of is the many comments that I have received from people saying the Winter Festival has helped the region to come together and heal after the devastating Black Summer bushfires!"

East Gippsland Winter Festival

A significant number of events and activities were funded in this first five years of recovery and similar investment should continue in future, as this social connection is critical to recovery and to building resilience in the face of future events.



"The event was significant for our community, with many reconnecting or catching up for the first time since the bushfires of 2020 hit Rocky Hall. Sometimes it is not the numbers of people dancing and singing that is the measure but the fact that the 'right' people are dancing and singing. The ones that have gone through trauma with many still living under canvas are the real target. Many of them are musicians and to see them drag that old guitar out and have fun on the stage gives us all a lift. Very proud of that indeed!"

Rotary Club of Pambula Incorporated



## Ewingar Rising

The Long Gully bushfire struck the Ewingar district, in northern NSW, in September and October 2019. Brigades patrolled and fought fires into November. Two residents died. Many homes were lost and everyone lost infrastructure. The effects of smoke continued well into December. In January 2020, there was a flood, then in March, the pandemic hit, bringing with it the isolation of lockdown – all on top of three years of drought.

Shortly after the fires, the community was galvanised by Ewingar Rising 2019, a three-day benefit recovery concert. The festival showed the community how self-determination and self-direction, alongside a strong community, aids recovery. But then people returned to cleaning up and re-establishing homes and work lives. Isolation and disengagement grew, as did depression, anxiety, fear, exhaustion and distrust. The fortnightly Hall nights ceased and during 2020 the community gathered on only a handful of occasions.

Against this backdrop, with the support of the Clarence Valley Council, the Ewingar South Tabulam Community Sports Centre decided to restage Ewingar Rising in 2021, using a \$19,860 grant through The Yulgilbar Foundation Fund. The project was intended to strengthen local connections, provide joy and a chance to relax; acknowledge the resilience of the community and raise funds to support local artists, as well as the community hall.

However, COVID came along again and a devastating flood led to two postponements and its eventual cancellation. Instead, the organisers held 10, mostly free, events in five communities in the district over a 10 month period. The project enhanced community cohesion by attracting around 800 people from the district and beyond. Engaging with art, music and comedy enhanced mental health, drew people together, providing time out from the onslaught of disasters. The committee 'gave back' to the bands that had supported the original concert by paying them and the events boosted local businesses.



**“Local community, bands and local businesses have been very grateful, and local pubs say it was the best night in 20 years. While not without its challenges, the project reinforced our community's identity of caring and inclusivity.”**

Ewingar South Tabulam  
Community Sports Centre

## → Supporting big visions and building back better

In designing granting programs to support recovery, it is important to not constrain what that recovery might look like. FRRR deliberately kept programs as flexible as possible, as while the fires were catastrophic, in some cases they provided an opportunity to reimagine a different future. Aspirational development projects that increase resilience and long-term recovery are important, as well as those projects that directly replace something that was lost – such as a water tank. Taking time to carefully consider those opportunities and building back better can create greater impact.

Patient investment is required for the long-term and it's inspiring to see what is possible when communities are supported at their pace, as highlighted in the story about the [Yackandandah SES](#).

## Building FoodShare's Capacity

As the fires took hold on New Year's Day 2020, Albury Wodonga Regional FoodShare began operating its warehouse seven days a week. FoodShare distributed around 100,000 kg of food, essential household items and pet food to bushfire affected communities in the Towong Shire, VIC and the Snowy Valleys Shire, NSW. Trailer loads of food were also sent to Wagga Wagga, Holbrook, Batlow and Jingellic in NSW, and across the Towong, Alpine and Wangaratta local government areas.

Food insecurity increased in the Albury / Wodonga region following the 2019/20 bushfires and was exacerbated by the impacts of COVID. FoodShare responded with a food hamper program, a community pantry program and opening a FoodShare Shop.

The logistics of all these efforts - recording food in and out collected from 70 suppliers and distributed to 225 agencies - were being managed via spreadsheets. With FoodShare's increased capacities the need to shift to a cloud-based database system was very evident to keep up with administration and reporting requirements.

A \$9,944 grant from FRRR's Strengthening Rural Communities program, supported by

GlobalGiving, went toward creating a CRM system to track food in and out, as it is collected from suppliers and distributed. The centralised database has significantly improved their operations and engagement with stakeholders, as well as streamlining the ordering process.

**“We appreciate the provision of this grant, which has provided us with both an efficient online ordering system that can accurately record and provide reports on all our food in and food out and an efficient CRM system that now houses all our organisational contacts and volunteers in the one place.”**

Albury Wodonga Regional Foodshare

This grant has enhanced the ongoing sustainability of the organisation, which means they can continue to support bushfire-impacted community members and provide future disaster relief.



## → Supporting First Nations Peoples to repair, prepare and teach

Walking alongside First Nations Peoples in their recovery and in caring for and healing Country following the fires was an important area that funding supported. This also included cultural connection and learning more widely within and across communities.

"The bushfires on Ngadju Country burnt tracts of old growth forest, destroyed Wanyarr (water trees), overran spiritual sites, and destroyed the habitat and nests of threatened species. It is estimated that the area of Ngadju Country impacted by the fires was about half the extent impacted in Victoria. The project will assist in rebuilding the Ngadju community and provide healing for community who are mourning the loss of Country. The clearing of tracks will allow the Rangers, as well as other Ngadju volunteers, to be able to undertake active repair and protection of important cultural and environmental assets. In the longer-term, the Ngadju community is setting an example to Australia with regard to fire and land management by using cultural knowledge refined over thousands of years, to care for the environment."

Ngadju Conservation Aboriginal Corporation, WA



Black Summer Bushfires, Five Years On

## → Grants can be catalytic

While the median grant awarded through FRRR was around \$18,687, for the most part, those funds were a contribution toward a project. To that extent, the grants are often leveraged to secure additional funding, either cash or in-kind.

Many FRRR grants fund early stages of initiatives, when possibilities are being explored by community groups (some of whom are informal or local / grassroots organisations that may not have 'runs on the board'). These early investments enable proponents to demonstrate that their vision and ideas are achievable. They can leverage the outcomes (e.g. feasibility studies, pilot projects, etc.) to bring on other institutional partners and secure the investments needed to progress.

While this leverage is wonderful, these grants are worth much more than their monetary value. They build confidence, bring out and nurture the strengths and capabilities of a group / community and can help galvanise a group around an initiative and create momentum. We also heard time and again that it meant someone cared about the group.

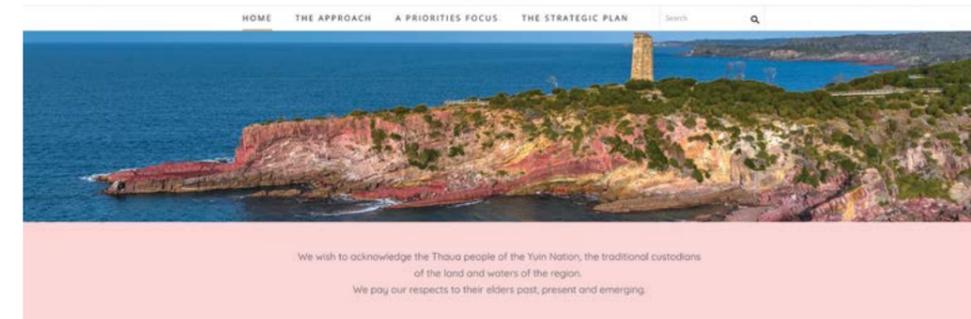
"Funding for the Arts Coordinator achieved all its desired outcomes and more. From having funding for this position we have been able to leverage other funding to support community connection through creative arts, including funding free art workshops series, and two years of funding for youth after hours art programs."

Nambucca Valley Phoenix Limited

"We are proud that the projects we have undertaken since the devastating fires of 2020 will live on through provision of the [website](#). The website is also a great way of sharing resources with other communities and individuals. The resources published here are freely available for public use. It's all about working together to respond, recover, learn and share for an improved sense of safety and wellbeing."

Eden Community Access Centre

### Eden & Surrounds Disaster Preparedness Project



DOWNLOAD THE  
STRATEGIC PLAN

## Narooma Mountain Bike Trail

The Narooma community planned to develop a Mountain Bike Centre to attract more visitors, leveraging the growth in nature-based tourism. At the beginning of December 2019, Narooma became surrounded by bushfire isolating residents. The bushfires burned well into January 2020, through their peak tourism season and local residents experienced significant trauma and economic loss.

Despite the devastation, the community remained committed to the project, which would connect the trails across the region. But to get started, they needed a feasibility report, including a concept plan, audit and maps, and they needed it quickly. If it was viable, they could apply to the Bushfire Local Economic Recovery Fund.

A \$25,000 SRC grant, supported by Fire Fight Australia, helped them to get together the essential information they needed to apply for more funding. They went on to secure \$4.3 million and build 54 km of trails, plus infrastructure. This project means that the local community has year-round attractions, which will increase tourism and improve the health of the community.

**“The trails we have built have been so well received in the mountain bike community that we are already seeing a huge amount of increased visitation. It has exceeded our predictions. This project was six years of our life, and we could not be happier or prouder of what we have done. [FRRR’s] part in that was absolutely the most crucial. It was the first grant we applied for, and it allowed us to get together essential elements for the larger grant, which we would never have afforded. Winning that grant also gave us the confidence to continue.”**

Narooma Mountain Bike Club Inc



## → Different roles of funders

Philanthropy has a critical role to play in providing medium to long-term support for communities, as do State and Federal Governments. Frequent communication and collaboration between funders reduce the likelihood of funding inequity. Minimising the number of programs enables greater efficiencies and makes it simpler for community groups to apply for support. Many partners pooled their donations and FRRR managed donor preferences and ensured that donors received the recognition they were seeking.

Another key lesson, which is consistent with previous disaster recovery campaigns, is that the more flexible partners can be about the initiatives that they will support, the greater impact that they can have. Our experience is that local community groups know what will make the greatest impact. It is important that there is flexibility, coherence and complementary approaches that have demonstrable impact at community level.

Traditional models of working with communities on preparedness and recovery efforts that are top-down and rigid in nature, can make things more complicated and result in resources being less efficient. While research<sup>4</sup> has indicated a community-led approach is a sound way to respond, there remains much room for improvement in establishing a consistent approach, and mechanisms through which to distribute support. It is important to build genuine agency and self-determination at a community level and ensure support reaches organisations of all shapes and sizes, right across communities.

## → FRRR’s role as a connector and conduit, as well as a funder

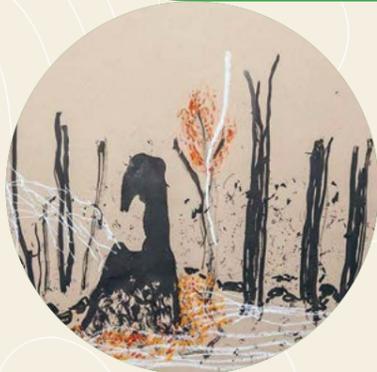
FRRR plays an important role as a connector, enabler and sometimes conduit between donors and communities in the provision of flexible funding, which seeds projects and ideas that would often have no other means of getting funded. Thanks to the trusted role that FRRR has in community and the connections we already have, community groups often reached out directly to FRRR seeking support. This gave us good insights into what was happening on the ground, which we were able to share with other funders.

FRRR also collated information and shared with others in the sector and into forums such as the National Bushfire Recovery Agency’s Charities Roundtable. FRRR convened the Public-Private-Partnerships forum, which brought together government, philanthropy and business leaders to consider opportunities for coordination and information-sharing. FRRR also brought donors together and encouraged collaboration to reduce duplication and overwhelm for community leaders as recovery began.

**“The grant is greatly appreciated. All in, FRRR provides an outstanding service that simply does not seem to be available from other sources. Small rural-based organisations find it difficult to compete for funding and FRRR is providing a service that helps overcome that disadvantage. Thank you.”**

Sapphire Community Projects Incorporated

Eden Evacuation Centre Emergency upgrades, NSW



In this video, local leaders share the impact of grants in their community



Artwork by Kuweni Dias shown at The Regeneration Exhibition, organised by The Little Pocket, QLD



Stars sent to Mallacoota, VIC from across the world showing support



Wallaby Joe Rural Fire Service purchased equipment and safety clothing. Sarsfield experiences the full force of the fires. Volunteer at Repair Club



FRRR recognises the blood, sweat and tears that have been invested by so many individuals and community groups into the recovery process to date, the work that is still ahead and the ongoing efforts in communities that are at-risk of future disasters.

The depth of generosity from across the country reflected the breadth of impact and the shared desire to assist. We are grateful to the thousands of donors who trusted us to get the funding to community groups in the affected areas, when the time was right for them. Thank you for your support.

More information

Should you wish to know more about any of the learnings or projects we have shared in this report, please don't hesitate to contact us via [info@frrr.org.au](mailto:info@frrr.org.au) or call 03 5430 2399.

## Thank you to our generous supporters

FRRR is grateful to everyone who trusted us to get funds to communities to support the projects local leaders prioritised, when the time was right for that place.

Below we have listed donors who contributed more than \$25,000 but we also acknowledge the thousands of individuals, small businesses, trusts, foundations and other organisations that donated other amounts to FRRR. Thank you, as every contribution has supported recovery.

.au Domain Administration Ltd	Helen Amelia Hains Foundation	Pratt Foundation
ALS Limited	Helen Macpherson Smith Trust	Qudos Bank
Arthur Laundry	Herbert Smith Freehills	R.M.Williams
Arup	IKEA Australia	Rio Tinto Limited
Ascodama Pty Ltd as Trustee for The Handsome Tours	Jeunesse Kids Foundation Inc	Shaw and Partners Foundation
Aussie Farmers Foundation	Lachlan and Sarah Murdoch Foundation	Sid and Fiona Myer Family Foundation
Australia Post	Luerssen Australia	Sidney Myer Fund
Australian Community Media – South Coast is Calling Initiative	Maple-Brown Family Foundation	Sony Foundation
Australian Government	Mark Nelson	Stockland CARE Foundation
Australian Philanthropic Services (APS)	Metamorphic Foundation (APS)	Suncorp Group
Barker Trailers	Metricon Homes	Tabcorp Holdings Limited
Bowness Family Foundation	Mike and Geraldine Roche	The Baker Foundation (Equity Trustees)
Center for Disaster Philanthropy	Nelson Alexander Charitable Foundation	The Caledonia Foundation
Charter Hall	News Corp Australia	The Ian Potter Foundation
Community Enterprise Foundation	One Tomorrow Charitable Fund (ACF), a sub-fund of Australian Communities Foundation	The Jack Brockhoff Foundation
Darville Foundation (APS)	Origin Energy Foundation	The Laneway Festival
Dawkins Family Gift (APS)	Paul Ramsay Foundation	The Ross Trust
Dolce & Gabbana	Paypal Giving Fund	The Yulgilbar Foundation
Elders Limited	Pepper Australia	Tonkin + Taylor Group Pty Ltd
Entertainment Industry Foundation	Percy Baxter Charitable Trust (Perpetual)	UNICEF Australia
Frasers Property Foundation	Pinnacle Charitable Foundation	Vicinity Centres
GlobalGiving	Portland House Foundation	Waislitz Family Foundation, in partnership with Australian Community Media
Go-To Skincare		Wayne Lim Junjie (JJ Lin)
Grace and Emilio Foundation		Westpac Group
		Wilson Asset Management





## Foundation for Rural & Regional Renewal

Dja Dja Wurrung Country

PO Box 41  
Bendigo VIC 3552  
ABN: 27 091 810 589  
info@frrr.org.au  
Ph: 03 5430 2399  
www.frrr.org.au

Report written by JAW Communications,  
designed by Twenty20 Graphics

Published November 2024