

Young Farmer Business Program

Monitoring, evaluation, reporting and improvement framework

Prepared for NSW Department of Primary Industries

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Acronyms

YFBP	Young Farmer Business Program
The Program	Young Farmer Business Program
DPI	Department of Primary Industries
MERI	Monitoring, evaluation, reporting and improvement
MERI framework	The monitoring, evaluation, reporting and improvement framework (this document)
YF&F	Young farmers and fishers
ToC	Theory of change
KEQs	Key evaluation questions
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation

Glossary of key stakeholders

Group	People	Role
Project team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liane Corocher, A.Manager Business and Social Resilience Programs • Adele Henry, A/Manager Young Farmers Business Program • Alex Hicks, Program Coordinator • Emma Remond, Administration Assistant 	Young Farmer Business Program team (Department of Primary Industries) who design and implement the Program.
Evaluation team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jill Campbell, Principal Consultant • Jenny Riley, Principal Consultant • Ed Hawkes, Consultant • Edgar Daly, Consultant • Nikki Bartlett, Consultant 	Responsible for supporting ongoing learning about, and design of, the Young Farmer Business Program as well as the production of reporting outputs as agreed in section 4.5.
Advisory Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • David Ward, Agronomist, Central West • Sam Nicholson, Dairy Farmer, Taree • Allison Mudford, Mixed Farming, Cassilis • Camilla Kenny, Vice President ASC Next Gen • Megan Davies, Chair, Future Farmers Network • Aly Bunton, Policy Officer, NSW Farmers • Tim Carroll, Chair, NSW Young Farmers Branch, NSW Farmers 	Meets every four months to provide a sounding board on issues and solutions relevant to young farmers and fishers. They have no decision making or budgeting authority.
Sub-contractors	Various, as contracted	Responsible for delivering initiatives for young farmers and fishers as determined by the Young Farmer Business Program team including

		workshops, networking events and communication tools.
Young farmers and fishers	The target beneficiaries of the project. People between the ages of 18 and 35 years across NSW, who currently receive (or have the aspiration to receive) their primary source of income from farming 'food, fibre or fishing'.	Participate in monitoring and evaluation activities.

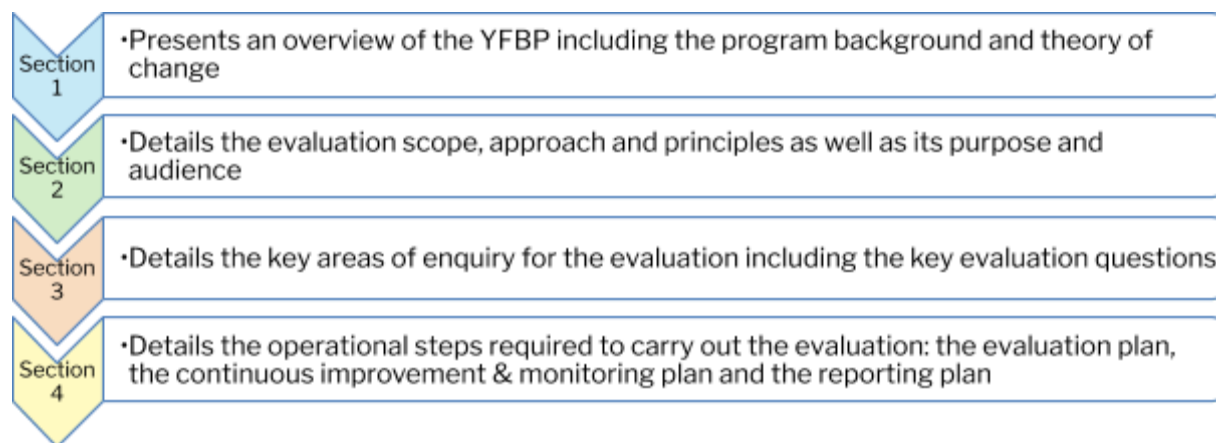
Key definitions

Term	Definition
Self-Efficacy	The belief that an individual, group, or community has it in their capacity to produce desired outcomes by their own actions. It relates to self-reliance, initiative, the degree of influence believed to be held, and the ability to draw upon additional resources as required.
Sense of belonging and connection	An insight into a person's access to social capital: if a person feels that they are welcome in their community, this is a good indicator that they have access to support from their social networks.
Business resilience	See 1.3. Criteria for Business Resilience

Document overview

How to read this document

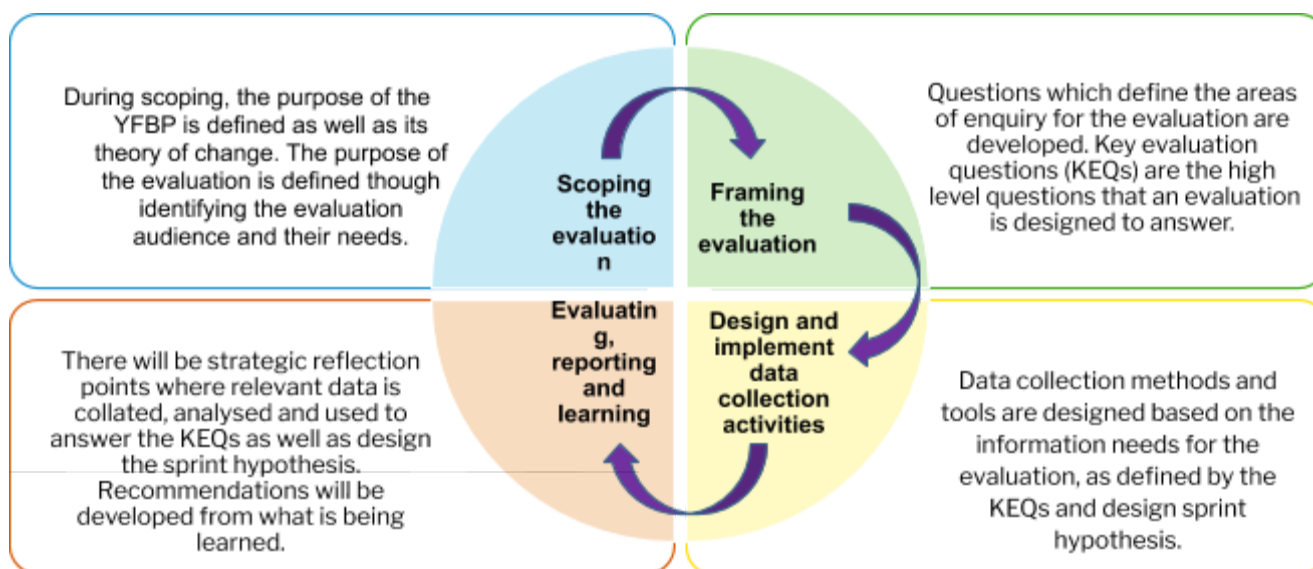
This document outlines the Monitoring, Evaluation, Reporting and Improvement (MERI) framework for the Young Farmers Business Program (YFBP). It articulates the rationale of the evaluation and describes the MERI process in detail. There are four



sections:

Key elements of the MERI framework

This MERI framework has been developed in collaboration with key members of the YFBP team and the evaluation team, including an initial planning workshop on 19 July 2018, as well as additional teleconference meetings throughout August and



September 2018. As Figure 2 captures, developing and implementing the MERI framework involves four key elements:

Section 1: Presents an overview of the YFBP including the program background and theory of change

YFBP background and overview

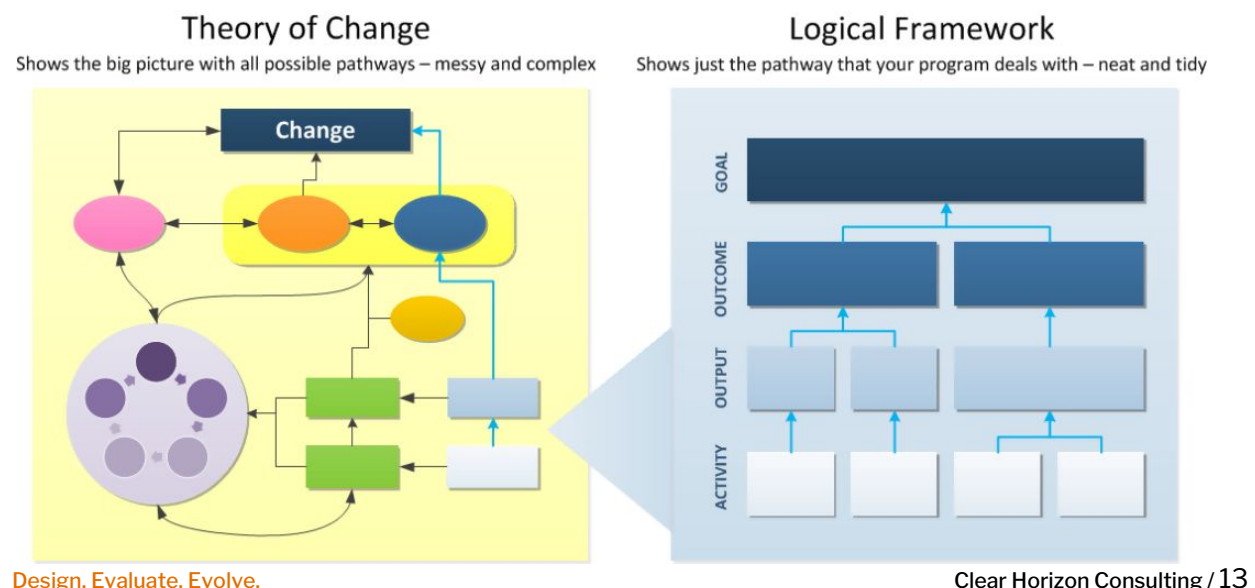
1.1. Background of the YFBP

The YFBP is a \$6 million investment by the NSW Government to enhance the business resilience of young farmers and fishers (YF&F) in NSW, delivered through the Department of Primary Industries (DPI). The YFBP commenced on 1 July 2017 and will run until 30 June 2021. It seeks to improve business skills by trialling a variety of approaches including mentoring, networking, online and offline community building, supported by a central online hub with business templates and resources.

The YFBP prioritises being flexible and responsive to the needs of YF&F, and was designed using feedback from two surveys conducted in 2016 and 2017. These surveys identified that the biggest barriers for young people pursuing a farming or fishing career were 1) confidence in making business decisions (self-efficacy) and 2) a sense of connection to networks that support them on their business journey. The YFBP seeks to address these barriers by using the voices of YF&F to identify priorities and develop appropriate, targeted and need-driven responses.

1.2. The YFBP program logic and theory of change

A program logic (also known as a logical framework) and a theory of change provide separate but complimentary functions in an evaluation. A **program logic** (Appendix 1) was developed to provide a framework for the delivery of the YFBP, summarising the relationship between activities and intended outcomes. The outcomes reflected in the program logic align with the DPI Strategic Plan, NSW Agricultural Industry Action Plan, the Intergovernmental Agreement on National Drought Program Reform, the NSW Drought



Strategy and the MOU between DPI and NSW Farmers. The evaluation team will use the program logic to monitor the outputs and evaluate the outcomes of the YFBP.

A **theory of change (ToC)**, makes explicit the reasoning behind how and why change is expected to occur. As indicated in Figure 3 it is derived directly from the program logic, with a greater emphasis upon causal chains. In doing so, it identifies and articulates the assumptions about the sequence of expected change over which it has influence. The evaluation team will test the YFBP theory of change through assessing whether the program inputs and outputs have led to the intended outcomes. The Theory of Change is in Appendix 2.

Because a theory of change is a messier reflection of the program's pathways, it is frequently captured in a **program narrative** to compliment the program logic.

Program Narrative

The two broad goals of the YFBP are (i) increased business resilience of YF&F in NSW and (ii) economic development and industry growth across the agricultural and aquatic sector.

At the end of the three years, it is expected that participants will become 'rock star business managers'; they will be equipped with high business resilience (see Section 1.3) will regularly apply business skills, draw on the resources (tools, networks etc.) established during the YBFP and feel part of a wider 'tribe' of YF&F. Overall they will be more resilient and be able to adapt to challenging situations by drawing on their skills and networks to overcome adversity. This will be underpinned by a self-efficacy to be 'rock star business managers'. The success of the YFBP will also result in having developed and captured a viable program model that is well received by all stakeholders.

To bring about these changes, seven main activities (some simultaneously) will be delivered:

1. Facilitating business skills capacity building and knowledge exchange;
2. Giving YF&F access to shared networking spaces (virtually and in person);
3. Sharing stories of success, challenge and learning experienced by YF&F;
4. Providing business resources and tools;
5. Delivering coaching, training and mentoring programs;
6. Creating partnerships to improve YFBP delivery;
7. Communicating and marketing to YF&F about the outcomes and offerings of the YFBP.

If implemented effectively, these activities are expected to create three mutually reinforcing outcome pathways for YF&F: 1) business skills development, 2) improved self-efficacy and 3) social connectedness. The fourth outcome pathway relates to proving the YFBP concept and model. Below are descriptions of the outcome pathways told as the 'best case scenario' using cause-and-effect language (if x happens then y will occur), as well as the assumptions in the hypothesis that will need to hold true for this to occur. We can later test these hypothesis as part of the MERI activities.

Table 1: Outcome pathway 1

	Description	Assumptions
YF&F have improved business skills and can capitalise on opportunities	If YF&F become aware of the program, attend the business training and acquire appropriate knowledge and skills, they will apply those skills and 'better manage their business' by making better and more financially savvy business decisions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> YF&F are aware of the program YF&F have the capacity and means to attend training The training is suitable and valuable for YF&F with a range of knowledge, motivations and circumstances. YF&F will acquire the skills and knowledge they need YF&F will apply the skills and knowledge YF&F have the decision making power to apply business skills and make business decisions. Business skills and knowledge alone will result in well run businesses YF&F will seek more skills and knowledge When opportunities or challenges arise, YF&F will be able to apply skill and knowledge to make decisions and take actions
	This will lead to a virtuous feedback loop of skill-behaviour-reward whereby these decisions result in positive outcomes (increased profitability) and the YF&F will become more confident and seek additional business skills and knowledge. YF&F will capitalise on more opportunities, adapt to challenges (resilience) and will ultimately be able to achieve their longer-term farming or fishery related goals.	

Table 2: Outcome pathway 2

	Description	Assumptions
YF&F are connected and can learn from each other	If YF&F become aware of the YFBP and involve themselves in the opportunities to meet other YF&F, they will make social connections and feel less isolated.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> YF&F are aware of the program YF&F have the capacity and means to attend events YF&F will interact and expand their networks through attendance YF&F will stay in touch with the social connections YF&F will nurture the social connections Those social connections will provide support, knowledge and opportunities YF&F want to meet and collaborate with other YF&F YF&F don't already have these social connections with other YF&F
	As a result, YF&F will establish a sense of connection, belonging and community with their peers; they will feel valued and supported. If these networks are established and maintained the YF&F will draw upon them regularly and learn from each other, thus increasing self-efficacy and also opening up new opportunities (contributing to greater resilience).	

Table 3: Outcome pathway 3

	Description	Assumptions
	If YF&F become aware of the YFBP, attend face to face and online	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> YF&F are aware of the program

<p><i>YF&F have the capacity to achieve their goals (self-efficacy)</i></p>	<p>opportunities and are exposed to new opportunities and success stories of their peers (both stories of success and stories of overcoming adversity) then their confidence will increase as well as a belief that their community 'YF&F' (and therefore themselves) have the capacity to produce desired outcomes by their own actions (self-efficacy).</p> <p>As a result, YF&F feel recognised, invested in and valued as:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a 'young farmer or fisher' as separate to their parents or grandparents and a key contributor to primary industry. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> YF&F have the capacity and means to attend events The story-teller is someone who YF&F aligns themselves with There are not many psychological barriers to someone identifying with the group (i.e. depression). The YFBP makes YF&F feel valued Enough 'early adopters' identify and connect with the tribe and then encourage the 'early majority' to join the tribe.
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Table 4: Outcome pathway 4

	Description	Assumptions
<p><i>YFBP concept and model</i></p>	<p>If the YFBP is well delivered, subcontractors are developed by the YFBP team and positive outcomes are being realised YF&F, then program subcontractors and YF&F will engage more with the YFBP and with DPI more generally.</p> <p>The successes of the YFBP will be communicated to relevant stakeholders. The YFBP team will have a viable model that documents the effectiveness of the YFBP and which demonstrates a case for future viability.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The YFBP can become a financially sustainable business model YF&F has increased business resilience The YFBPs role in contributing to increased business resilience in YF&F is understood and recognised

The **first three outcome pathways** are interlinked and mutually reinforcing. YF&F who develop and apply business skills can influence their peers, this ripples and contributes to strengthening the social network as other YF&F connect with them to increase their own business skills. Therefore YF&F who are within the 'YF&F tribe' will have greater exposure to stories of success, failure, resilience; people who have walked their path and from whom they can learn. Additionally, increased business skills will lead to increased self-efficacy, as their newfound abilities will result in YF&F feeling more empowered. Increased self-efficacy will boost self-confidence and lead to an increased desire to learn additional business skills. Increased social connections will also lead to increased self-efficacy, as YF&F will learn from their peers. All contribute towards increased business resilience of YF&F.

The **fourth outcome pathway** is about testing the YFBP concept and model and contributes to the realisation of the other three outcome pathways. Figure 4 illustrates the relationship between the outcome pathways.



1.3. Criteria for business resilience

Improving the business resilience of YF&F is a core aim of the YFBP, and it is articulated in the Theory of Change. Therefore, it is important to understand what business resilience means for YF&F. The YFBP team and the evaluation team have come together to create an analytical rubric for business resilience that can be used to assess the business resilience of YF&F and identify any changes over time as a result of the program. This rubric will be drawn upon for both data collection and reporting.

This rubric was derived from two resilient young farmer avatars. These avatars were co-developed by the evaluation and YFBP team and can be revised in future PDSA cycles according to feedback from the Advisory Committee and other YF&F. Two avatars were developed to recognise the different types of resilience that were relevant for YF&F in different circumstances. The key distinguishing factor is whether the YF&F stands to inherit a farming business or whether they must pursue alternate pathways to farm ownership. These avatars were combined into a single analytical rubric for business resilience. This rubric is in Appendix 3.