

It is a good idea to have a sponsorship/in-kind support sub-committee and establish who is the key liaison person dealing with each sponsor and supporter. Sponsors and supporters need to be approached professionally usually by phone and a follow-up letter. When talking to sponsors and supporters you need to tell them about the Gathering aims, what you have to offer and what you would like from them (it doesn't always have to be money!).

It is important that any 'agreements' are followed up in writing promptly stating what they will be giving you eg. money, in-kind goods and services, and what you will be giving them in return eg. acknowledgment on the program and in advertising, access to 200-300 women from across NSW, allowing them to put their material in Gathering bags, have them introduce a speaker, give them 5 minutes (tops!) On the program to speak, etc.

All sponsors and supporters should also be thanked after the event and perhaps you could send any media coverage that may be of interest.

Media and PR

The Media is an important aspect of Gathering planning. Contacts with radio, TV and print journalists should be made a few months prior to the Gathering and continue as the weekend approaches. Inviting a local media person to participate on the Committee can be a great help. Allocating a Photographer to record the Gathering is also a good idea.

It is also important that a committee person is designated as the media contact person – someone who has good liaison skills, can organise press releases, is easily contactable, can organise women for interviews and is not afraid to do interviews themselves.

The RWN is available to help with promotions and manages The Women's Gathering internet site. RWN can also help through *The Country Web* newsletter or linking with NSW DPI's Public Affairs Officers.

Other things to consider

GST

Unless Gathering Committees are auspiced by another organisation (such as their local Council, an agency or group) there is little benefit in registering for GST, because although the Committee would be able to claim back any GST paid on goods and services, they would also be responsible for collecting GST on income such as registrations, sponsorship, fund-raising and remitting that to the ATO with the quarterly BAS. If not being auspiced, it is important that the Committee seek advice on this from a qualified accountant.

Unless Gathering Committees are auspiced by another organisation as mentioned above, they should apply for an ABN. Forms are available from www.business.gov.au. If the Committee does register for an ABN, then once the Gathering is over the Committee must cancel their number. Forms are available from www.taxreform.ato.gov.au or by calling 13 24 78.

Public Liability Insurance

Unless Gathering Committees are auspiced by another organisation, they will need to get adequate public liability insurance.

Feedback and Evaluations

Evaluation of the weekend ensures the committee receives feedback on what the participants thought and felt about the

weekend and is a valuable resource for the next committee. (The RWN has examples of evaluation forms from previous Gatherings).

Celebration

It is very important to plan a celebration with all committee members when your Gathering is over. You will have earned it!

Gathering Report

In the past, Gathering reports have provided an important record of the event and an opportunity to have a voice to decision-makers if issues are raised. Planning and allocating responsibility and time for report preparation before the Gathering can save lots of effort afterwards.

Hosting a Gathering

Gatherings are held in different locations around the State to ensure rural women can attend when it is held in their local area. The RWN SAC is responsible for ensuring the Women's Gathering moves around the State. At its February Meeting, the SAC looks at Gathering proposals. Using the criteria below they then decide on the host town for the coming year.

Proposals Should Show:

- A local committee has been formed
- Strong community support ie. letters of support from council, businesses, community groups, TAFE, etc.
- There is adequate facilities which can hold up to 300 women. Smaller centres need to think creatively about meeting the needs of 200-300 women (it can be done!)
- Appropriate space for workshops
- That you have identified some potential sponsors
- Adequate and affordable accommodation (this may include homestays and billeting)
- A venue for the Gathering dinner
- Child care (you should have at least looked into it)
- Good transport access (road, bus, train)
- Proposed dates (doesn't need to be exact)
- Develop a few activities for partners as a handful of men come along with their wives.

If you are interested in submitting a proposal to host The Women's Gathering please forward your proposal to:

The Community Co-Chair
Rural Women's Network State Advisory Committee
Locked Bag 21, Orange NSW 2800.

Proposals must be received by the 15th of January each year for consideration by the RWN SAC.

For more information or would like to discuss your proposal contact NSW Department of Primary Industries' Rural Women's Network:

Telephone: 02 6391 3620
Facsimile: 02 6391 3650
Email: sonia.muir@dpi.nsw.gov.au
Website: www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/rwn



NSW WOMEN'S GATHERING GUIDELINES

"As a member of the first Gathering Committee I look back at the experience of showcasing my Orange region and providing an opportunity for rural women as both challenging and rewarding. Since that time I have worked with over 100 women who have used their amazing organisational and networking skills along with creative talents to deliver Gatherings that are diverse and unique to their area." **Sonia Muir, RWN Coordinator**

The Rural Women's Network (RWN) developed these guidelines to share feedback and best practice from past Gatherings. By passing on the knowledge and skills gained by each organising committee a progressive bank of information can be passed on to future organising committees and the spirit and philosophy behind this unique and wonderful event in the rural calendar is maintained.

What are Women's Gatherings?

In Orange in 1993, NSW Agriculture's (now NSW Department of Primary Industries') Rural Women's Network (RWN), along with FarmSafe Central West and a committee of volunteers, instigated the first Gathering in NSW as a way of bringing rural women together for networking, learning, gaining inspiration and ideas and sharing information. The idea came from Victoria where *Women on Farms Gatherings* have been an annual event since 1990.

Four hundred women from around NSW and other States came to the Orange Gathering. From that event came enthusiasm for NSW Gatherings to be held each year. Gatherings have been held in Bega, Bourke, Cobar, Cooma, Coonabarabran, Coonamble, Grafton, Gunnedah, Hay, Kempsey, Moree, Temora, Tocal, Wellington and Yanco. The 2009 *Women's Gathering* will be held in Junee from 18-20 September.

Gatherings are organised by local committees who make key decisions, develop a theme and the weekend program. Each Gathering reflects the unique culture, industry, tourism and environment of the host community.

Women's Gatherings are for ALL rural women including: farming women; Aboriginal women; women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds; mining women; women in the fishing industry; women who live in regional cities, towns and villages; and coastal women.

Why Gatherings are important

Gatherings are now a well established annual state-wide community event for all rural women.

Gatherings aim to:

- provide an opportunity for rural women to network, share experiences and support each other through good and tough times. It is not a 'conference' – but a special event which brings women together;
- provide opportunities for rural women to have a direct voice to decision-makers through government, Ministers and other decision-makers attending the Gathering and through the distribution of a Report which committees may produce after the Gathering;

- enable rural women to access information on existing services, resources and assistance;
- provide an opportunity for rural women to learn from listening to inspiring and informative speakers and participating in workshops;
- raise the profile of rural women and highlight important issues through wide media coverage; and
- be inclusive and involve women from culturally diverse backgrounds to ensure all women participate both in the events and on the organising committees.

What makes a successful Gathering?

These best practice elements have been developed from what worked well at past Gatherings. The following suggestions are about adopting good practises.

Opening, Closing and Welcome

The NSW Minister for Primary Industries or Minister for Women is usually invited to perform the official opening or closing. This ensures a voice to government so decision-makers hear what women have to say. It also gives women the opportunity to talk to those who make the decisions – an important aim of Gatherings.

The Friday night welcome is usually informal as often women have travelled long distances and don't want anything too heavy or late!

A brief official ceremony is held on the Saturday morning. It is important to acknowledge Aboriginal land as part of this. Maybe a local Aboriginal Elder could be invited to do this. The local Mayor is also a good person to do a brief welcome.

The closing includes a handover ceremony passing on the task to the next year's committee.

Official Guests

An official guest list should include the Minister for Primary Industries, the Minister for Women and their respective Directors-General. Other key decision-makers might include the local Mayor, female councillors, Chair of NSW Department of Primary Industries' Rural Women's Network State Advisory Committee, Chair of the NSW Farmers' Association, Aboriginal Elders, key community people and major sponsors.

Gathering Committees

Gathering committees are usually made up of a diversity of local people who are enthusiastic and keen to showcase their region. (It is always a bonus to have committee members who have been to a Gathering before!) Committee members don't have to have any special qualifications, although it is a good idea to have representatives from key organisations, agencies and groups from across the community who have a wide range of skills and networks.

In addition to the broader committee, it works best if there is a smaller 'core committee' of 4-5 women who can meet more regularly and make key decisions. One or two women from that core committee also need to be nominated by all committee members to be the Gathering Convenor(s) or Chair(s). This is a very important role as they are the spokesperson and liaison person with whom the Rural Women's Network, Ministers, sponsors etc. can liaise and, if decisions need to be made in a hurry they need to know that they have the committee's support and trust to make these.

The Core committee will need the support and assistance of a broader committee which takes on specific sub-committee roles such as coordinating speakers, displays, a partner's program, child care, workshops, catering, sponsorship, administration, registration, venues, media, etc.

It is also important that every effort is made to encourage Aboriginal women and women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds to be involved on the Gathering Committee to ensure they are part of the pre-planning as well as their participation in the event. Having a diversity of women involved from the beginning will ensure they will feel part of the Gathering and participate. The RWN is available to assist with any issues or concerns that may arise during the planning of a Gathering.

Including Aboriginal women

Ideas to encourage participation of Aboriginal women include:

- find out about local protocol through local Aboriginal groups such as Land Councils and reconciliation groups. Ask if any local Aboriginal women's groups exist in your area and if they would like to be involved on the committee by sending a couple of representatives;
- ask a local Aboriginal Elder to do a traditional welcome and acknowledge local tribal lands;
- try and include Aboriginal women on the program as speakers, panellist or workshop facilitators;
- incorporate some Aboriginal artwork on the brochure;
- send information to the *Koori Mail* for its women's section.

Venues

A large venue where everyone can come together for the opening, speakers and closing is essential. Most of the Gatherings attract around 200-300 participants. It is also important to have spaces for workshops such as the local school, TAFE or a community hall.

Timing

Lack of time continues to be a major issue and committees need to plan carefully for each element – especially free time for networking.

Generous time should be given for lunch and tea breaks so that women have an opportunity to talk amongst themselves as well as time to view displays which often involves local women selling their wares. It is also a time for sponsors and service providers to talk to women and for women to access decision-makers such as Ministers.

A common pitfall of Gatherings is trying to organise activities for every minute! So remember that Gatherings are also a good opportunity for women to network and just be with other women who share some common experiences. Time must be allowed for this in the program.

Childcare

Childcare is essential if women with young children are going to be able to attend. Local councils, Family Day Care and Occasional Care Services are good places to start for information on what is available. The Registration Form should include 'participants needs' eg. number of children and ages, as well as the Gatherings' child care provision (how long each day, cost, a phone contact, etc).

The Program

Gathering Themes

Gathering themes can help to create a focus for speakers and presenters. Past themes included: Be All That You Can Be; Reach for the Stars: Looking Back... Moving Forw@rd; Flat Our in Hay; Big River Dreaming; Holistic Health, Wealth & Wellbeing; Golden Beginnings: Harvesting our Future; Fortitude and Far Horizons; Unity in Diversity; Information + Inspiration = Innovation; Participation, Persistence, Partnership; High Country, High Hopes, High Achievers; Inspiring and Achieving; Resourceful and Resilient; Today's Knowledge, Tomorrows Success; Sharing and Caring; Surviving and Thriving.

Chair

A strong chairperson is also important to ensure the program runs smoothly and to time.

Keynote Speakers

The best keynote speakers are topical, motivational, entertaining and inspiring. Many rural women do not get the opportunity to hear dynamic and inspiring speakers. This is usually one of the more expensive budget items so may need some good negotiation skills. But it is also attractive for sponsorship!

NSW Department of Primary Industries' Rural Women's Network

As the ongoing link between Gatherings, the RWN gives a brief presentation as part of the Saturday morning program. The length and timing of this is negotiated with the committee.

Panel and Issue Sessions

Gatherings can be an avenue for key issues to be filtered through to decision-makers. At past Gatherings there have been panels or issue sessions to discuss issues of concern. These need to be well facilitated to ensure they do not dominate the agenda as many women come to gather NOT conference! The Committee may agree to key recommendations from the Gathering and produce a report to be sent to decision-makers.

Women's Stories

Local women telling their stories of their life experiences are an integral and important part of the Gathering program and have proved to be a highlight. These story presentations in the early part of the program (Friday nights and Saturday morning) play a major role in helping to set a friendly/sharing tone for the whole weekend as well as to complement the higher profile keynote speakers by celebrating the lives of 'everyday' women.

Workshops

Workshops need to be diverse and can be organised into themes such as: health, sustainable agriculture, education, personal development, technology, finance, decision-making, managing change, community development, leadership, craft and arts, etc.

Workshops should aim to:

- be of good quality (using quality local facilitators where possible with backups just in case!);
- be relevant and focus on significant issues offering a wide range of choice to cater for the varied participants' needs and skill levels (doing a short survey to find out what local women would like is useful in this process);
- be given adequate time (a minimum of 1.5 hours gives enough time for participation and questions);
- have committee members or 'hostesses' responsible for helping presenters – introducing and thanking them, making sure equipment is working, rooms can be found, etc;
- signs, simple maps and people to direct are helpful in making sure everyone is able to find their workshops quickly; and
- it is also a good idea to repeat popular workshops if possible.

Partner's Program

The Partner's Program (for rural men!) was a great idea introduced by the Cobar Gathering and has been a feature ever since. Partners activities have included things such as golf, tours of local sights and fishing expeditions. Partners can also be invited to listen to guest speakers and participate in other Gathering activities where appropriate. (From the experience of past Gatherings there are usually about 6-20 partners who need to be catered for.)

Tours

Tours of local/regional interests can be incorporated as an additional option to the weekend. Many women attending past Gatherings expressed a strong interest in seeing more of the host town and surrounding area including tourist spots, industries and agricultural enterprises.

Displays

Displays work best when they are interactive and relevant. Time needs to be set aside so participants can view displays, talk to service providers and collect information. They also need to be set up in areas where lunch, morning and afternoon teas are held so women can wander through in these breaks.

Registration Form and Program

The Gathering registration form needs to be simple and provide information on the program, workshops, speakers, childcare, accommodation, costs, etc. If the registration form and program is to be printed in *The Country Web* newsletter it is crucial that time lines be discussed with the RWN well in advance.

Costs should be kept to a minimum. Registrations for the weekend vary depending on the location, but are usually about \$170 (+ accommodation). Early bird discounts, one-day only charges and corporate fees are also an option to think about. Connecting women from the same area may mean women can 'car pool' and travel together thus sharing costs and driving.

Gathering Dinner

The dinner on the Saturday evening is another excellent networking time. Sometimes participants are 'speaked' out and just want to relax and talk to other women, so only short/light entertainment may be needed rather than another guest speaker.

Role of key players outside the Gathering Committee

Each Gathering committee is responsible for all aspects of their event – finding sponsorship, selecting speakers, organising workshops, partner's program, catering, child care, venues, etc.

NSW Department of Primary Industries' Rural Women's Network

The RWN does not run the Gathering but plays a key role ensuring the Gathering philosophy and spirit continues to bring NSW rural women together to network, share experiences and knowledge, and access decision-makers. RWN is a resource which can support and guide local organising committees on protocol and issues as they arise. The RWN can also assist with contacts and information from previous committees.

The RWN and its State Advisory Committee (SAC) have been involved from the beginning of the Gathering movement in NSW and act as a central coordinating agency, ensuring Gatherings have continuity and are held in diverse locations. A member of the RWN or SAC will sometimes be on a committee (if they live in the area) or help by attending some meetings and/or through regular phone contact. You can call the RWN or SAC if you need to discuss any issues or concerns as they are there to help wherever they can!

Sponsors and (In-kind) Supporters

Sponsorship and in-kind support is crucial to any event and Gatherings are no different. Engaging support from smaller local businesses as well as the larger corporates is important. Supporters and sponsors can be both major and minor. Government and non-government agencies such as local government and TAFE often play key roles as in-kind providers of essential resources such as personnel, phone, postage, photocopying and stationery. High Schools have been major 'supporters' of past Gatherings by donating the use of buildings for workshops. A local business may be a minor 'sponsor' by donating \$250. A useful way of distinguishing different levels of sponsorship is to set amount benchmarks and think of 'sponsors' as giving you funds and 'supporters' as providing good or services in-kind.

It is important that Gatherings remain community-based events, and are not seen as exclusive 'branded' events such as 'The Blogs and Blogs Gathering'. In the past this has required tactful negotiations with sponsors and supporters so both their needs and the Gathering Committee's needs are clearly outlined.

Sponsorship needs vary, but a ball park figure is to develop a budget of about \$75,000 (or \$100,000 if using a tent city) – for registrations, speakers, child care, travel, gifts, tent city accommodation, etc. Complimentary invitations to attend the dinner may need to be considered for sponsors or high profile guests.