

PROJECT UPDATE | EDITION 2

Investigating farmer needs to support strong farm businesses

October 2017

The Department of Primary Industries and the Office of the NSW Small Business Commissioner are partnering to identify opportunities to enhance farmer business skills and programs, with the aim to support farmers' financial resilience. This is the Department of Industry's third project applying 'design thinking' principles to policy design and service delivery.

In the [last Update](#) we reported on the outcomes of Phase 1 and 2 of the project. This Update focuses on the outcomes of Phase 3 – Ideate.

What is ideation?

Ideation is simply 'idea generation'. The Ideate Phase is where we start to create ideas that might solve the problems we identified through the prior two Phases of Empathise and Define.

At the beginning of this phase, ideation is about diverging to create the widest possible range of ideas - not simply searching for the single, best solution. Once lots of ideas are generated, we then look to reduce them down to a set of focused solutions, in a reductive process called converging. This method is less about defining the best solution and more about refining ideas.

To get the most out of the ideation phase we followed these best practice principles:

- **Collaborate** - harness the collective perspectives and strengths of team members and key stakeholders from different backgrounds to allow for a collision of ideas from different viewpoints
- **Be imaginative and curious** - uncover novel areas of exploration by getting obvious solutions out first and then driving the team beyond them
- **Defer judgement** - separate idea creation from idea evaluation. In doing so, you give people's imagination and creativity a voice, while being safe knowing they can review them for quality later.

Ideation in practice

Our starting point for the ideation phase was the five problem statements we had identified out of the farmer interviews and research. These were:

- How might we make business planning simple and easy for time poor farmers?
- How might we make information and services relevant and accessible for farmers?
- How might we enable farmers to be more financially secure in good times and bad?
- How might we better leverage networks and relationships to support farmers' financial goals?
- How might we encourage and support succession pathways?

In order to generate a wide variety of ideas, we brought together a cross-disciplinary group of individuals including representatives from NSW Farmers, the insurance and banking sectors, farm advisory services, rural financial counsellors, academia and other government agencies. Following the principles above, the group generated a wide range of ideas under each problem statement.



A SNAPSHOT OF THE IDEAS FROM THE STAKEHOLDER WORKSHOP

The outcome of this process was a list of 242 ideas. The project team then reviewed these ideas to arrive at a revised list of 126 ideas by grouping similar ones. Key themes emerging from the process include:

- farmers need to be able to share stories and experiences of business planning – both good and bad
- there are many existing services and tools, but it's hard to know what's good and where to start
- advisors should be aware of and able to refer farmers to different services beyond their own area of expertise – i.e. provide more holistic advice
- services and tools should be tailored to the farm type and stage so that the farmer is accessing information most relevant to them
- poor internet services will continue to hamper farmers' access to online resources
- many farmers, particularly older, will rely on and prefer phone or face-to-face contact over online
- finding the time to devote to business planning will remain a major hurdle.

We are now working through the list of ideas generated to identify those to progress - either internally, in partnership with other organisations, or externally.

Next Steps

The next step in the project is to take a selection of core ideas forward for testing. Though we only test a small selection at this point, the other shortlisted ideas will be retained for further investigation by DPI in the future.

To facilitate the testing process, we will build rough prototypes of each idea that we will take back to farmers to get their feedback. More information on this process will be provided in the next update.

To register your interest in participating in the testing process or to make an enquiry, please visit: <https://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/agriculture/farm-business-planning>

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