

FACT SHEET – STRATEGIC REGIONAL PLANS (SRP)

Background

The new Charter requires RDAs to *‘co-ordinate the development of a strategic regional plan, or work with suitable existing regional plans that will align with the Commonwealth’s regional priorities’*.

It is important that, to the extent possible, economic development stakeholders agree on a set of common needs and priorities for their region and coordinate their collective efforts in a manner that ensures the achievement of outcomes is maximised. As facilitators of economic development, RDAs have an important role to play in bringing stakeholders together under a common strategic plan for their region. A number of regions already have regional plans in place; this guidance note is to help RDAs decide whether to align behind an existing regional plan or co-ordinate the development of a new one.

Requirements

By 30 June 2021, RDAs are required to have determined whether there is a recognised, existing SRP in place (or multiple plans which cover the region but do not overlap), which is up to date and, for the most part, meets the needs of the region. **In many cases, SRPs may have been prepared by State Government agencies responsible for regional development.**

If such a plan(s) is in place, RDAs are asked to recognise this plan(s), engage with other stakeholders to determine which aspects of the plan(s) they are focusing on, and then design their annual work plans in a manner that complements and builds on the work of others. RDAs should share their work plans with stakeholders to ensure there is transparency across the region and implement methods for stakeholders to share their information regarding the achievement of outcomes.

If a region does not have an appropriate SRP(s) in place, nor plans to develop one, RDAs should develop a methodology for working with stakeholders to develop a new SRP during 2021-22. RDAs are required to detail the outcomes of this work in their 2021-22 Annual Business Plan.

We understand that funding may be required to enable an SRP to be developed and methodologies for developing plans should include a stakeholder funding contribution model. The Department will consider providing co-funding assistance to RDAs for their part in the development of an SRP on a case-by-case basis. It is expected that all, or at least the majority of, key stakeholders will accept the proposed methodology and contribute towards the cost of developing the SRP.

If RDAs cannot reach agreement with the majority of stakeholders that a new or updated plan is needed and that this should be both jointly developed and funded, the Department does not require RDAs to proceed with the preparation of an SRP.

However we require that RDAs provide high level information about the following in their 2021-22 Annual Business Plan:

- Key stakeholder priorities
- Analysis of the region’s strengths, weaknesses, potential opportunities and threats and from this, the region’s strategic economic development needs and priorities
- Existing work being undertaken by other stakeholders
- The focus areas for the RDA.

Guidance

The following guidance has been prepared for RDAs in relation to the identification or development of a suitable SRP.

STEP 1 – Work out what is currently available and if it is suitable

- A. Is there an existing SRP for the region, or multiple plans which cover the region but do not overlap?
 - i. If yes, go to STEP 1 B.
 - ii. If no, address GATEWAY 1 reporting (refer below) and skip to STEP 2.
- B. Is the existing SRP(s) suitable (refer to the better practice guidance in the **Attachment**)? Consider if it is/they are up to date, thorough, address the Commonwealth's [regional priorities](#) (also detailed in the **Attachment**) and is/are supported by the region's key economic development stakeholders.
 - i. If yes, go to STEP 1 C.
 - ii. If no, address GATEWAY 1 reporting and skip to STEP 2.
 - iii. If no, but SRP(s) only requires minor or moderate modifications, address GATEWAY 1 reporting and skip to STEP 2.
- C. Address GATEWAY 1 reporting (refer below) and recognise the document(s) as the region's basis for economic development activity. Align the RDA 2021-22 (and future) Annual Business Plan with the outcomes sought under the SRP(s). Use the document(s) as a reference during discussions with stakeholders to get everyone behind the SRP.

GATEWAY 1 – Please detail the outcomes from STEP 1 in your 2021-22 Annual Business Plan (which is due to the Department by 2 July 2021) and move to STEP 2 if required.

STEP 2 – Plan an approach for updating the current SRP(s) or developing a new one

- A. Identify stakeholders that have a role in the economic development of your region.
- B. Initiate discussions with those stakeholders to discuss the need for a new or updated SRP. Discussions should also consider whether stakeholders are already planning to update an existing SRP(s) of their own or prepare a new one(s).
- C. Do stakeholders support the need for a new or updated SRP(s)?
 - i. If yes, go to STEP 2 D.
 - ii. If no, the Department does not require RDAs to proceed with the preparation of an SRP(s). Please address the GATEWAY 2 reporting (refer below).
- D. Consider the processes for preparing the SRP(s), including which stakeholder will lead the process, the need for a working group comprising stakeholder representatives, whether a consultant will be used to prepare, financial contributions to be provided by each stakeholder (this should be a prerequisite wherever possible) etc.

NOTE: The Department is willing to consider providing financial support to RDAs to help with the costs of preparing the SRP(s). This will be considered on a case-by-case basis. If provided, funding will be payable on signing of a Funding Agreement variation and acceptance of the GATEWAY 2 report.

- E. Has an agreement been reached with stakeholders for the preparation of the SRP?
 - i. If yes, work with stakeholders to prepare a plan for developing the new or updated SRP(s). Guidance to consider when planning for and developing an SRP is in the **Attachment**. Address GATEWAY 2 reporting and skip to STEP 3.

- ii. If no, the Department does not require RDAs to proceed with the preparation of an SRP(s). Please address the GATEWAY 2 reporting.

GATEWAY 2 – Please send a brief report (email is acceptable) detailing the outcomes of discussions with stakeholders. If answered yes for STEP 2 E, please also send the plan referred to in STEP 2 E i to your RDA Liaison Officer before moving to STEP 3. If answered no to STEP 2 E, please include the required information referred to under **‘Requirements’** above in your 2021-22 Annual Business Plan.

STEP 3 – Prepare an updated or new SRP(s)

- A. Execute the plan for updating or preparing a new SRP(s) that was agreed with stakeholders in STEP 2 E i.
- B. Please send the final new or updated SRP(s) to your RDA Liaison Officer.
- C. Recognise the document as the region’s basis for economic development activity. Align 2022-23 (and future) RDA Annual Business Plans with the outcomes sought under the SRP(s). Use the document as a reference during discussions with stakeholders to get everyone behind it.

What is a Strategic Regional Plan (SRP)?

The SRP is a living document which provides a wide range of stakeholders, potential investors and policy-makers with a better understanding of the region - including strengths, challenges, and needs - and strategic priorities that outline the region's future ambitions. The audience for the SRP includes communities, community organisations, private enterprise and all levels of government.

SRPs assist regional development stakeholders and their communities to identify comparative advantages, manage regional growth pressures, identify opportunities and address economic development and infrastructure needs. They should take into account Commonwealth, state and territory and local government plans.

SRPs also assist regions to make the most of future opportunities, the evolving Australian economy and changes in the demographics of Australian society.

An SRP is a three-to-five year living document that should focus on the economic development of the region.

An existing SRP may be adopted if it adequately analyses regional data and addresses the economic development and infrastructure needs of stakeholders. Examples of existing SRPs include the NSW Government's [Regional Economic Development Strategies](#) and the WA Regional Development Commission [Regional Blueprints](#). SRPs should also address the Commonwealth's regional priorities of:

- **Connectivity and Infrastructure** incorporating digital connectivity, transport links, and freight and supply chain infrastructure.
- **Human Capital and Skills** to provide skilled and adaptable workforces, Regional Universities and training, and schooling.
- **Regional Employment and Business** to develop regional businesses and industry, local R&D and innovation and a strategic regional vision.
- **Leadership and Collaboration** by investing in regional leadership, capable local government and the Indigenous community.
- **Amenity and Liveability** providing services, facilities and liveability, and support for local priorities.
- **Sustainable Natural Resources** to build future resilience, ensure sustainable foundations and provide economic opportunities and jobs.

SRPs should be reviewed annually and revised when changing regional priorities, updated regional data or critical issues imply the need for revision. Critical issues are those which are likely to have a significant impact on the current or future economic performance and growth of the region. Where possible, critical issues should be supported by evidence or data.

The SRP should articulate a clear vision for the region and identify strategic priorities. This will then guide future RDA Committee activities through the Annual Business Plan.

The SRP will also serve as a major promotional tool for the region, including by supporting investment attraction.

It is critical that SRPs have broad stakeholder input and support to ensure outcomes from economic development work undertaken are maximised for the local community.

Work plans arising from the SRP should also be shared and coordinated between all stakeholders to avoid duplication of effort. Local working groups should be established to coordinate work programs and monitor the delivery of outcomes.

Better Practice SRPs

The following provides guidance on some critical elements of a better practice SRP.

Consultation

SRPs should be underpinned by comprehensive consultation with key stakeholders to ensure complete coverage of economic development issues that are important to the region. This also ensures that they reflect the expectations of the community and give a strong sense of regional ownership.

Stakeholder groups will vary between regions, but usually include governments, community organisations, business and industry groups, education institutions and the not-for-profit sector.

Plans should identify the format, method and outcomes of consultation, including contributions by stakeholders to the implementation of priorities.

Evidence base and data

Plans should provide an economic, social and environmental description of the region from a diversity of evidence sources. These include the Australian Bureau of Statistics, Australian, state/territory and local government data sources and publications, the private and not-for-profit sectors, universities and private research organisations and publications.

Strategic context

Plans should outline the strategic context of the document, including the priorities of Australian, state/territory and local governments. This will assist to identify complementary priorities and align with program and funding opportunities.

Analysis

All evidence and data should be accompanied by analysis which addresses its significance and how it supports their strategic vision and priorities. Better practice plans:

- Analyse how the evidence supports the regional vision
- Identify regional strengths, weaknesses, potential threats and opportunities
- Articulate the drivers of change and regional trends
- Outline the region's economic, social or environmental strategic priorities.

High level actions to support priorities can be included in the SRP and will support the detailed work plans of regional development stakeholders.

Priorities

A series of economic development priorities for the region will be identified after conducting widespread consultations, research and analysis, and detailed consideration. These should be endorsed by all stakeholders.

SRP presentation

SRPs are most effective in supporting stakeholders when they are concise. Lengthy SRPs can be difficult for stakeholders to navigate and identify key information about the region.

The department will not mandate how SRPs should be presented. RDAs should decide what format and presentation will best meet the needs of the region and the SRP's users.

All electronic versions of SRPs must be word-searchable.