

Schools First Partnering for success

Sharing the responsibility

Schools First is a national awards program that has committed \$15 million in awards funding over three years to recognise and encourage excellence in school-community partnerships.

Schools First builds on the growing recognition that the task of raising young people who are resilient, adaptable and well-adjusted, rests on the shoulders of the entire community. Schools First brings teachers, students, parents, business, local government and community members together to share this responsibility.

The philosophy underpinning the program is that "it takes a village to raise a child".

Schools First has been welcomed by the education sector because it understands that schools alone cannot be expected to meet the educational needs of children in the twenty-first century. Evidence-based decision making, collaborative planning and implementation, ongoing review, and shared expertise and resources via worthwhile programs can help bring about improved outcomes for students.

Leading the way

The National Australia Bank (NAB), Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) and The Foundation for Young Australians (FYA) are working together on this national initiative. All three organisations are committed to the goal of fostering sustainable, effective school-community partnerships as a means of improving outcomes for young people.

The program draws on the expertise, goodwill and resources of each organisation. The partnership between one of Australia's largest financial institutions, a not-for-profit research organisation with an international reputation, and a not-for-profit organisation specialising in outstanding programs for young people, shows what can be achieved through shared commitment and a collaborative approach.

This report provides a comprehensive overview of the 2009 Schools First Awards program and outlines its achievements in the first year of operation. We hope its contents will inspire other community and business groups to work together with schools to maximise the educational outcomes and life opportunities for all students.

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Schools First **2009 - At a glance**

- 68 Schools First Impact Awards were awarded to outstanding school-community partnerships
- 20 Seed Funding Awards were awarded to developing partnerships with excellent potential
- 1,552 applications were received from school and community partnerships from a wide range of schools in every state and territory and from all education sectors
- 15% or one in six Australian schools applied for an award in 2009
- 35.7% of applications were from schools in areas that are among the most disadvantaged in Australia
- 55 judges participated in the judging process
- The total award funding provided in 2009 was \$4.95 million
- 75 workshops were held with 2,166 attendees from the education, business and community sectors
- Of these 75 workshops, 39% were held in major cities, 53% were in regional areas and 8% were held in remote communities
- 8% of Australian schools attended a Schools First workshop
- 351 NAB staff engaged with and participated in Schools First
- There were 82,356 unique visitors to the Schools First website, which equates to an average of 245 visits per day
- Almost 50% of the total visitors to the website came during the application phase in June-July 2009
- More than 1,000 people participated in our local, state and national award celebrations
- 75% of applications came from Government schools across Australia



Making a meaningful contribution

The idea of creating a national awards program to help improve student outcomes through strong and collaborative school-community partnerships had its origins in 2008.

Senior staff from ACER and FYA met to identify ways in which their respective organisations could collectively make a difference to educational outcomes for students. The primary focus was on finding ways to increase the sense of connectedness that young people feel to their local communities.

Each organisation had been separately investigating opportunities and possibilities for improving educational outcomes, particularly in areas of entrenched disadvantage. Together, it was agreed that these not-for-profit organisations could achieve more.

NAB was looking to make a more meaningful contribution to the communities in which it operates. NAB realised that it, too, could contribute positively to the lives of young people by playing a significant role in the education sector, using its considerable resources to support a high profile project that would genuinely help bring about improved educational outcomes for students. As a result, NAB agreed to fund ACER and FYA's proposal for a national awards program and to become a partner in the initiative.

The Schools First Board was set up with all three partner organisations represented. The Board meets regularly to monitor the progress of the Schools First project and provide ongoing support and advice.

An important early step in the setting up of Schools First was to build a strong evidence base for the awards program. The research that was carried out into effective school–community partnerships by ACER enabled the awards criteria to be developed and formed the basis for much of the planning and implementation that followed.

The 2008-09 processes and planning have provided an excellent foundation for the subsequent development and implementation of Schools First.

The 2009 Schools First Board

Michael Ullmer – Chair, Schools First & Deputy Group CEO, NAB

Geoff Masters – CEO, Australian Council for Educational Research

Adam Smith – CEO, The Foundation for Young Australians

Steve Bracks – Former Premier of Victoria Cindy Batchelor – Program Director, NAB

Chris Blake – Executive General Manager, Business Strategy

& People Wholesale Banking, NAB

Andrea Pearman - General Manager of Community Engagement

& Sponsorship, NAB

John Simpson – Strategic Adviser, Office of the CEO, NAB

Joanna White – Group General Manager Strategic Support,

Office of the Deputy CEO, NAB

Schools First Building an evidence base

Developing the awards criteria

In mid to late 2008, ACER undertook a desktop analysis of the research on school-community partnerships. The study confirmed that the most effective school-community partnerships are based on identified need; aim to improve student outcomes; have a strong and committed leadership team; share decision making; have clear roles and responsibilities; implement well-organised programs; communicate effectively and frequently; regularly monitor and review the program and their partnership; can point to tangible evidence of improvement; use data to inform decision-making; and are sustainable.

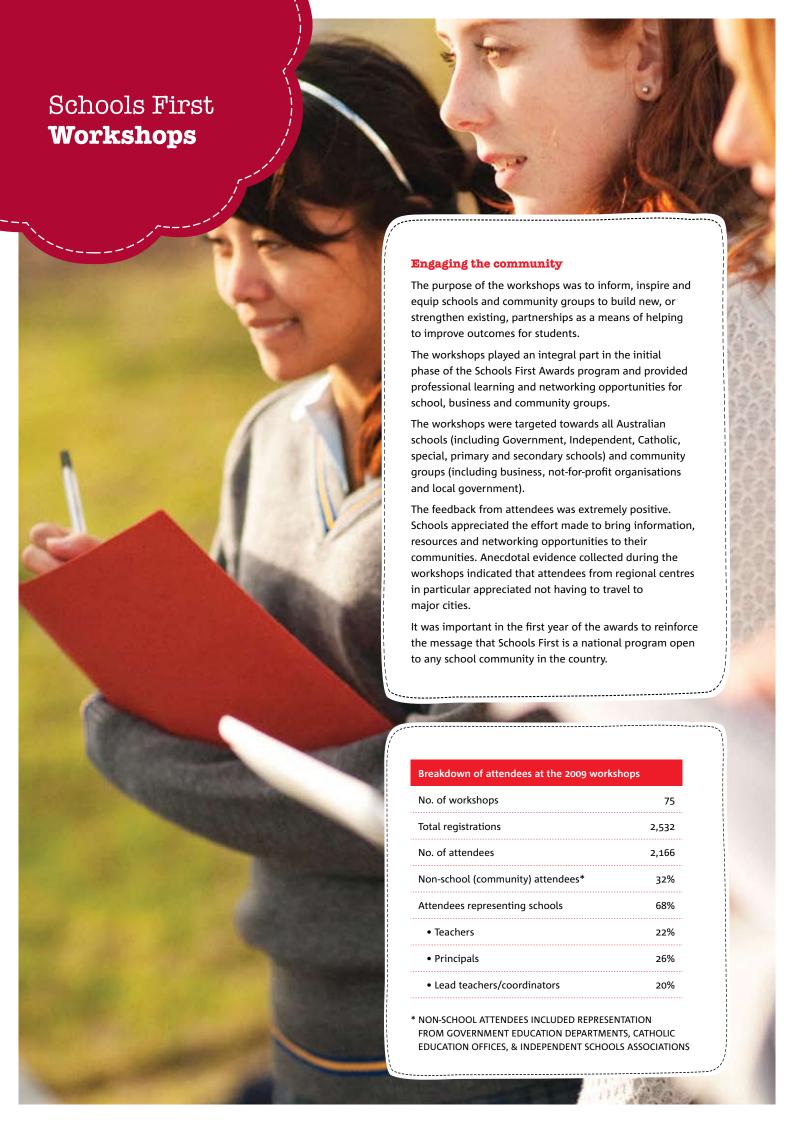
This research provided the evidence base for the two types of Schools First awards available – Impact Awards and Seed Funding Awards – the Schools First criteria, application forms and guidance material for schools. It has also given Schools First a strong foundation from which further research can be conducted.

A crucial step in the evolution of the program was to develop an outline for the two award categories and the awards criteria based on the desktop analysis carried out in late 2008. There are five criteria that schools must meet in order to win an award. These criteria are based on research and reflect the qualities that have been found to characterise highly effective school-community partnerships.

To be eligible for a Schools First award, schools needed to provide sound evidence of the following:

Seed Funding Awards criteria		
 The partnership is being set up to address an identified need or opportunity that will benefit students. 		
 A plan is being developed with each partner contributing to the plan. 		
 A well-organised program will be implemented. 		
Students will benefit from the program.		
 The partnership will become part of the culture and planning activities of each partner organisation. 		

partnerships and the evidence needed to support each application.



Schools First Judging

Identifying outstanding partnerships

In 2009, the criteria provided a basis for identifying highly effective partnerships. To cope with the deluge of 1,552 applications, 55 judges were appointed to evaluate the quality of the applications and identify the winning partnerships.

Senior representatives from the Government, Independent and Catholic school sectors, industry, and parent organisations were represented on the judging panel. Quite deliberately, NAB itself was not represented on the judging panel.

As the task was complex, a majority of judges appointed were experienced assessors with expertise in evaluation. The judging panel also contained a broad cross section of representatives from the states and territories and was chaired by an internationally recognised expert in the evaluation of quality programs in education.

On average, it took the judges half an hour to assess each application. Applications were culled or advanced on the basis of their scores after each marking and applications were marked at each stage as they advanced through the process.

A remoteness index was used to ensure that remote and regional schools would not be disadvantaged and each category was allocated a certain number of awards.

The judges' scores and comments were used as the basis for providing customised feedback to every school that applied in 2009. The information back to unsuccessful applicants is an important means of helping schools to identify ways they could enhance their partnerships and programs and of assisting them to apply again for a Schools First Award in the future.



Schools First **Applications**

The 2009 applications revealed a rich variety of programs being implemented by school-community partnerships across Australia. The depth of the activities, commitment of the partners, and outcomes that have been identified confirm the considerable potential of school-community partnerships to make a positive difference in the lives of young people.

Award winning applications showed strong and clear evidence of background research with the partners engaging in regular monitoring, review and reflection on the effectiveness of their programs. There was clear evidence of collaborative decision-making, planning and sharing of expertise from the very beginning of the partnership. Program activities were educational, student-focused and of obvious benefit to students and partners. There were clear links between the identified need or opportunity, program goals/objectives, proposed program of activities, and tangible outcomes. The best applications showed how the partnership would be sustained in the future. These collaborations were not service delivery models but genuine partnerships with clear mutual benefits.

The quality of the winning partnerships has provided an excellent model for other schools planning to develop exemplary partnerships with community groups.

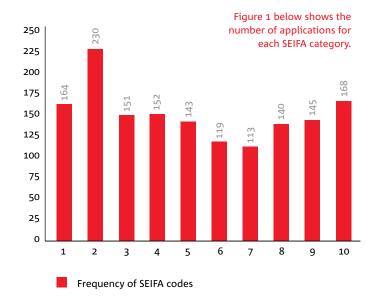
Distribution of applications

A preliminary analysis of the 2009 applications shows there was an even distribution of schools across all socio-economic communities. According to the Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA), which is based on education and occupation classifications, around 35.7% of applications were from schools in areas that are among the most disadvantaged in Australia.

Each of the ten SEIFA categories summarises a different aspect of the socio-economic conditions of people living in an area, with category 1 representing the most disadvantaged communities and category 10 representing the least disadvantaged communities.

Analysis of the 2009 applications shows that:

- There was a very even spread of applications across the ten SEIFA categories.
- The level of disadvantage did not affect the capacity of schools to apply for an award.
- There was an over-representation in the number of schools in the second lowest category of disadvantage (category 2).



Seed Funding Awards by state

Seed Funding Awards			
State	Total		
NSW	4		
VIC	7		
QLD	5		
SA	-		
ACT	-		
NT	-		
TAS	1		
WA	3		

Applications by School Sector					
	Total	%			
Government	1160	75			
Catholic	202	13			
Independent	190	12			
Total	1552	100			

Impact Awards by state and region

	Loca	State Impact Award			
State	Major cities	Regional	Remote		Total
NSW	14	5	1	1	21
VIC	11	4	0	1	16
QLD	7	4	1	1	13
SA	2	1	1	1	5
ACT	1	0	0	1	2
NT	0	1	0	1	2
TAS	0	1	0	1	2
WA	4	1	1	1	7

Schools First

Recognising excellence

- local, state and

national awards

Local Awards

All of the inaugural Schools First local Impact Award winning schools were encouraged to hold their own celebratory events once the winners had been announced. Working in conjunction with the Schools First team, these activities took the form of school assemblies, morning or afternoon teas, breakfast celebrations, presentation nights or larger scale events.

A total of 68 local award presentations were held across the country in September and October 2009 to celebrate each local award. The local celebration events were supported by teachers, students, local government, mayors, parents and NAB staff.

State Awards

In late October 2009, five state and territory cocktail receptions were held in Melbourne, Adelaide, Perth, Brisbane and Sydney to announce the eight state/ territory winners. All local Impact Award winners were invited to these receptions. Prior to each event, a workshop was held to enable schools and partners to meet with other winning schools and to exchange ideas and experiences.

Each state and territory event was supported by key government stakeholders in the respective areas, Board members and senior staff from NAB, ACER and FYA.

National Award

In November 2009, the inaugural Schools First state and territory winners attended a national dinner in Melbourne. The Hon. Julia Gillard, Deputy Prime Minister, presented the winner's cheque to Canberra College. The evening was a culmination of what has been an extraordinary year of thought leadership by Schools First and the partners involved.

The Schools First National Award dinner was attended by 250 education executives from across Australia, media representatives, government ministers, Schools First Board members and key representatives from NAB, ACER and FYA. The MC for the night was television presenter, David Koch.



Schools First Spreading the word

Communicating via the media

The media was identified as a key communication vehicle in helping spread the word about Schools First. To help build awareness, drive applications and celebrate the 2009 winners, an extensive media campaign was rolled out across TV, print, radio and online.

To support TV, magazine, newspaper and online advertising across regional, suburban and metropolitan media channels, a heavy PR campaign was also executed across rural, regional, suburban and metropolitan radio and print outlets.

Schools First also appeared in targeted educational outlets as well as social media channels such as Facebook.

Communicating via the Schools First website

The website is a key resource for the Schools First program and an important means of communicating with stakeholders.

While its online application function is of particular importance, the website is also a useful source of information about school-community partnerships. Users can find information about Schools First, tips and resources, tools, Frequently Asked Questions, research, case studies and information about the application process.

The website has been redesigned to provide a wider range of functions and possibilities for users.

General website statistics for 2009

- Total unique visitors = 82,356 or 245 per day on average
- 4.3 page views per visitor
- 348,827 unique page views
- 57% are direct traffic
- 22% came from a referring website or email
- 21% came to the site via a search engine

Schools First In 2010

Awards

Due to the high number of Seed Funding Award applications in 2009, the number of these awards being offered in 2010 has doubled. The number of Impact Awards remains the same. This means that a total of 108 partnerships will benefit from Schools First in 2010 with over \$5 million committed.

Research

The 2009 applications provide a unique insight into the existing school-community partnerships in Australia. Analysis of this data is expected to make a genuine contribution to international research on school-community partnerships.

National Conference

On 19 March 2010 the inaugural Schools First National Conference is to be held. The theme for the 2010 conference is 'Power through Partnership'. Guest speakers, a discussion panel of experts and a diverse audience of educators, business and community leaders are expected to generate informed debate about the potential of partnerships to improve student outcomes.

Partnership Forums

A series of forums will be held at strategic locations nationally with the aim of helping schools build stronger partnerships. The forums will also provide networking opportunities for schools and potential partners.

Knowledge Bank

A repository of the latest research about school-community partnerships will form part of the new look website. This section of the website will contain articles that are likely to be of interest to schools, the latest research on school-community partnerships, and case studies.

Evaluation

An evaluation will be carried out during 2010 and 2011 to identify the contribution that Schools First has made to the quality of school-community partnerships in Australia. A strong focus will be on the Impact and Seed Funding Award winners to identify the difference that winning an award and participating in Schools First have made to their partnerships.



Schools First Partner highlights



NAB

For NAB, the highlight of 2009 was the way that Schools First captured the hearts and minds of our people and, as a result, our staff have become passionate advocates of the program. Hundreds of NAB staff are actively involved in the program and are working alongside their local school community partnerships, volunteering time to bring the partnerships to life and providing financial advice.

Schools First is a practical and meaningful way of putting back in to our communities. As one of Australia's largest banks, NAB understands that its responsibility extends beyond its business interactions to being actively involved in the communities in which it operates.

Schools First acknowledges that it really does take a village to raise a child and, as part of the community, we all have a responsibility to contribute positively to the lives of young Australians.

ACER

For ACER, the highlight of 2009 was being able to read through the stories of hope, dedication and achievement contained in the applications for an Impact or Seed Funding Award. The programs that schools have developed with community partners are worthwhile and often inspirational. It was quite moving seeing what is being achieved in schools, often against great odds, with the support of their community partners. It was also wonderful to see the benefits gained by community groups.

FYA

For FYA, the highlight from the inaugural year of Schools First was when that very first call was placed to a Seed Funding Award Winner. The room was full of Schools First team members sitting silently with baited breath as the first award winner was called on speaker phone. After some brief 'misdirection' on the success of their application, the school was informed of their winning status. The school contact person erupted with surprise and sheer delight, as did the rest of us in the room! Then came tears over the phone and the comment: 'You really have no idea what this award will mean to our school … I'm speechless … the highlight of our year!'





