

Leadership Development Compass

Interpretation manual



The One Basin Cooperative Research Centre (CRC) is an industry-led partnership established in 2022 to build a more productive, resilient and sustainable Murray–Darling Basin for current and future generations.

From Queensland to South Australia, we are facilitating collaboration between universities, industry, business, government, not-for-profit organisations and local communities, across the agriculture, environment, water and technology sectors, working towards our vision of growing the value of water in a changing world.

Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge and pay respect to the Traditional Owners of the Murray–Darling Basin and their Nations. We pay respect to the Traditional Owners of the lands and the waters upon and around which our organisations are situated. We acknowledge their deep cultural, social, spiritual, environmental and economic connection to their lands and waters. We pay respect to their Elders – past, present and future.

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Introduction

Welcome to the One Basin Leadership Development Compass (LDC), where we tackle the challenge of creating a sustainable, productive, and resilient Basin through exceptional leadership. We are committed to cultivating leaders who bring the One Basin CRC vision to life. Key to this is our unique LDC. It is grounded in local ideas and best practice, and aims to align with the CRC's strategic goals, ensure consistent leadership development, and support individual growth.

As one of our leaders, you would be very aware of the challenges of navigating complex issues and uniting diverse stakeholders across disciplines, organisations, sectors, and regions. These skills require outstanding leadership and is crucial in delivering the CRC's research and innovation mandate. Without it, even the most innovative solutions may falter.

Your commitment to the Leadership Development Compass initiative is vital in shaping our leadership community's future and fostering a culture of excellence within the CRC. We believe your leadership journey will be inspiring, challenging and rewarding. Most importantly, we hope it transforms your heart and mind, guiding you to become the leader that the One Basin CRC and your community needs.



**Embrace this opportunity
to grow and make a
meaningful impact!**



Your profile

Your individual profile has been designed using both your self-assessment (the blue dot) and all your assessors' aggregated feedback (the black dot). It is represented as an average score for each of the practices of leadership expertise. This dual perspective provides a broad and comprehensive view of your leadership talents and capabilities.

We have chosen to represent the framework as a circle, symbolising the expansive nature of leadership growth. This shape reflects how development manifests outwards in your behaviours, attitudes, and skills. However, true transformation often begins within — requiring shifts in your beliefs, mindsets, and values.

Your profile results highlight your strengths. It provides insights into areas for further focus based on your role's demands, how others perceive your leadership style and presents an opportunity for introspection.

We invite you to embrace this profile as a valuable tool for personal and professional growth, and self-discovery. As you engage with this process, you'll be better equipped to contribute to our shared vision of a sustainable, productive, and resilient Murray-Darling Basin.



Focusing

This Leadership Development Compass is a guide for your leadership journey. As with navigating over land, we cannot explore every leadership direction simultaneously. Progress requires us to focus on one region of the compass at a time.

Where you focus for now, will depend on what is important to you in the leadership roles you play. Your profile reveals where you and your peers think you are already strong. Think about areas of your profile where you are weaker. What would it mean for you and those around you if you could grow your capacity in those parts of the compass.

You may already know where you are 'playing safe' and you want to be challenged and grow. Our experience is that leaders have a sense of their blind spots. These are revealed at times when you feel out-of-your-depth and unsure how to address challenges with the people around you. Ask yourself what elements or leadership practices will help at these times.

While narrowing your focus is critical, significant leadership growth will always include inner work. You will keep returning to the Leading Self element and particularly "Reflection" practice.



Reimagining Leadership with First Nations Perspectives

The One Basin CRC Leadership Development Compass, described in this manual, gains deeper meaning when viewed through Aboriginal ways of knowing.

Aunty Mary Graham teaches that relationships are at the heart of Aboriginal philosophy—first with Country, then with people. Country is not just land; it is sentient, shapes identity, and is the source of law. Leadership, in this view, is not about authority or entitlement but responsibility and reciprocity. Leaders must first attune themselves to Country, which guides how they relate, decide, and remain accountable.

This shifts the framing from a top-down model of leadership to one of distributed custodianship. The Compass, then, can be seen not as a linear path of skills, but as a cyclical map of obligations and relational accountability. Leadership becomes about listening, sensing, and acting with care for the interconnected cultural, ecological, and social systems that make up Country. As Aunty Mary reminds us,

“Country is not only a place, it is a way of being.”

Dr Karen Martin expands on this with her framework of three interconnected and dynamic concepts - Being, Knowing, and Doing:

- **Being** means understanding identity as embedded in relationships—with kin, Country, and community. It acknowledges that leadership is not a title but a set of responsibilities that emerge from one's role in the collective story of place.
- **Knowing** is relational and holistic—knowledge is not owned but shared with permission and care. It comes through story, ceremony, practice, and connection. Leadership in this frame is about holding and activating knowledge in ways that honour its origins, protect its integrity, and make it useful for the collective good.
- **Doing** is action grounded in these relationships. One acts not from entitlement but out of obligation to people, Country, and knowledge. In the One Basin CRC, this means designing and enacting leadership that is not only technically proficient but spiritually, culturally, and ecologically accountable.



When these Aboriginal philosophies are centred within the Leadership Development Compass, they reconfigure leadership as a deeply relational and moral undertaking. They invite leaders to recalibrate their sense of purpose—not as agents of control or innovation alone, but as custodians of relational harmony. The Compass becomes not a tool of individual ascent, but a guide for collective flourishing, where Country is teacher, obligation is driver, and balance is the enduring aim. This, ultimately, is what sustainability requires—not just new technologies or policies, but new (and ancient) ways of being with each other and with the world.

The Four Elements



The Leadership Development Compass was crafted through consultation with the One Basin's diverse stakeholders and identified four key elements of leadership excellence:

1. **Leading Self**
2. **Leading Others**
3. **Leading Impact**
4. **Leading projects**

Each element encompasses several practices, that offer detailed insights into leadership expertise. The framework serves as a comprehensive guide to cultivating the desired leadership skills that align with the organisation's strategic goals, while fostering a culture of innovation and collaboration.

Leading Self



Reflective leadership is a transformative approach that balances deep self-awareness with genuine empathy and continuous growth. Practices associated with this element allow leaders to systematically examine their motivations, strengths, and weaknesses while investing time to understand their team's personal drivers. They see challenges as learning opportunities, actively seek feedback, and ensure their actions align with core ethical principles. By creating space for reflection and demonstrating adaptability, they navigate complexity with courage and humility. Reflective leaders foster psychological safety, bridge cultural divides, and promote open communication, ultimately driving meaningful organisational and personal transformation through their commitment to self-improvement and inclusive leadership.

The Leading Self element incorporates the following practices:

Reflecting for progress

A leader who scores highly in this area consistently

- Engages in self-reflection to recognise their own motivations, strengths, and weaknesses
- Uses successes and failures as opportunities for growth
- Actively seeks feedback as an opportunity for personal growth
- Creates time and space for reflection
- Exhibits actions anchored by core values
- Exhibits a commitment to ethical principles
- Demonstrates self-awareness of personal triggers and actively manages them, while maintaining overall well-being

Motivating success

A leader who scores highly in this area consistently

- Shows enthusiasm for their work
- Bravely shares passion and vision, as well as acknowledging failure and uncertainty
- Persists constructively despite challenges and opposition
- Exudes positivity and optimism
- Exhibits flexibility and adaptability
- Describes, celebrates, and encourages advancements
- Demonstrates tenacity and patience in staying the course
- Exhibits humour and humility
- Demonstrates comfort with volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity
- Has the courage to choose the challenging yet rewarding path
- Is decisive despite uncertainty

Connecting from the heart

A leader who scores highly in this area consistently

- Demonstrates self-awareness about biases related to culture, race, gender, and age
- Demonstrates openness and a commitment to genuine interactions
- Exhibits a willingness to engage on others' terms
- Exhibits a commitment to inclusivity
- Fosters trusting relationships
- Demonstrates empathy, particularly towards those who are disadvantaged, fatigued or traumatised
- Exhibits a steadfast commitment to reconciliation and social justice
- Actively seeks, considers and respects diverse perspectives
- Fosters a culture that helps to bridge divides
- Understands and utilises the strength of diversity
- Effectively engages with First Nations communities
- Encourages questions and promotes open communication by providing psychological safety
- Shows adaptability when interacting with stakeholders beyond their immediate circle of influence
- Exhibits a readiness to learn while respecting boundaries

Leading Others



Leading others is the art of visionary collaboration and adaptive thinking. Practices associated with the element, support leaders to articulate compelling visions while inviting team participation, exploring broader contexts and long-term impacts. They challenge existing paradigms, navigate complex challenges with confidence, and connect diverse ideas to generate breakthrough solutions. By cultivating a culture of calculated risk-taking and continuous learning, they move beyond traditional boundaries. These leaders address conflicts constructively, offer impartial mediation, and embrace diverse perspectives with humility, creating an environment of innovation, mutual respect, and shared growth.

The Leading Others element incorporates the following practices:

Visioning the future

A leader who scores highly in this area consistently

- Articulates a compelling and inspiring vision
- Encourages others to participate in shaping the vision, thereby creating a shared understanding
- Eagerly explores the broader context and implications
- Focuses on long-term impacts and consequences
- Demonstrates an understanding of the multiple impacts of change
- Shows the ability to move beyond their own area of expertise
- Understands the breadth and complexity of the subject under investigation
- Exhibits a willingness to embrace both traditional and innovative approaches to facilitating social inquiry

Creating imaginative options

A leader who scores highly in this area consistently

- Seed creativity in their teams to envision new possibilities
- Demonstrates an openness to listen and respond to what is heard
- Produces novel, transformative concepts that challenge existing paradigms
- Systematically questions established norms to unlock innovative thinking pathways
- Confidently explores and deconstructs ambiguous challenges with adaptive problem-solving
- Cultivates a culture of calculated risk-taking and continuous learning.
- Connects disparate ideas to create breakthrough insights and solutions

Negotiating contributions & outcomes

A leader who scores highly in this area consistently

- Establishes appropriate boundaries
- Deals quickly and directly with conflict
- Offers impartial mediation and fosters the search for common ground
- Acknowledges diverse and conflicting priorities, embracing a comprehensive approach that includes all perspectives without marginalisation
- Acknowledges historical power imbalances and embraces the complexities of shifting dynamics with humility
- Invests time in understanding peoples' personal motivations

Leading Impact



Leading Impact involves a strategic approach to innovation and improvement. Practices associated with this element harness systems thinking to understand complex interdependencies and develop adaptive strategies that respond to dynamic conditions. They focus on continuous improvement, fostering an environment where new ideas are encouraged and explored. Strategic thinking is pivotal, as it allows leaders to be future focussed, anticipate challenges and opportunities, and align efforts with long-term goals.

The Leading Impact element incorporates the following practices:

Navigating impact pathways

A leader who scores highly in this area consistently

- Engages stakeholders to co-create impact goals
- Demonstrates the capacity to work together in establishing common long-term objectives
- Develops and communicates compelling visions of possible research impact
- Demonstrates understanding of a range of pathways to impact, and the mechanisms to achieve them
- Conducts thorough background research, including historical context, and shares insights to engage participants
- Tests assumptions, experiments with solutions, and integrates the feedback to make progress
- Anticipates and mitigates barriers to impact
- Adaptively manages projects while maintaining focus on research impact
- Brings the right people together with the skills, resources and purpose to make real progress

Governing impactful projects

A leader who scores highly in this area consistently

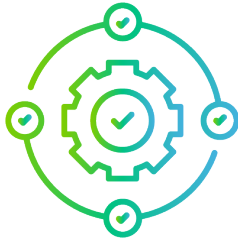
- Implements robust project governance frameworks that are focused on achieving impact
- Establishes clear roles and responsibilities
- Commits to evidence-based decision making
- Promotes transparency in decision making
- Ensures compliance with organisational policies, including those that relate to research integrity and ethics
- Implements rigorous risk management processes
- Tracks progress towards impact
- Demonstrates accountability for project outcomes
- Evaluates progress using metrics aligned with desired impacts

Developing integrated solutions

A leader who scores highly in this area consistently

- Recognises the interconnection among components of the system
- Acknowledges diverse perspectives, including critiques of "whole" systems
- Evaluates and critiques system boundaries and underlying values with team and stakeholders
- Leverages interdisciplinary knowledge to address complex system challenges
- Evaluates feedback loops and interactions across system components to ensure a dynamic understanding of how changes propagate
- Iteratively adapts solutions to account for system changes
- Anticipates unintended consequences of interventions within the system

Leading Projects



Leading projects is a dynamic process of empowerment and strategic execution. Practices with this element enable team growth by providing opportunities, promoting autonomy, and valuing individual contributions. They foster a culture of continuous improvement, delivering quick wins within long-term efforts while maintaining accountability and adaptability. By skilfully managing stakeholder expectations, communicating with clarity, and demonstrating technical and interpersonal proficiency, these leaders transform complex challenges into successful outcomes through collaborative and innovative approaches.

The Leading Projects element incorporates the following practices:

Growing human capital

A leader who scores highly in this area consistently

- Assembles teams with the right mix of skills
- Enables others to grow by providing opportunities
- Provides constructive feedback and thoughtful reflection
- Promotes autonomy by delegating responsibilities, and trusts team members to make decisions
- Recognises and genuinely values the contributions of all individuals
- Demonstrates authentic care and consideration for each person's individuality and unique needs
- Prioritises community advancement over personal ego
- Fosters a culture of continuous improvement
- Promotes experimentation and welcomes new ideas
- Adapts their approach to systems based on impacts and evolving perceptions

Managing productive teams

A leader who scores highly in this area consistently

- Delivers quick wins within a long-term effort
- Takes responsibility for their actions and decisions
- Follows through on commitments while striving to meet expectations
- Demonstrates effective prioritisation and time management
- Negotiates sound commercial agreements
- Demonstrates compliance with legal obligations
- Demonstrates strong budget management skills
- Exhibits proficiency in project management
- Displays competence in risk management

Communicating powerfully with stakeholders

A leader who scores highly in this area consistently

- Manages expectations from communities and stakeholders
- Tailors communication effectively to suit the situation
- Demonstrates humility in actions and words
- Demonstrates an openness to listen and respond to what is heard
- Exhibits a non-judgmental attitude and openness to new experiences and views
- Expresses ideas with clarity and transparency
- Possesses the skill to convey ideas through storytelling
- Demonstrates proficiency in using technology for effective interaction
- Celebrates small wins



One Basin CRC stories

Real Leaders, Real Stories: Diverse Paths to Leadership

These personal stories showcase how leaders from different backgrounds bring unique perspectives and strengths to their roles, demonstrating that leadership is about individual potential, not predetermined pathways.

Margot L Rawsthorne: visioning and moderating for community change.

Margot, a social work and policy expert at the University of Sydney, leads the Water Futures initiative for the One Basin CRC. Her previous work has been in areas affected by disasters like the 2019/20 black summer bushfires and the 2022 NSW floods. This experience compliments her One Basin focus on community development and climate change adaptation.

“It’s creative and exciting work when people come together to identify and navigate complex issues.”

Margot is adept at using participatory processes to generate shared visions. She effectively manages differences, including conflicts, and sets clear boundaries that allow her work to progress smoothly. Her capacity to find practical solutions in complex environments is genuinely impressive. “We always ask ourselves, ‘Is this useful?’” she explains. “It’s about being attuned to the situation, taking the necessary time, and allowing people to choose how involved they want to be. Transparency and ethical behaviour are also essential.”

A prime example of Margot’s work is the Lake Hawthorn project at Mildura. This recreational and environmental site, valued by residents, faces potential impacts from upcoming land development. Margot and her team have initiated community scans to understand the issues and community reactions, with the Mildura Hub emerging as a valuable contact point.

In tackling these types of challenges, Margot emphasizes common interests. “Start with what people share and collaborate on those goals,” she advises. This approach has been particularly effective where communities grapple with uncertainty, perceived powerlessness, and frustration. “Our goal is to be helpful without an agenda,” Margot notes. “We guide people through the process, helping them emerge stronger.”

Her leadership philosophy includes maintaining a learning stance, fostering curiosity, showing cultural humility, and keeping things enjoyable. Looking ahead, Margot hopes the One Basin CRC will continue its collaborative spirit and genuine focus on indigenous engagement, ultimately making a meaningful impact on community adaptation to climate change and water resource management.

Troy Meston: bridging cultures through Indigenous wisdom.

Troy is an accomplished Aboriginal researcher and teacher from the Gamilaroi nation, who serves as the First Nations Research Lead in the Gulbali Institute and for the One Basin CRC. His work exemplifies his shared values of care, connection, and curiosity.

His leadership is deeply rooted in his connection to his ancestors and country, with a strong sense of history and the present moment. He is motivated by the opportunity to be an “honourable ancestor” and to close the gap among First Nations people by making meaningful contributions. His approach is guided by caring for future generations and curiosity about traditional knowledge systems.

The challenge Troy faces is ensuring that First Nations communities get to genuinely lead research projects. In this context he is focussed on three key outcomes: First Nations leadership, community benefits, and socio-economic opportunities for First Nations people.

Additionally, he must navigate his own professional transition from a former small and controlled research setting to a much larger and complex basin-wide context.

To address these challenges, he employs First Nations models and knowledge, including the “Yarning Circle of Life” - an ontological compass that functions as a high-level knowledge framework and pedagogical model. This approach allows him to understand and orientate the phase of work he is in, enabling forward movement, and the application of ancient wisdom to contemporary challenges.

His leadership actions include: 1. promoting Aboriginal worldviews, ethics, and consensus decision-making models, 2. elevating others to have similar opportunities, 3. advocating for hiring more Indigenous people and increasing access to country, 4. strategically using the Yarning Circle model, and 5. focusing on his own personal development, in particular his mindset, empathy, and awareness.

Through modelling these behaviours and mindsets, Troy demonstrates how values can drive effective leadership, fostering care for future generations, connection to cultural wisdom, and curiosity in applying traditional knowledge to contemporary challenges.

“ His leadership is deeply rooted in his connection to his ancestors and country, with a strong sense of history and the present moment.

”

Peta Jeffries: reflecting, connecting with integrity, and respecting difference.

Peta, a lecturer and researcher at Charles Sturt University's School of Indigenous Australian Studies and the Gulbali Institute, leads the Stories of One Basin project for the One Basin CRC, which prioritises First Nations aspirations, Indigenous knowledges and Indigenous-led research to address climate change. Her work intersects visual arts, eco-social work, and history, with a focus on individual and collective healing in the Murray Darling Basin. Her leadership exemplifies a respectfully collaborative, integrity-driven approach to research, particularly in the context of addressing social and ecological injustices caused by ongoing colonialism.

Central to Peta's leadership are her strong values, a commitment to addressing climate change, past and ongoing injustices, and promoting integrity in research practices. She applies Indigenist Standpoint Pedagogy (ISP), a relational and critical approach that considers historical, institutional, and socio-cultural contexts, challenges dominant assumptions, and prioritises Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination.

Peta has identified several challenges in her field, including the dominance of some epistemologies, ontologies and axiology's and their associated approaches, confusion around and resistance to incorporating Indigenous perspectives and Indigenous self-determination, and project timeframes that constrain meaningful and respectful outcomes. In an attempt to address or overcome these, she has implemented innovative solutions, including adopting ISP as a transformative

framework, focussed on building communities of practice, and promoting collaboration and co-creation through relational inquiry and accountability.

Her methods challenge traditional research norms, her approach goes beyond critique and or cultural competency training, and instead embraces an iterative and transformative way of being and doing. Critical self-reflection is a key element of her leadership, however, creating genuine human and more than human connections that transform self and those around her through trauma-informed experiential learning, creativity, mindfulness, and somatic techniques is an important aspect and objective of Peta's teaching and research.

“ Central to Peta's leadership are her strong values, a commitment to addressing climate change, past and ongoing injustices, and promoting integrity in research practices. ”

Drawing from wisdom of the head, heart and the senses Peta's approach to leadership is about understanding, supporting, and respecting interconnectedness, action, justice and transformation. For example, in a project led by traditional owners, Peta was asked to research what was considered at the time to be "traditional ecological knowledge" of fish and eel traps. This led to the co-creation of an extensive database of archival research that was then used by Traditional Owners and catchment managers/decision makers to inform ongoing water and land management practices. The site is now recognised and listed by United Nations as a world heritage cultural landscape. This positive outcome contributes to ecological, economic, and social justice for the broader Indigenous and non-Indigenous community. The success of this project demonstrates the potential of inclusive, respectfully collaborative, and importantly, Indigenous led projects.

Quiet but firm, Peta's leadership challenges norms and inspires change. She highlights the interconnection of ecological, economic, and social justice, emphasising the importance and value of relational accountability and multidimensional approaches. Her work lays a foundation for more inclusive and effective research practices in the Murray Darling Basin and beyond.



Learn more:

For more information, contact the
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