

2012 LGMA Management Challenge

# the temperature is rising

Are you ready for  
the challenge?



## getting started...

Congratulations on taking the first step toward one of the most innovative professional development programs in the market place. The fact that it is keenly priced, designed specifically for local government and structured to effect positive change in the workplace, adds up to a good move for your team members and your organisation. The LGMA Management Challenge deserves to be an integral part of your professional development program.

And by entering one or more teams each year in the Challenge, you are supporting a program that is dedicated to the continuous improvement of leadership standards in the local government sector. Whether you have already entered a team or are still deciding, you will find this Getting Started Guide a helpful entry point. Here is what you will read:

### Section 1 - About the Challenge

A general description of the Challenge, how it is structured, time lines, team member and organisational commitments, etc.

### Section 2 - Appointment of a Mentor

What is the mentor's role and what are the critical attributes? How much time will he/she have to commit and what is the relationship to the team.

### Section 3 - Forming and Preparing Your Team

What is the ideal team composition? Options for putting a team together. How to prepare the team. How much time will they be required to commit?

### Section 4 - Rules of the Challenge

The few rules which apply to the Challenge and why they are there.

### Section 5 - Administrative Information

Important information to ensure you do the necessary things at the right time and are in the right place when you need to be there.

### Section 6 – Take the Challenge to a Graduate Degree

New for 2012, an additional component to the Challenge will enable participants to progress towards a postgraduate degree.



## SECTION 1: About the Challenge

We'll start with the program's objectives and then look at how the Challenge operates.

### Objective

The major objective of the Challenge is to provide local government employees in Australia and New Zealand with a highly relevant learning experience in management and teamwork that readily translates back into their workplace.

More specifically, the Challenge is based on a series of professional management capabilities that have been shown to be critical for people in management positions in local government. They are:

- Effective Team Skills
- Planning and Project Management Skills
- Negotiation and Influencing Skills
- Listening and Interpersonal Communication Skills
- Emotional Intelligence
- Written and Verbal Presentation Skills
- Skills in Different Ways of Thinking and Problem-Solving
- Political Awareness
- Professional Ethics & Values

On the day of the Challenge you will also need to particularly draw on your time management skills.

### Themes for 2012

Our key aim for 2011 was to ensure that the themes were relevant to professional staff and managers working in local government today. The theme for 2011 was 'New Ways of Working', and we tackled issues such as workforce retention, working with councillors, debating the rates, regional collaboration, amalgamations, managing places, service delivery and more.

In 2012 we will again cover a wide range of issues and topics which have direct relevance and which challenge councils to design new responses and innovations. While the exact range of topics for 2012 will remain a secret until the distribution of the pre-challenge task, we can tell you that the Temperature is Rising...

### Overview

The Challenge is a 'competition' (more about that later) held in each Australian State and New Zealand. Teams of 5 or 6 members (typically, nearly all teams have 6) prepare for the Challenge day and also complete a pre-challenge task. Then, the teams come together to meet in one venue over a whole day and carry out a series of tasks that are allocated on the day. For the most part, they work with their own team. Sometimes the tasks require them to break up the team and/or work with other teams.

So, the Challenge will take your team through three phases:



## 1. The Preparation Phase:

An internal mentor will be appointed (probably by your CEO/GM) who will guide your team through the preparation phase and lend a hand during the post-event debriefing and translation phase. Your Mentor will receive the Mentor's Guidelines. This outlines a comprehensive team preparation program and includes several preparatory activities. Some sample tasks from previous years are also provided with the Mentor's Guidelines. These are to give first time teams a taste of what Challenge tasks might be like. During the preparation phase we suggest that it is far more important to focus on team-building processes rather than analysing old tasks from previous years – we change the tasks every year, so you can always expect something new!

During this phase the Mentor will commence exploring what will be required for participants to work together as an effective team, ready to tackle the actual Challenge tasks. The first of the actual Challenge tasks is the pre-Challenge task that is provided to teams about six weeks before Challenge day.

The pre-challenge task will focus on a topical issue facing local government and may require some data collection, analysis and strategy development within your own organisation. Early appointment of your Mentor will assist with team formation and pre-challenge task preparation.

As the pre-challenge task will be assessed as part of the overall performance, teams should plan to allow sufficient time to meet the pre-challenge requirements.

Team members will also receive a Participants Handbook (via your Mentor). This document will help you understand your role so you can make the most of the Challenge experience.

## 2. The Challenge Day Itself:

On the Challenge day itself, your team and other teams from your State/Region will gather to undertake a series of tasks and participate in a number of activities typical of those encountered by local government managers. During the day, your team will put into effect the processes developed during the preparation stage. The day will conclude with a general debriefing session.

## 3. Post Challenge : Translation of Learning Back in the Workplace

Your team will participate in a post-Challenge debriefing process. This will include:

- A debriefing process by a Challenge facilitator; and
- A debriefing process back at work led by the Mentor.

The post-Challenge phase is the most important of all. Firstly, its focus is on how to translate your learning outcomes into a personal action plan for professional development. Secondly, it addresses how the team can leverage off the Challenge experience to improve organization and business processes within their own organisation.

This should include the development of a personal action plan by each team member and a structured process of engagement with the CEO/GM and/or senior management and/or peers.

How the team goes about this is ultimately up to you. But it should **at least** involve post-Challenge briefings to senior management, immediate workgroups and the CEO/GM. If the team doesn't commit to some form of post-challenge debriefing within their organisation from the outset, the prospect of enduring benefit to team members and the organisation is diminished.

## The First Stage - Regional Challenges

Regional Challenges will be conducted throughout Australia at designated venues during the period of 19<sup>th</sup> – 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2012 and in New Zealand from 12<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> March 2012. Venues are finalised upon the close of entries and will be selected on the basis of a number of suitability criteria. Subject to sufficient entries, each state/New Zealand will conduct at least one Challenge. Based on our experience over several years, you can expect there will always be at least an event in your capital city. Depending on entry numbers there may also be a non-capital city event – for, example, there is often one in both islands of New Zealand. Your State Division/SOLGM will confirm regional venues and dates.

Each Regional Challenge must have a minimum of five participating teams (except for the Northern Territory and Tasmania where a minimum of four are required). The maximum number of teams for any single Regional Challenge event is sixteen. If this number is exceeded, an additional Challenge event or a double module event will be conducted. Only one team will be selected as the winner from each State and New Zealand to contest the Australasian Final. Within each State/New Zealand, the same facilitators will be utilised for the conduct of all Challenge events in order to provide consistency in judging and evaluation.

## The Winners

Everyone is a winner just by participating in the Challenge. All participants win if they stretch themselves, challenge some personal horizons or maybe learn something new about their own personal strengths and weaknesses. They also win if they have some fun, network with some industry peers and just by having a go. And the prize? – teams can expect to come away from the Challenge having had a unique experience and with a sound working knowledge of effective team management practices.

Following the post-Challenge assessment process, one overall winning team will be declared in each State and New Zealand. The overall State/NZ winners will then participate in an Australasian Final in Melbourne on 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2012.

All teams participating in the Challenge will receive a Council Participation Certificate acknowledging their efforts and participation. Winning teams of State/NZ Regional Challenges and the Australasian Final will receive a trophy.

Needless to say, the goal of “**WINNING**” needs to be kept in perspective. There is no doubt that the competitive element adds excitement and motivation to the event. However, the fundamental objective of the Challenge is to provide a personal, team and organisational development opportunity: every member of every team should expect this as an outcome. While teams will naturally get excited or disappointed about winning or not winning it is important to keep in mind that the program delivers effective professional development to all participants and the organisations they work for.

## SECTION 2: Appointment of a Mentor

At the time of submission of an entry, the Chief Executive Officer/General Manager should give consideration to the appointment of a Mentor for each team to assist and guide preparation for the Challenge. The Mentor is not to be a team member.

The LGMA National Office provides detailed Mentor’s Guidelines. The Guidelines are provided directly to Mentors and are for use by the Mentor only. The Guidelines set out a suggested process and contain a number of Preparatory Activities for Mentors to undertake with their teams to prepare for the Challenge. By this means, the team will be already working together and addressing team process issues in



preparation for the Challenge. The Mentor's Guidelines also contains some sample tasks from previous years, to assist first time teams, and a Participants Handbook for each team member.

In addition, Mentors will be provided with additional administrative/logistical information for dissemination to team members during the preparation phase.

The Mentor's Guidelines will be provided to all Team Mentors on a common date, (this is in mid-December after the closure of early-bird entries), to ensure equal opportunity. The delayed appointment of a Team Mentor may also delay the dispatch of the Mentor's Guidelines.

A pre-Challenge task (which is an assessable part of the Challenge program) will be provided to teams each year. This is available approximately six weeks prior to Challenge day each year to Team Mentors.

The name and contact details of the appointed Mentor are to be entered into the Management Challenge website by the Team Contact as soon as possible after deciding to enter a team into the Challenge. The Team Contact will receive specific instructions by email after entering a team.

Early appointment of your Mentor will assist with team formation and pre-challenge task preparation.

### **Who should be the Mentor?**

There is no simple answer of course, but many council's appoint a previous participant. It's not a bad idea, but there are more important criteria to consider. For example, the Mentor is, in part, a facilitator: guiding and introducing ideas, but not directing, during the preparation phase. So someone who is good on their feet, good at drawing contributions from all members of a team, and a good timekeeper will do the job best. They will also work with the team after the event, assisting them to debrief and translate their learning into workplace change.

**BUT**, the Mentor can't become a de facto team leader: they must step back from the team work itself. Above all, the Mentor should be someone who is genuinely committed to the role and getting something positive out of it for everyone involved. Taking on the role of Mentor is as much a professional development opportunity as being a team member. Many past Mentors have commented on how they enjoyed and valued playing the role and learnt a lot in the process.

## SECTION 3 – Forming and Preparing the Team

The previous section has already given an insight into team preparation. This section will look first at who should go into a team and develop the preparation process.

The maximum size of each team is six. The minimum is five.

### Choosing a Team

Competitive or Developmental ... or Both?

There is a fundamental choice to make: does the team comprise the strongest performers to give your council its best chance of winning? Or is it a team of young hopefuls because they - and consequently the organisation - will thereby gain the most out of the program? Or will it be a bit of both? Getting younger, less experienced people working alongside more experienced people.

LGMA is strongly of the view that it should not intervene in team selection and each council should be free to assemble teams to suit its professional development plans. Many councils field teams comprising personnel from throughout their organisation – and not just ‘white collar’ either. To confront one possible misconception of what makes a successful team, the Australasian winners very often don’t have any senior personnel in them. In summary, it can be said that while there will be the possibility of some differences in team composition, looking only at the experience and seniority of team members is missing some important opportunities.

### Further Considerations for Team Selection

It may be that winning is the prime objective and the team capitalises on existing experience and expertise. Alternatively, it may be more important to introduce as many individual staff members to the learning experiences that the Challenge offers so that they develop professionally. A third alternative is to assemble a team that shares experience and also provides the potential for benefit.

The merits and requirements of three alternatives are outlined as follows:

- The ‘objective is winning’ approach. This approach involves selection of a team whose main focus is to win. It could involve selecting the most experienced people from within council to form the team with expert skills across a wide spectrum of council activities. The selected team (or a majority of its members) might even compete in successive Challenges with the ultimate aim of winning.

However, gains associated with this approach may be considered short term and limited in value in terms of broader professional development and organisational growth.

- The professional development approach. This approach results in the greatest number of individuals gaining exposure to the Challenge experience. The benefits to the organisation are enhanced as skills and knowledge gained from the Challenge will very likely flow to a greater number of workplaces. Each year new people would be selected to participate.
- A hybrid approach. This approach may be seen to retain a winning potential but can still foster high levels of professional and organisational development (it is interesting to note that among the 700 plus Challenge participants each year, about 80% are first timers.)

A suggested method of forming a team is to call for expressions of interest from staff to compete in the Challenge. This approach may require an “information session” or similar device to explain the event and overcome any initial fears. Selection processes could ensure that there is a cross section of the organisation represented in the team and that the team could include one or two people who can provide guidance and leadership. (Don’t expect the most senior people always to be the natural leaders though. In many effective teams we also see leadership being shared or moving around according to the nature of the task. )

Care should be taken to ensure existing organisational relationships do not suppress free participation. On this point, it is not usual that Chief Executive Officers/General Managers will join a team although this may be appropriate in teams from smaller councils.

Teams can certainly include members who do not have management responsibility, but whom their authority believes would benefit from the experience of competing in the Challenge. As mentioned, some council’s bring together people who would not otherwise work together and often recruit non-managerial staff to their teams. Many local authorities enter more than one team.

The members of the winning teams entered in the Australasian Final Challenge must be the same as the team members from the Regional Challenges. Substitution of team members requires LGMA National Office approval.

### **Can We Include Non-Staff /Community Representatives in Our Team?**

Some council’s have asked whether they can include local community representatives in their teams. Yes, you can, but with some provisos. Remember, the primary focus of the Challenge is still about skill development for staff, although elected councillors have participated occasionally in the past. Obviously, ‘team stacking’ (with ‘outside experts’ or consultants etc.) is counter to the spirit of the Challenge and not allowed. If you wish to include non-staff members on your team, we suggest you discuss it with the LGMA National Office first.

### **Can We Have Composite Teams?**

Smaller authorities that cannot form their own team are encouraged to enter a composite team with neighbouring authorities. Also, council’s may wish to enter a composite team as part of an ongoing ‘partnership’ arrangement they might have with another Council. The LGMA National Office can assist – download our brochure that gives some tips on preparing a team consisting of employees from several authorities.

### **Rural Grants Scheme**

Under the LGMA Rural Grants Scheme rural councils with a population of less than 20,000 may apply to pay a reduced fee to participate in the Challenge. Presently the discount is \$750 per team. Further information and application is available on the Management Challenge website at [www.lgma.org.au](http://www.lgma.org.au)

### **Notification of Team Members**

Details of Team Members are to be entered into the Management Challenge website by the Team Mentor as soon as practical following entry to the Challenge.

## SECTION 4 – Some Practical Issues

### Team Responsibilities

The nominated Mentor will provide a full account of team responsibilities to each team. The following summary outlines the expected process for the 2012 Challenge.

- All Regional Challenges in Australia will be held during the period of 19<sup>th</sup> – 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2012 and in New Zealand during the period 12<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> March 2012 (subject to State/New Zealand confirmation). The Australasian final will be held in Melbourne on 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2012.
- The LGMA Divisional/New Zealand Chief Officer will advise teams within their State/ New Zealand of their Challenge date, the location and administrative requirements.
- Mentors and Teams will be responsible for any travel and accommodation requirements associated with attending the Regional Challenges.
- On completion of the Regional Challenge, teams get a chance to provide participant feedback to facilitators through a Participant Evaluation process.
- The winning team (from each region) is notified within 28 days and will be given details of arrangements for the Australasian Final.

### Resources and Technology

Teams will also be responsible for the provision of all resources and stationery supplies to compete in the Challenge with the exception of a flip chart or butcher's paper. Teams will be given a detailed list of the minimum resources they should bring (this will be issued at the same time as the pre-challenge task). The design and the conduct of the 2012 Challenge will be similar to 2011 - computers and technology will not be excluded. In fact, teams will be required to bring at least one laptop (**maximum of three**) with Windows operating system and loaded with Microsoft Office and Adobe Reader. There will be no photocopiers provided. However, we are making a real effort to reduce the amount of paper and waste from the Challenge and we expect teams to help us achieve some waste reduction goals. Teams are to be aware that the venue will not provide additional administrative or material support. Further details are contained in Section 5.

Teams should not overly burden themselves with copies of legislation, reports, corporate plans, budgets, Council documents etc. There will be little advantage in loading up your laptop with all sorts of unnecessary information as we will be designing the tasks to draw upon your collective thinking and problem-solving on the day.



## Evaluation of the Challenge

Challenge Facilitators; apply a number predetermined criterion, to progressively evaluate each team's performance.

Every year, the Challenge them and the type and number of the tasks is different. However, the types of Challenge tasks you may expect are:

- Production of briefing papers/guidelines for Council;
- Dealing with personnel and interpersonal issues;
- Liaising and co-operating with other teams
- Conduct of negotiations;
- Analysing Problems and Developing concepts;
- Presenting ideas in a variety of formats;
- Addressing current management issues.

The Facilitators/Assessors will not be looking for definitive right or wrong answers.

The evaluation applies a mix of the following two components:

### The Process:

This is the process applied to a particular task and through which a particular outcome is obtained. We assess the effectiveness of the team's problem solving skills and the way in which they approach a task (as a team), interact with each other and interact with others during the Challenge.

### The Outcome:

The product or outcome of the teams' efforts is also assessed.

The main focus of the LGMA Management Challenge is primarily on team processes. However, the balance between process and outcome in the specific assessment equation applied varies significantly from task to task and year to year. The assessment of some tasks is 100% process-based and others are 100% outcome- based. For most tasks, this balance reflects the nature of the task itself and its context in the Challenge program. Generally, the assessment for most tasks will involve a combination of process and outcome, to the extent that these are observable in the program context. In some cases, it is the logistical complexity of running a multi-team/multi-task event like the Challenge which dictates the process/outcome balance which is applied in a task assessment.

Remember, the Mentor's Guidelines provided to the Mentor includes the following advice on task assessment:

- All work submitted will be assessed primarily on the quality of the content only. The quality of production/presentation of those materials will not be assessed as long as it is neat, well structured and professional – 'glossy' output won't help.
- Teams are advised to think carefully about the content, logic and structure in the way they present their task outputs.
- All task outputs for submission are required to be submitted/presented in the format given in the task instructions – you can expect that you will be expected to produce outputs in a variety of formats.



The balance of the assessment is distributed across all tasks on a weighted basis. The weighting applied to tasks reflects the designer's assessment of the relative importance of each task in an overall program context. Weightings are not declared in advance.

Team Observation – Professional facilitators are in many cases supported by experienced local government practitioners who act as team observers. This means even better feedback and learning outcomes for your team. In 2012, every Challenge event will have at least one professional observer for every two teams. This translates to higher levels of process observation, better assessment and improved feedback for teams.

## **Team Feedback**

The critical link in learning is feedback. At the end of the Regional Challenges, facilitators and team observers will facilitate a de-brief session with each team at the end of the day

More detailed feedback to Challenge teams is provided through two processes:

### **1. Team Reports:**

Within 28 days following the last Challenge event, the LGMA National Office will provide to each team via the Management Challenge website an individual written Team Report. It includes:

- Easy to read team scores can be compared, by task, with all-team averages (there is a score for each task and an overall team process score).
- A task-by-task commentary on the key elements/attributes which were required for good performance in each task (This is a generic commentary and does not address each team's task-by-task performance.)
- An overall general feedback commentary is provided to each team on their team's process and performance. This is tailored for each individual team. It is based on the 'on-the-day' observations by the facilitators and team observers. The focus of this feedback is on team processes, strengths and areas for improvement.

### **2. Teleconference Debriefing Session:**

Teams and Mentors will also have the option (and are strongly encouraged) to invite the facilitator to join a post-event debrief. This is done by teleconference and generally runs from 30 to 60 minutes. It is through the teleconference that task-by-task feedback is provided to teams. The format of the teleconference is flexible and allows for an open dialogue to occur about individual experiences of each team and aspects of their performance and the assessment process.

The teleconference should occur after Team Reports have been sent out. The onus for arranging the teleconference with their local facilitator is on the teams.



## **Australasian Final**

The LGMA National Office will make travel and accommodation arrangements for teams participating in the Australasian Final. Teams meet their own accommodation expenses. (LGMA has negotiated favourable group discounts for accommodation at the designated venue.) Teams or individuals may be accommodated in a single or twin room subject to their council's requirements. When advising accommodation requirements to the LGMA National Office, details of a council credit card or notification of payment arrangements will be required. LGMA will meet air travel costs based on the most economic options for travel. Any additional costs resulting from route or itinerary preferences, booking delays or changes must be met by the respective council/authority.

The Australasian Final winner will be announced by the LGMA National President at a dinner on completion of the Challenge and awarded a trophy.

## **Team Evaluation at the Australasian Final**

The evaluation process by expert facilitators will continue for the Australasian Final to determine the overall winner.

Within three weeks of the final, the LGMA National Chief Executive will provide comprehensive feedback information to all teams.

## SECTION 5 - Administrative Details

### The Venue - Regional Challenge

Obviously, venues for Regional Challenges will vary significantly and advice will be received from your LGMA State/SOLGM New Zealand Chief Executive Officer regarding specific administrative details in due course.

However, the minimum facilities and conditions each team can expect at the venue are:

- Individual team area with table and chairs and access to a power point.. Subject to local venue constraints, individual team privacy will be maximised. Some teams may have separate syndicate rooms but this is not always possible. Often teams will share common space but separated by a reasonable distance and/or partitions.
- Flipchart or butchers paper - or whiteboard with marker pens;
- A light lunch, tea and coffee etc;
- Access to a phone/fax for emergency contact only.

#### Teams cannot expect:

- Photocopies
- Data point/telephone modem access (wireless modems are prohibited);
- Extension leads;
- Data-show projector (except in group presentation areas);
- Electronic whiteboards; or
- Additional computer equipment, printers etc.
- Teams are basically expected to be self-sufficient.

Teams are also responsible for any travel and accommodation costs associated with the Regional Challenge.

### What to Bring

Teams will be given a detailed list of the suggested minimum requirements – this will be issued at the same time as the pre-challenge Task.

Teams will also need to bring the following to the Challenge:

- Information and other resources as seen fit (As mentioned, don't over-burden yourself with all sorts of documents or materials – they probably won't help)
- Any particular personal sustenance or medical needs of team members. Tea, coffee, water and meals will be provided by the venue. Special dietary needs should be notified to your State/New Zealand office (We will do our best, but we may not be able to cater for all of them.)

Common sense should apply in determining what to bring to the Challenge (i.e. don't overdo it).

## SECTION 6 - Take the Challenge to a Graduate Degree – New for 2012

Over the past two years the Australian Centre of Excellence for Local Government (ACELG) has worked with LGMA to improve the Challenge program. In 2012 this will culminate in the Challenge becoming part of an optional subject in a Graduate Certificate in Local Government Leadership (or equivalent qualification) being rolled out nationally by ACELG, LGMA and university partners.

The Graduate Certificate complements existing LGMA professional development programs as part of ACELG's Advancing Leadership Partnership. It also opens up new pathways into university postgraduate study.

For 2012, mentors and participants will be able to take the Management Challenge as an enrolled postgraduate student in NSW, NT and WA\* (\*subject to confirmation), or as a postgraduate-standard short course in all States. In NSW and NT the Graduate Certificate is already being offered by the University of Technology, Sydney (an ACELG consortium member). In WA an equivalent program is being designed by Edith Cowan University in partnership with LGMA (WA). ACELG is negotiating with several universities for the short course to be recognized as part of their graduate programs. Distance learning options will be offered where direct delivery is unavailable.

The postgraduate subject is called 'Building and Leading your Team', and uses the Management Challenge process as a case study. The additional subject requirements are designed to run in parallel to your work in your Challenge team, but won't affect your responsibilities to your team before, during or after Challenge Day – it will also be independently assessed. It has three main components:

- 1) **Understanding Team Dynamics:** using associated readings and structured guidelines available online, students will use the pre-Challenge planning and research task as a working example of the issues involved in building, working within and leading a team.
- 2) **Assessing Team Performance:** Students will participate on the Challenge day as a normal team member or mentor. They will record their observations in a logbook of the Challenge process, to be submitted shortly after.
- 3) **Action Plan for Team Building:** Students will participate in a facilitated workshop (or webinars where direct delivery is unavailable) which will focus on learning about concepts and practices regarding team processes, team dynamics and effectiveness, as well as related aspects of leadership in a local government setting. They will then submit a detailed report which provides an assessment of their Challenge team performance against agreed criteria, and their own ideas for improvement.

For further details on how to enroll in 'Building and Leading Your Team', please contact [Sophi.Bruce@uts.edu.au](mailto:Sophi.Bruce@uts.edu.au) or call 02 9514 1659 – you will need to enrol by late January.



## Any Questions?

By now teams should have a good grasp of what to expect. Don't let the detail blur their vision of what this all about however. It is important, it is effective and it is **fun!**

If you still have a question, contact the LGMA National Office. If we can't answer your query, we will find someone who can. (Unless of course it's a question you shouldn't have the answer to!) We can even put you in touch with people who have taken part in past events.

## Local Government Managers Australia

*Leading Professionals in Local Government*

### Contact the LGMA National Office on:

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