Slide 1
Thank you for the opportunity to meet and speak with you today. 
My presentation is titled Digital Enabled Rural Community Development: The Riverland Experience
Firstly, I will briefly explain the role of Regional Development Australia and then give a brief overview of the Riverland Region.
I will then talk about how engagement in the Digital Space can assist in the achievement of our regional priorities of innovation, diversification and building community capacity.

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Regional Development Australia is a Federal Government Initiative. We act as an on the ground conduit between the Federal Government and regional Australia. There are 56 Regional Development Australia’s, with 7 in South Australia.
In South Australia, we are funded by Federal, State and Local Government, and we work with Government, Business, Industry, Educational Institutions and the Community to assist in the economic development and building of community capacity of our region.

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The Riverland region is located along the Murray River approximately 150klm, or around 2 hours’ drive from the South Australian Capital City of Adelaide, and is located on the eastern border of South Australia. The Riverland region has a population of approximately 35,000 people, and consists of 5 major towns, Waikerie, Barmera, Berri, Loxton and Renmark. The towns are all in close proximity, with residents working and living transiently between these towns on a daily basis. It is very common to live in one town and work in another.

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The Major Economic Drivers for the Riverland Region are Irrigated Horticulture and Agriculture and the value adding of its product. Being heavily reliant on horticulture and agriculture to generate income into the region, the region suffered significant financial hardship in the mid 2000’s as a result of drought. This highlighted the need to operate with greater efficiency in these industries and also that as a region we needed to diversify our economic base to ensure the future viability and sustainability of the region.

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In order to address the long term viability and sustainability of the region, the State Government at the end of 2008 put in place the Riverland Futures Task force. The Taskforce identified Pre retirement, Retirement Living and Immigration, additional new food and beverage manufacturing, Tourism, Education, and local business development as key target areas of opportunity to achieving a diversified and sustainable economic base. In order to kick start economic activity in these identified areas, the State Government of South Australia provided a AUD $20million dollar grant funding scheme named the Riverland Sustainable Futures Fund. The fund has been highly successful and has stimulated significant economic activity within the region.
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Regional Development Australia Murrayland and Riverland vision for our region is for
A vibrant, resilient region that capitalises on change, embraces sustainability, and provides an aspirational living, investment and working environment
Through regional consultation, we have identified 3 Key Priorities for the region:
These are Innovation, Diversification and the Building of Community Capacity.
We believe the Digital Space will have significant impact on the achievement of our vision and play major roles in each of our 3 Key Priorities.

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We believe the “Digital World” provides an Opportunity to assist in realising our vision and achieving the priorities of the Murraylands and Riverland Region.

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As facilitators of economic and business development, and the building of community capability and capacity within our region, it is vitally important that we are aware of and address potential threats and opportunities that will impact upon the economic and social future of our region.
RDA Murraylands and Riverland acknowledge that technology is advancing rapidly, never before in modern history has the progression of technology moved so fast. This rapid change brings with it both threats and opportunity for all levels of society.
For those that smartly embrace the change, there is significant potential to improve processes, gain productivity, access new markets and pursue many other opportunities leading to economic and business growth and development. Significant social benefits can also be gained through increased ability to connect with friends and family and to access services, such as health, education and shopping without the need to leave home. Through the innovative and smart use of technology the tyranny of distance can be negated, opening new doors and opportunities for population retention and attraction in regional areas.
However those that do not embrace change are at risk. Competitors are no longer just the shop next door or down the road, they can be located anywhere in the world. Without reducing costs and improving processes, competing with businesses that have adopted new technology and methods will become increasingly difficult.
Socially the already disadvantaged are at risk of falling further behind if the digital divide gap within our region widens due to lack of resources, education and capacity to access this new world.
Although the majority of our region already has access to the internet via ADSL, we are currently significantly underutilising our existing internet resource. The NBN will bring greater speed and increased opportunities; however there is still significant untapped room for productivity and innovation within existing infrastructure. We have an opportunity to use the time prior to NBN rollout to bring our region up to speed with existing opportunities so they are enabled and ready to take the next step when high speed NBN is turned on in our region.
Given that our role is to facilitate economic development and build community capacity and capability, we see the digital era as a tool to assist in achieving our regional vision of “A vibrant resilient region that capitalises on change, embraces sustainability, and provides an inspirational living, investment and working environment”.
We also believe that without acknowledging and addressing the opportunities and threats of the new digital era, both the achievement of our vision, and the future viability and sustainability of our region would be at risk.
Our Challenge – is to enable our business, industry and community to engage in the digital space and make the most of the new opportunities now available thanks to the digital world.

We have identified the key enablers of Awareness, Access, Education and Opportunities

We believe Awareness is a key enabler in stimulating the mindset transformation to enable a smarter digital region. A general Awareness of the digital era and the opportunities it brings, is an essential perquisite to inspire digital engagement. Raising the awareness of connectivity options and opportunities already available with existing internet connectivity, and keeping the region informed on progress the of the National Broadband Network will set the foundations for enabling an innovative and smarter digital region.

With an awareness of digital opportunities Access to both internet connectivity infrastructure and IT including hardware and software, and understanding what that means is a vitally important part in economically and socially engaging and enabling a digital region.

Education is not only about educating our people, but also having the resources to educate. To become a smarter digital region we require digitally literate, skilled and trained people capable of using digital technology to best advantage. But most importantly it is critical that we have access to the expertise and skills required to train and up skill our region. Over time we will also need access to increased resources to capably providing web building and maintenance services in our digitally engaged region.

With a well-informed, well equipped and digitally literate region, RDA Murraylands and Riverland will facilitate and collaborate with government, business, industry and the community to assist in making the most of the Opportunities and benefits of the digital world.

Understanding that needs and opportunities vary, we have identified 10 Major Sector Groups with which we will work smartly and collaboratively to effectively Stimulate The Digital Mindset Transformation. Through the key enablers of Awareness, Access, Education and Opportunity our sector groups will play an important role in the contribution to Innovation, Diversification and Building of Community Capacity throughout our region.

Primary Production is the key economic driver of our region. Exciting new technologies in smart farming combined with digital marketing opportunities have the potential to generate production efficiencies and allow access to new markets. Given the importance of this sector in generating economic activity throughout the Murraylands and Riverland, even a small increase in productivity would have significant positive impact on our region.

Making the most of digital opportunities has the ability to transform our Industry & Business. The smart use of technology can result in significant financial and productivity gains, resulting in the enhancement of long term industry sustainability and viability, while creating opportunities for regional economic growth and diversification. It is also important this sector understands that long term viability could also be at risk if it fails to play in the digital space.

The digital world opens up many opportunities for Tourism operators that embrace the digital era. Tourism is an important economic driver in our region, offering diversification for a region heavily invested in Primary Production. To date this remains a relatively untapped market with significant potential to increase the smart use of digital technology to promote, attract and retain visitors to our region.
With instant access to the world Teleworking (working remotely or from home) brings new opportunities for population growth and the promotion of our region as a place to live, work and play. The digital world reverses the tyranny of distance, and provides a unique opportunity to instantly connect with the world whilst enjoying the lifestyle benefits of our region.

There are significant opportunities within both the Health and Education sectors for industry growth, changes in delivery methods, and significant expansion of the geographical area it is now possible to access/service. Electronic records, Telehealth and virtual classrooms are just a few of the opportunities that will transform the delivery of and access to Health and Education Services in rural areas.

Councils & Community Services will have the ability to transform the way they operate and interact with their communities, whilst also having an important role to play in assisting their local government area to transform into the digital world and embrace the opportunities available.

The Not for Profit sector covers a wide variety of organisations from Non-Government Organisations through to local Sporting Clubs. It is important the NFP sector, who often rely on volunteers and already busy people giving their time, also fully understand the capabilities, benefits, and time savings digital services can present to their sectors.

To be a digitally smart region it is important that digital capability and capacity across the whole of our community is continually developed. Many of the sectors mentioned above, will receive structured education and support through their industries or membership groups. However we must be mindful that sectors such as Home & Seniors will also require support and are important contributors to the community capacity building of our region.

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By effectively ensuring that identified sector groups are aware of the possibilities available in the digital world, have the appropriate access to infrastructure and equipment, are educated in how to use it and are aware of, and making the most of opportunities this new world brings, the benefits for our region can be considerable. We believe that Effectively Stimulating the Digital Mindset Transformation of our people plays a key role in the achievement of our regions key Priorities of Regional Diversification, Innovation and Building Community Capacity.

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As you are all aware the digital world brings many new opportunities. However the digital space is new and ever evolving, there is no text book on how this should be done.

We as Regional Development Australia Murraylands and Riverland are keen to both share our experiences in this space and learn from the experiences of others such as yourselves.

We are also excited by the new and emerging opportunities to engage with countries such as yours, where through the digital world the tyranny of distance is no longer a barrier to engagement.

Thank you.