

Theory of Change

Why?

A theory of change helps us to improve our strategy, measurement, communication and partnerships.

This document has been developed leveraging the inputs of a broad range of stakeholders in The Pinnacle Foundation.

Context and Situation

Many young LGBTQIA+ Australians continue to face family, faith and community rejection because of how they identify. Discrimination, bullying and abuse are commonly reported in these situations. This often results in needing to leave unsupportive environments (home/community) leading to a greater risk of homelessness. Sustained discrimination, bullying and abuse leads to high rates of self-harm and psychological distress. A lack of visible LGBTQIA+ role models may compound a sense of helplessness/worthlessness. A lack of money means education is subjugated to finding paid employment.

A societal perception (particularly in more progressive communities) that the achievement of marriage equality has led to widespread community acceptance of the LGBTQIA+ community is flawed. It overlooks that a significant minority of Australians do not embrace the LGBTQIA+ community – often attributable to a lack of understanding/LGBTQIA+ exposure, cultural and faith beliefs and similar. The surprise expressed in more progressive communities when young LGBTQIA+ Australians share the enormous burden and angst they feel when “coming out” reinforces this paradigm.

Narrative Theory of Change

The Pinnacle Foundation is Australia’s LGBTQIA+ education charity and a public benevolent institution. Our flagship program supports LGBTQIA+ Australians aged between 18 and 26 who have faced challenges because of how they identify to realise their full potential. We do this by awarding multi-year educational scholarships for fulltime study at public tertiary institutions in any field.

We know that providing the funds to study alone is often insufficient. To overcome the impact of sustained bullying, abuse, rejection and similar, and the associated feelings of being alone, helpless and worthless, frequently requires expert intervention. This may include psychological support in addition to access to positive role models and a sense of belonging to a more supportive community.

The Pinnacle Foundation carefully matches every scholar with a mentor who has walked a similar path. They will work in the same field that the scholar is studying – and be of the same gender and sexuality. They will provide encouragement, support and inspiration to the scholar to see through their studies.

Further, The Pinnacle Foundation fosters an extensive national network of volunteers, as well as an expansive corporate/philanthropic partner, donor and supporter network. This collective group is known as the "Pinnacle family". The Pinnacle family seizes opportunities to support Pinnacle scholars and alumni to realise their full potential. Scholars and alumni see others giving freely to support them – helping to restore their faith in the goodness of society – and affirming the rich intrinsic rewards of giving back and helping others.

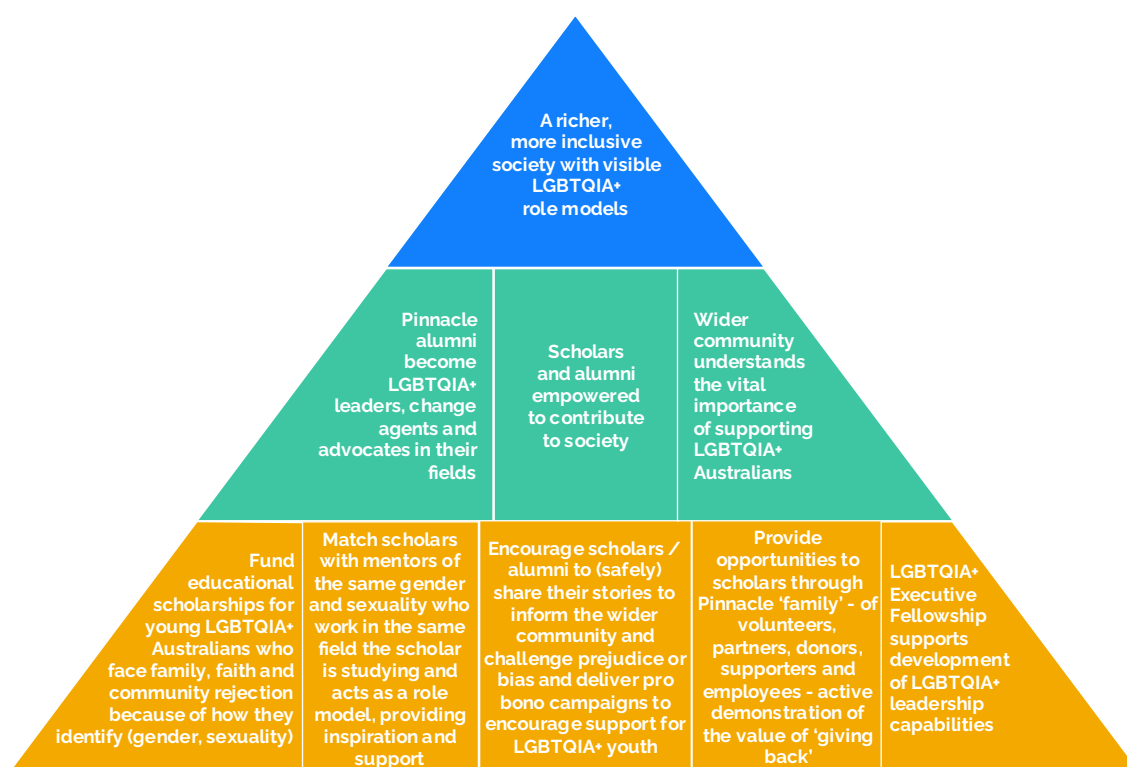
Systemic Impact (Upstream)

In addition to the direct impact Pinnacle's flagship program has on the lives of the young LGBTQIA+ Australians, as Australia's LGBTQIA+ education charity, we seek systemic (societal) change. This happens in four main ways:

1. The Pinnacle program embraces a model which encourages scholars and alumni to (where it is safe for them to do so) share their stories and the impact of the Pinnacle program. To maximise the extent and reach of the scholar/alumni stories, The Pinnacle Foundation relies on the involvement of corporate partners. When Pinnacle's corporate partners seek to leverage their involvement with Pinnacle by using scholar/alumni stories to engage their workforces and encourage personal reflection about the importance of LGBTQIA+ inclusion and belonging, it also helps to realise The Pinnacle Foundation's vision for a richer, more inclusive society with visible LGBTQIA+ role models.
2. The Pinnacle Foundation secures pro bono assistance to deliver campaigns to encourage support for young Australians, regardless of their sexuality/identity. For example: [Make Awkward Awesome TVC - Pinnacle Foundation \(thepinnaclefoundation.org\)](#).
3. The Pinnacle Foundation partners with The University of Sydney Business School to deliver the [LGBTQIA+ Executive Fellowship - The University of Sydney Business School](#). The Fellowship, the only program of its kind in the Asia-Pacific region, delivers tailored education to build LGBTQIA+ and close ally executive and board leadership capabilities, confidence, executive presence and networks. We partner for following reasons:
 - a. Reinforces Pinnacle's place as Australia's LGBTQIA+ education charity by furthering opportunities to develop LGBTQIA+ leaders and build their networks.
 - b. Deepens engagement scope with Pinnacle's corporate partners (who are key funders of Pinnacle's flagship scholarships/mentoring program).
 - c. A complimentary place is awarded to a Pinnacle Foundation alumnus to attend the Fellowship each time it runs, tangibly supporting scholars beyond their scholarship to become leaders, role models and advocates, and deepening their networks.
 - d. Pinnacle shares equally in any Fellowship delivery profit – diversifying our income stream to support our flagship program for young LGBTQIA+ Australians.

- e. Leadership program graduates are engaged as potential donors, supporters, mentors and similar.
 - f. The Fellowship welcomes LGBTQIA+ and close ally participants from countries where LGBTQIA+ inclusion is less progressed.
4. As the number of Pinnacle alumni from our flagship and LGBTQIA+ Executive Fellowship programs grow, they are increasingly spreading their influence (the multiplier effect) to generate positive change. The Pinnacle Foundation maintains active engagement with Pinnacle alumni to maximise the Pinnacle alumni multiplier effect.

Theory of Change Model (Planning Triangle)



Measurement

Outputs of the flagship Pinnacle program can be measured by the high rates of study completion by Pinnacle scholars, mentor connection, increased scholar/alumni confidence and sense of self-worth, and the willingness of many Pinnacle alumni to themselves give back – often as Pinnacle volunteers or as donors.

We are proudly witnessing Pinnacle alumni developing into future leaders in their fields, and as powerful advocates and role models for the LGBTQIA+ community.

Research

The Pinnacle Foundation's triennial longitudinal research, *Are we making a difference?* affirms:

- 98% of scholars successfully complete their studies.
- 99% of scholars and alumni believe a Pinnacle Foundation scholarship supports wellbeing.
- 90% of scholars and alumni value(d) their mentor relationship.
- 95% of scholars and alumni feel supported to realise their career aspirations.

Scholar Feedback

Scholars and alumni reflect on the value of Pinnacle's flagship program:

- [The Pinnacle Foundation Scholar Stories 2025 - Pinnacle Foundation](#).
- [Veronica's Story - Pinnacle Foundation \(thepinnaclefoundation.org\)](#).
- *Pinnacle gave me a chosen family where my biological one had broken down and showed me the good in all this.*
- *Before ... Pinnacle, I'd never met another LGBTQIA+ professional, but now I know there's a whole community of people who have not only gone before me, but who I know have my back and are keen to see me succeed.*
- *I never would have been able to study or had the courage to even try without The Pinnacle Foundation.*
- *It has been a long journey for me to find my identity ... I was never really comfortable with my identity prior to being a Pinnacle scholar and I've learnt to embrace it and use it to help others.*
- *The Pinnacle family, who believed in me and lifted me up in ways that I didn't think were possible or even deserved ... has done more for me than my biological family ever could have or knew how to do.*
- *It helped me gain more confidence and to be proud in who we are and that we should not be ashamed.*

Program Enablers

Key enablers of the Pinnacle program include:

1. Highly engaged scholars/alumni who are proud ambassadors and "living proof" of the flagship and Fellowship programs' impacts are vitally important when it comes to sharing their stories in wider contexts to bring about greater community understanding, challenge unhelpful LGBTQIA+ stereotypes and overcome prejudice and bias.
2. An extensive pool of engaged volunteers to support the delivery of the Pinnacle program (including as mentors, state and territory committee members, ambassadors, board and management team) and who, as members of Pinnacle family, open doors, encourage and engage scholars and alumni to realise their full potential – and through their actions as volunteers restore or reinforce scholar/alumni faith in society and the importance of "giving back".
3. An active and engaged donor, supporter and partner base. Having corporate partners engage their workforces, suppliers and customers in Pinnacle's programs extends our reach and expands our impact. Similarly, having donors and supporters as willing ambassadors raises community awareness and understanding of the challenges that continue to be faced by many LGBTQIA+ Australians.

Assumptions

Key assumptions that underpin the Pinnacle program include:

1. Aspiring scholars continue to be courageous enough to "show their hand" by applying for and being awarded a Pinnacle scholarship or being accepted into the LGBTQIA+ Executive Fellowship. (Given many of those involved in supporting the Pinnacle program have long-ago overcome their fears of "coming out" we must always be conscious of how difficult this continues to be for many in the LGBTQIA+ community.)
2. The Pinnacle Foundation's flagship program will continue to attract corporate partners who find strong appeal in supporting a program that educates young Australians first and foremost – and for these partners to expose all their employees, not just their LGBTQIA+ employees and allies, to scholar/alumni stories designed to inform, educate and encourage self-reflection about the importance of LGBTQIA+ inclusion. (For example, parents with young children reflecting on how they might respond if their own child turned out to be gay/trans etc.)
3. The Pinnacle Foundation will continue to attract donors, partners and supporters because it is an apolitical organisation that is not advocacy led. Pinnacle supports systemic change through the delivery of its programs – including equipping scholars to shape our community today and tomorrow, through effective leveraging of scholar/alumni storytelling, by securing pro bono assistance to deliver campaigns to encourage support for young Australians, regardless of their sexuality/identity, and

through the LGBTQIA+ Executive Fellowship, in partnership with The University of Sydney Business School

4. Pinnacle being able to maintain sense of "Pinnacle family" as it grows and professionalises and maintain extensive volunteer involvement.

Building on Strong Foundations

There is constant strategic focus to ensure The Pinnacle Foundation's programs deliver otherwise unmet value to the community, are of the highest quality, are delivered efficiently, reach target constituencies, and are scalable and sustainable. Actions taken include:

1. Developed a triennial research program to measure the impact of the flagship Pinnacle program and inform program enhancements.
2. Increased the financial value of flagship program scholarships and made them multi-year:
 - a. Maximising scholar likelihood of graduating.
 - b. Deepening scholar engagement with Pinnacle.
 - c. Increasing perceived value of the Pinnacle program.
3. Developed an alumni program to continue to engage, support and encourage alumni to become future leaders/role models/advocates – and promoting the concept of the "virtuous circle" whereby we now see many Pinnacle alumni as active Pinnacle volunteers/donors etc.
4. Established active volunteer committees in every state and the ACT to:
 - a. Raise awareness of, and funds for, The Pinnacle Foundation.
 - b. Provide local support to scholars and alumni (the Pinnacle family).
 - c. Deepen local understanding of the challenges faced by many young LGBTQIA+ people by including skilled local volunteers in the selection of scholars (within a careful framework).
5. Developed systems to support our growth (CRM implementation, scholar selection technology, Office 365 and Copilot implementation, regular website re-developments etc.)
6. Resourced key roles with paid employees while maintaining our status as a volunteer driven organisation and volunteer engagement and buy-in.

7. Developed and implemented a fundraising strategy that seeks to maintain our historic funding channels (predominantly high net wealth LGBTQIA+ donors) while:
 - a. Expanding our corporate partnerships (corporate partners who, in turn, magnify our impact by leveraging their partnerships with Pinnacle).
 - b. Developing a donor/supporter pipeline through community activations (for example, fair days, Pride marches and annual Picnics for Pinnacle).
 - c. Promoting planned giving and living legacies (especially to older LGBTQIA+ supporter cohorts who are less likely to have children to leave their wealth to).
 - d. Initiating a defined program to encourage the funding of perpetual named scholarships, enhancing sustainability.
8. Established robust risk and governance frameworks, processes and policies.
9. Built an endowment to enhance sustainability and ensure we can meet the multi-year scholarship commitments we make.
10. Re-branded Pinnacle and developed brand campaigns to attract, educate and connect target audiences.

Patron Commendations

Pinnacle patrons reinforce the value of the Pinnacle program:

[Professor Jennifer Westacott AC, Patron of The Pinnacle Foundation - Pinnacle Foundation.](#)

[Alan Joyce AC, Patron of The Pinnacle Foundation - Pinnacle Foundation.](#)

The Hon Michael Kirby AC CMG:

There are lots of scholarships and most of them are wonderful investments in the future of admirable young people. But the Pinnacle scholarships are special. They lift-up young people who are not only talented but have often faced dire problems with their families, beliefs, and communities. Helping young people to restore confidence in themselves and a trust in the goodness of society that once seemed hostile is something very precious.

THE P/NNACLE FOUNDATION

[THEPINNACLEFOUNDATION.ORG](https://thepinnaclefoundation.org)

THE PINNACLE FOUNDATION IS A PUBLIC BENEVOLENT INSTITUTION REGISTERED WITH THE AUSTRALIAN CHARITIES AND NOT-FOR-PROFITS COMMISSION.

THE PINNACLE FOUNDATION IS ENDORSED AS A DEDUCTIBLE GIFT RECIPIENT BY THE AUSTRALIAN TAXATION OFFICE. DONATIONS OF \$2 OR MORE ARE TAX DEDUCTIBLE.

© AUGUST 2025 THE PINNACLE FOUNDATION®. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. ABN 81 127 662 604

PO BOX 990, POTTS POINT NSW 1335