

NURSERY PAPERS

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GROWING THE NEXT GENERATION OF NURSERY LEADERS

Many nursery businesses know the challenge well: great people come through the ranks but there's rarely the time, structure or support to help them step confidently into leadership roles.

The Nursery Emerging Leaders Program was created to close that gap – strengthening businesses by investing in the people who will lead them into the future.



Emerging Leaders participant group on stairs



CHANGE AT ROOT

Strong leadership is essential to the long-term success of Australia's greenlife sector. And strong leaders are only cultivated when emerging talent is provided with the best resources and support to step up.

The Nursery Emerging Leader Program (NY24004) provides emerging talent with the tools, industry insights, and peer networks they need to step confidently into leadership roles that will shape the future of the sector.

'This program has given me the confidence to step up as a leader. It's helping me understand myself and my team better, and even partway through the course, I'm already seeing subtle changes boosting team positivity, my productivity, and accountability,' — **Zoe Johnson, General Manager, ASPACE WA.**

WHAT'S IN IT FOR GROWERS?

The Nursery Emerging Leaders Program is a direct investment in stronger, more resilient businesses. By building leadership capability within the workforce, growers can expect:

- Better people management, improved team culture and clearer communication
- More confident decision-making and succession planning
- Practical leadership tools applied to real workplace challenges
- Greater collaboration and knowledge sharing, fostered through national peer networks that continue beyond the program
- Long-term return on levy investment, as future leaders gain the skills to support business and sector growth



Participants at Warners Nursery



Participants at Specialty Trees

REAL VALUE, RIGHT NOW

In late 2025, the first cohort of 15 participants from across Australia began their leadership development journey. The skills they build will directly support productivity, workforce stability and strategic capability within the businesses they represent.

BUILDING FOUNDATIONS THROUGH CONNECTION

The inaugural class commenced with an onboarding session in November, bringing participants together online to establish expectations, introduce the program framework and begin building cohort connections.

This was followed by a three-day residential in Melbourne in early December 2025, timed to align with Australian Trials Week. For participants, this was an opportunity to step away from day-to-day operational pressures and focus on leadership in a dedicated, supportive environment.

Several participants noted that the chance to step out of the business – even briefly – helped them reflect on how they lead day-to-day, and what

kind of leader they want to become as their responsibilities grow.

The residential introduced participants to the foundations of leadership theory and practice, with a strong emphasis on self-awareness, values-based leadership and understanding personal leadership styles.

Participants also visited Warners Nursery and Specialty Trees, observing leadership in action and exploring how different approaches influence culture, decision-making and business performance.

FROM INTENTION TO ACTION

The Nursery Strategic Investment Plan 2022–26 identified a clear need to develop stronger leadership capability across the greenlife sector—from production and wholesale through to retail. While technical expertise in the industry is strong, leadership pathways have often been informal or limited, particularly for emerging leaders and those from diverse backgrounds.

The Nursery Emerging Leaders Program was designed to respond directly to this challenge. Developed with guidance from an industry-

based Project Reference Group and input from key industry stakeholders on leadership gaps and challenges faced by the industry, the program combines leadership theory, practical application and peer learning in a format tailored specifically to the nursery industry.

Growers feel the value of the program on the ground – through more confident supervisors, clearer communication within teams and emerging leaders who are better equipped to take on responsibility as businesses grow or transition.

ONGOING TOUCHPOINTS

The program is delivered through two residentials and two online sessions, supported by leadership resources and an online forum to maintain cohort connection. This blended approach recognises that leadership capability develops over time, through practice, peer learning, and consistent reinforcement.

As the first cohort continues through the program, participants are already applying what they've learned back in their workplaces – building capability that will support both their businesses and the wider industry over the long term.



Participants working on group activity

ARE YOU READY TO STEP UP?

Following the strong start of the first cohort, planning is underway for the next intake of the Nursery Emerging Leaders Program, scheduled to commence in November 2026.

Further details on applications and selection will be released closer to the opening date.

If you would like to receive updates on the program intake, reach out to Jeanette Gellard, Principal, Innovative Influences at jeanette@innovativeinfluences.com.au.

The Nursery Emerging Leaders Program (NY24004) is funded by Hort Innovation using the Nursery Industry research and development levy and funds from the Australian Government. The program is delivered by Innovative Influences in partnership with Susie Green Consulting.

FURTHER INFORMATION

- Past nursery papers – www.greenlifeindustry.com.au/communications-centre