



Australia Awards

**wii**  
women  
leading and influencing



**LA TROBE**  
UNIVERSITY



**The Asia Foundation**  
Improving Lives, Expanding Opportunities

# *LeadershipConnect 2026*

## **Program Outline**

### **8 April – 7 October 2026**



# Welcome to *LeadershipConnect* 2026!

WLI is a leadership enrichment program for Australia Awards scholars and alumni from the Pacific. Through a range of in-person and online offerings, WLI helps participants develop their skills, networks and readiness to take on leadership roles in their workplaces, communities and countries; and builds enduring person-to-person linkages between Australia and the Pacific.

## About *LeadershipConnect*

*LeadershipConnect* is a six-month, tailored program of leadership learning, networking and support for men and women Australia Awards scholars and alumni from the Pacific. It allows participants to build their leadership skills, knowledge, and networks – from wherever they are based in the region.

The first *LeadershipConnect* program was offered in 2020, in response to the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. It aimed to inspire Australia-based Pacific scholars to think and talk about the role of leadership and support them to connect with each other during challenging times. From 2022, it was expanded to include returned Australia Awards alumni in the Pacific.

*LeadershipConnect* 2026 has again been developed, and will be delivered, by WLI in partnership with La Trobe University's Centre for Human Security and Social Change (CHSSC) and The Asia Foundation (TAF) Pacific Islands. Covering a range of topics, the program will provide a peer-supported learning environment to equip leaders with practical knowledge, tools and skills to lead change in their country/ regional contexts. Participants will be invited to reflect on a range of leadership challenges and strategies, their own values and leadership styles, explore key leadership frameworks, and share their own experiences.

## Structure and timings

*LeadershipConnect* 2026 will run from Wednesday 8 April to Wednesday 7 October 2026. Online sessions will be held every Wednesday at 12:00 – 2:00pm (Australian

Eastern Standard Time).

A recurring calendar invite and Zoom link will be sent to all registered participants. *Please make sure you accept this invite and check your local session time.*

As a *LeadershipConnect* 2026 participant you will have access to:

- **Fortnightly online 'Leadership Zoom' sessions**, where you will be introduced to key leadership skills and concepts, delivered by a range of Pacific, Australian and international experts (2 hours, Wednesday afternoons, commencing 8 April 2026).
- **Fortnightly online 'Reflection & Connection' sessions**, on alternate weeks, where you can check in with other participants and share your thoughts and ideas on the previous week learnings! Reflection & Connection sessions are also an excellent opportunity to build networks with other participants, and with members of the WLI team (2 hours, Wednesday afternoons, commencing 15 April 2026).
- **Access to the WLI Leaders Hub**, a dedicated online networking / information sharing platform to connect with other participants and WLI staff, and access key articles and information.
- **Access to WLI's counselling service**, offering a range of online/ telephone counselling services for all *LeadershipConnect* participants, at no cost.
- **Opportunities for face-to-face networking**, with fellow participants in your local area.
- **A chance to apply for a study tour or internship** in your chosen leadership area anywhere in Australia or the Pacific.
- **Invitations to other WLI Learning and Networking events** where you can join the discussion on key leadership issues in the Pacific and hear from the region's most notable leaders, policy makers and practitioners.

## Participation requirements

As an Australia Awards enrichment program, successful completion of *LeadershipConnect* 2026 will require a minimum level of time and commitment from all participants. To be eligible for a completion certificate, participants should endeavour to:

- **Attend at least 70 per cent of all weekly sessions** (sessions will be recorded for those who cannot attend at the designated time);
- **Actively participate in all discussions** and group activities; and
- **Complete occasional set tasks**, including a short written reflection.



# Overview of Sessions

All *LeadershipConnect* 2026 sessions will be held for two hours every Wednesday from 8 April through to 7 October 2026. A recurring calendar invite and Zoom link will be provided to all registered participants.

#	Date	Session	Presenter(s)
1	08/04/2026	<b>Program Welcome</b> <b>What is Developmental Leadership &amp; Why Does it Matter?</b>	Tony Liston (WLI) & Aidan Craney (La Trobe CHSSC)
	15/04/2026	Reflection and Connection 1	
2	22/04/2026	<b>Where do Developmental Leaders Come From?</b>	Lis Jackson (La Trobe CHSSC) with guest leader
	29/04/2026	Reflection and Connection 2	
3	06/05/2026	<b>How do Developmental Leaders Work Collectively?</b>	Lis Jackson & Thushara Dibley (La Trobe CHSSC) with guest leader
	13/05/2026	Reflection and Connection 3	
4	20/05/2026	<b>How do Developmental Leaders Secure Change?</b>	Lis Jackson & Thushara Dibley (La Trobe CHSSC) with guest leader
	27/05/2026	Reflection and Connection 4	
5	3/06/2026	<b>Ontological Leadership, Part 1: Language, Beliefs, Culture &amp; Gender</b>	Tony Liston & Pacific co-facilitator (WLI)
	10/06/2026	Reflection and Connection 5	
6	17/06/2026	<b>Leadership and Problem Analysis 1: Leadership and introduction to Political Economy Analysis (PEA)</b>	Krystelle Lavaki, Lavenia Rokovucago & Natasha Bodger (TAF Pacific)
	24/06/2026	Reflection and Connection 6	
7	01/07/2026	<b>Leadership and Problem Analysis 2: PEA Framework and Understanding Institutions</b>	Krystelle Lavaki, Lavenia Rokovucago & Natasha Bodger (TAF Pacific)
	08/07/2026	Reflection and Connection 7	
8	15/07/2026	<b>Leadership and Problem Analysis 3: PEA Framework, Stakeholder Mapping and Power Dynamics</b>	Krystelle Lavaki, Lavenia Rokovucago & Natasha Bodger (TAF Pacific)
	22/07/2026	Reflection and Connection 8	
9	29/07/2026	<b>Taking Action: Building Coalitions and Partnerships</b>	Krystelle Lavaki, Lavenia Rokovucago, Natasha Bodger & Sandra Kraushaar (TAF Pacific)
	05/08/2026	Reflection and Connection 9	
10	12/08/2026	<b>Ontological Leadership, Part 2: Moods and Emotions</b>	Tony Liston & Pacific co-facilitator (WLI)
	19/08/2026	Reflection and Connection 10	
11	26/08/2026	<b>Speaking to Lead: Public Speaking Skills for Effective Leadership</b>	Katrina Roberts (Simply Speech)
	02/09/2026	Reflection and Connection 11	
12	09/09/2026	<b>Male Allyship for Women's Leadership</b>	Tony Liston, Mercy Masta & Melkie Anton (WLI)
	16/09/2026	Reflection and Connection 12	
13	23/09/2026	<b>Leadership and Self-Care</b>	Kate Minto (Mandala Staff Support)
	30/09/2026	Reflection and Connection 13	
14	07/10/2026	<b>Program Wrap Up and Farewell</b>	Tony Liston & Georgina Cope (WLI)

## About our Facilitators

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### **Tony Liston**

#### **Ontological Leadership Coach, WLI**

Tony Liston is a highly experienced leadership and executive coach, facilitator and adviser. He has a deep understanding of the public service and business contexts, having coached clients and held senior positions in the Australian and Papua New Guinea governments. He has a wealth of experience in training, coaching and mentoring clients from NGOs, regional organisations and governments in Australia and across the Pacific.

Tony's approach to leadership coaching and facilitation is underpinned by deep respect, dignity and compassion. He is passionate about helping individuals, teams and communities to transform through sustainable cultural and behavioural change, helping them to observe differently what is going on for them and their organisations so they can take practical action to achieve outstanding, long lasting change.

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### **Dr Aidan Craney**

#### **Senior Research Fellow, La Trobe University Centre for Human Security and Social Change**

Aidan Craney is an interdisciplinary researcher focused on social change in the Pacific islands region. He is the author of *Youth in Fiji and Solomon Islands: Livelihoods, leadership and civic engagement* (ANU Press, 2022) and a Research Fellow on the ARC Discovery Project, *The future of the Pacific: Youth leadership and civic engagement*.

Alongside this, Aidan has published on the practical and philosophical challenges of promoting locally led development. With training in anthropology, development studies, and social work, his research is informed by experience in frontline, managerial, and consulting roles across welfare and development programs. He has also organised and facilitated forums that support Pacific-led research and development initiatives.

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### **Dr Elisabeth (Lis) Jackson**

#### **Research & Learning Specialist, WLI / Senior Research Fellow, La Trobe University Centre for Human Security and Social Change**

Lis has over 20 years of experience conducting research and managing development programs in a range of areas, including disability inclusion, gender and women's leadership, civil society development, public policy reform, governance, and education.

As the Research and Learning Specialist for WLI, Lis contributes research and analysis that helps inform the program's approach and activities, evaluate impact, and improve understanding of women's developmental leadership and how it can be effectively supported. She also supports the sharing of this knowledge with the wider development community.

In her broader work at the CHSSC, Lis works with researchers across Asia and the Pacific to explore how local leadership, power and politics shape social change.

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**Dr Thushara Dibley**

**Senior Research Fellow, La Trobe University Centre for Human Security and Social Change**

Thushara has over 15 years of experience working on research and evaluation across Indonesia, Timor-Leste and Australia. Over this time her work has been grounded in a deep commitment to social justice and curiosity about social change. Her research has covered topics including peacebuilding, social activism, social movements and disability activism. She is also interested in cross-cultural research methods and how issues of race shape research and international development practice.

Thushara has also designed and delivered professional development activities focused on skills to promote social change, including research, leadership, and program management. She previously worked for a consulting firm specialising in culturally inclusive research and evaluation and was the Deputy Director of the Sydney Southeast Asia Centre at the University of Sydney for seven years.



**Krystelle Lavaki**

**Program Officer, Pacific Islands, The Asia Foundation Pacific Islands**

Krystelle is a marine scientist by training and holds a bachelor's degree in marine science from the University of the South Pacific. An entrepreneur, Krystelle has worked in veterinary nursing, media, research, and teaching before joining The Asia Foundation as a consultant. She attributes her colourful work / life experiences to her late mum, an entrepreneur who believed in doing, not trying. She attributes her ability to adapt and work on multiple projects to her upbringing in a home without gender roles.

Krystelle's current role at TAF provides the flexibility and a conducive environment to evolve into a better contributor. Through meaningful partnerships and respect, she strives to nurture and create a network of solution-driven regional practitioners. Krystelle's work experiences have helped her appreciate local knowledge and representation by indigenous people. She is interested in and has also worked on projects in the thematic areas of conservation, economics, cultural preservation through nutrition, and supporting underserved communities.



**Lavenia Rokovucago**

**Senior Program Officer, TAF Pacific Islands**

Lavenia is a former career civil servant and diplomat. Prior to joining in TAF in 2023, she spent more than 15 years working in Education, Social Welfare, Youth and Sports ministries, and the Public Service Commission. Lavenia was previously posted to the Fiji Mission in New York and the High Commission in London and later joined UNDP working in Governance in the areas of anti-corruption and public finance management, where she developed her passion for regional civil society engagement in the transparency and accountability space.

Lavenia holds an undergraduate degree from the University of the South Pacific (USP) and the University of Waikato and a master's degree in Human Resource Management from Melbourne University, a Post Graduate Certificate in Education from USP and a Post Graduate Diploma in International Relations from the University of Fiji. She is currently pursuing further studies in Social Policy at the Fiji National University.



**Natasha Bodger**

**PNG Program Manager The Asia Foundation - Pacific Islands**

Natasha has over 15 years of experience working across governance, public diplomacy, and development programming in Papua New Guinea. She brings strong expertise in program and grant management, stakeholder engagement, and convening dialogue across government, civil society, and donor partners.

Natasha's experience includes senior roles with the U.S. Embassy in Port Moresby and the Australian High Commission, supporting complex programs in politically and institutionally dynamic contexts.



**Mercy Masta**

**GEDSI and Safeguards Specialist, WLI and Research Fellow, ANU Department of Pacific Affairs**

Mercy is a Research Fellow with the Department of Pacific Affairs at ANU, and is WLI's GEDSI and Safeguards Specialist. She has worked across a range of sectors in the Pacific, including in the areas of health and HIV, gender equality, disability and social inclusion, women's empowerment, and youth development. She previously also worked with Conciliation Resources Australia, a peace-building organisation that works in the Pacific and Southeast Asia. Mercy has been instrumental in the development of WLI's approaches to engaging men in support of women's leadership and co-designed the WLI Men's Group initiative, which commenced in May 2025.

Mercy holds a Master of Gender and Development from the University of Melbourne and a PhD from RMIT University, where she investigated Pacific Island masculinities, advocating for the meaningful involvement of men and boys in endeavours related to violence and conflict prevention.



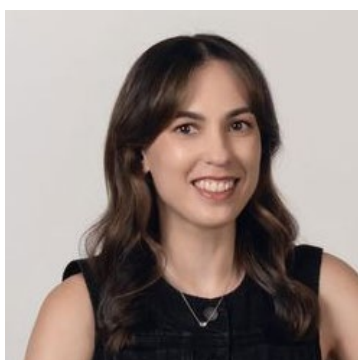
**Melkie Anton**

**Australia Awards Alumnus and Men’s Engagement Specialist, WLI**

Melkie is committed to engaging men as allies for women’s leadership and preventing violence against women and girls. He specialises in primary prevention, education, behaviour change, and culturally responsive approaches to gender equality.

He has worked with PNG’s Department of Personnel Management on GES policy implementation, contributed to the Urban Youth Employment Project and served as a counsellor and trainer with Anglicare’s StopAIDS. His experience spans Fiji, Vanuatu, Tonga, Tuvalu, Solomon Islands, and Papua New Guinea. As WLI’s Men’s Engagement Specialist, he leads the Men’s Group program and advises on engaging men across other activities

Melkie holds a Master of Development Studies (University of Melbourne), a Postgraduate Diploma in Children and Youth Studies (ISS, Netherlands), and a Diploma in Project Management (Divine Word University). He is currently based in Melbourne with his family while pursuing a PhD on masculinity in the Pacific.



**Katrina Roberts**

**Voice, Speech and Public Speaking Coach, Simply Speech**

Katrina Roberts is a qualified and highly experienced voice, speech and public speaking trainer, specialising in the coaching of performers, leaders and professional communicators. She holds several post-graduate qualifications in voice studies, speech training, public speaking and teaching.

Since launching Simply Speech in 2019, Katrina has worked with hundreds of professional voice users including performers, doctors, executives, entrepreneurs and public faces: anyone and everyone who needs to speak with genuine impact. She’s particularly passionate about supporting the disadvantaged and marginalised, with specific experience and expertise in freeing the voices of those with complex physical, cultural and psychosocial support needs.

Katrina is an accomplished and award-winning public speaker and former long-standing member of the Toastmasters International community. She is a Professional Member of Professional Speakers Australia (PSA): a national organisation representing the nation’s leading professional speakers.



**Kate Minto**

**Director & Senior Psychologist, Mandala Staff Support**

Kate is a psychologist who has worked in various roles with Mandala Foundation from 2008 to the present. She started in a regional staff support role based in the Pacific and has led the organisation since 2014. She also played a key role in co-developing Mandala's psychosocial risk management resources and guidelines for the aid sector. Her current role incorporates leadership and advocacy, strategy, HR, and organisational consultancies.

With 20 years' experience in the aid sector, Kate is specialised in applying psychosocial principles of support to humanitarian and development contexts, with a special interest in supporting women in the aid sector, and in the Pacific region. Her field experience includes work for Oxfam International and the Mandala Foundation in Vanuatu, Solomon Islands and Timor-Leste.

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