

25 ways to spot an expert revealed at New Professors Talk



Director of the Hunter Research Foundation (HRF) Centre and Chair in Applied Regional Economics, Professor Will Rifkin, outlined [25 ways to spot an expert](#). That was part of his recently delivered [New Professors Talk](#) exploring breakdowns in communication between experts and non-experts.

Professor Rifkin described actions and behaviours that ‘push our buttons’ and tell us that we ‘should’ treat someone as an expert.

One can avoid these pitfalls, he explained, to get expert and non-expert decision-makers in the Hunter ‘onto the same page’.

“When you are trying to get people from different parties to interact, communicate and understand each other, create something that has a common meaning for them,” he stated. “A map will mean something to a geographer, something else to somebody who lives in the region, and something else to somebody who is new to the region. But it will have very much a common meaning, as well.”

He proposed that the HRF Centre can create such 'boundary objects' to enable people to have conversations about common concerns where they each bring their own insight from knowledge or experience.

Professor Rifkin outlined his experiences over the past five years when he oversaw a \$5-million social science research portfolio. That was funded by the coal-seam gas industry and the University of Queensland.

"We sought to develop a boundary object that people from government, industry and community would find meaningful and revealing. That was a small set of indicators characterising changes occurring in the region before, during, and after a surge in onshore natural gas development."

The research produced the [Boomtown Toolkit](#). That method was employed to create an annual report on trends in socioeconomic indicators measured over a 15-year period for a set of towns in the Darling Downs. See the data and analysis at – <https://boomtown-indicators.org>.

"Even just a single indicator – the rent on a three-bedroom house over a 15-year period – helps you to understand cause and effect relationships. This small set of indicators can be the beginning of a sensible, evidence-based conversation within a community about what the needs and opportunities are."

He proposed producing Hunter region indicators, identifying data at the town level rather than merely the regional level. The indicators would be determined by asking community members, local businesses and industry, and government to prioritise a small set of indicators that would be meaningful for towns in the region.

If you missed Professor Rifkin's presentation and would like to hear more about his research, visit <http://www.hrf.com.au/news-events/events>