

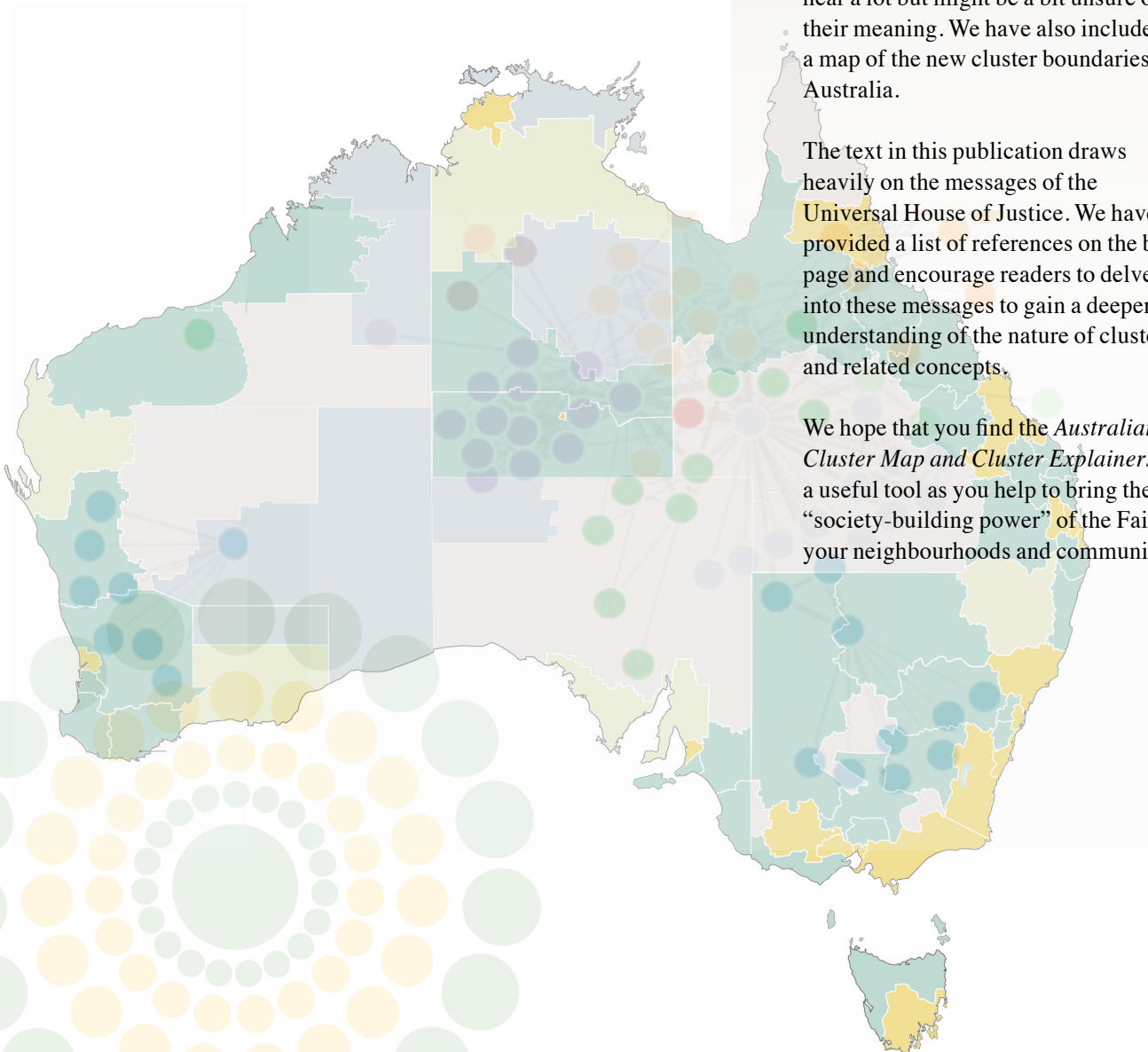
# Australian Cluster Map and Cluster Explainers

Ridván 2022 marked the start of the Nine Year Plan. Over the last series of plans there have been significant advances to how the Bahá'í community reaches out to all those living around them in the wide variety of neighbourhoods and communities around the world. These changes have helped Bahá'ís to connect with other people in their locality and together start the process of transforming neighbourhoods.

The start of a new Plan is a good opportunity to refresh our understanding of the changes introduced over the last series of plans. The team at *The Australian Bahá'í* has put together this reference guide in order to help us clarify terms that we hear a lot but might be a bit unsure of their meaning. We have also included a map of the new cluster boundaries in Australia.

The text in this publication draws heavily on the messages of the Universal House of Justice. We have provided a list of references on the back page and encourage readers to delve into these messages to gain a deeper understanding of the nature of clusters and related concepts.

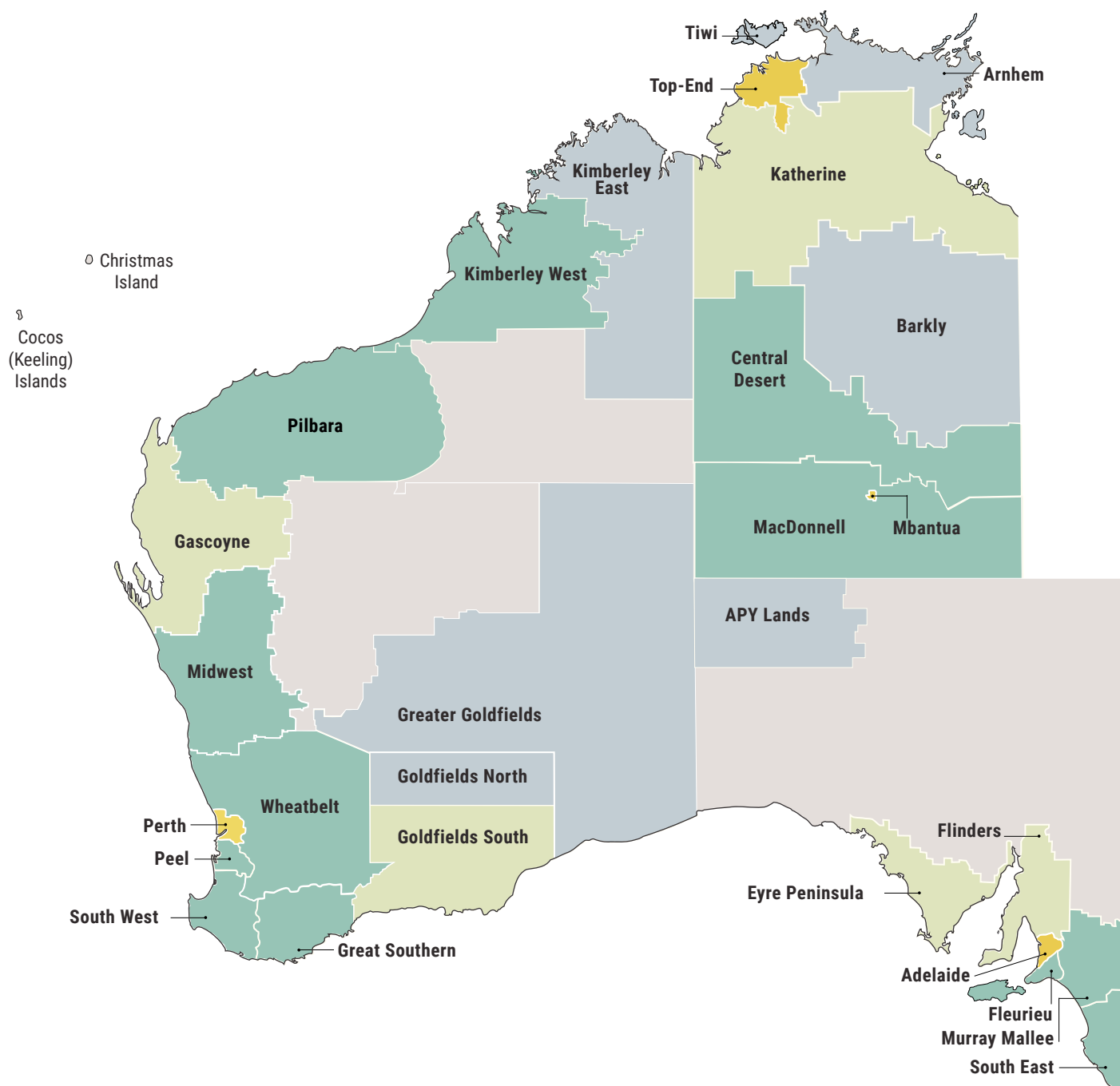
We hope that you find the *Australian Cluster Map and Cluster Explainers* a useful tool as you help to bring the “society-building power” of the Faith to your neighbourhoods and communities.



# Australian Cluster Map

*The cluster map of Australia shows the new cluster boundaries and their current stage of development, or milestone. On this and the following page, we show the clusters for each of the Regional Bahá'í Council areas of Australia. Then we describe the characteristics of each milestone and the cluster agencies that foster this development in many clusters.*

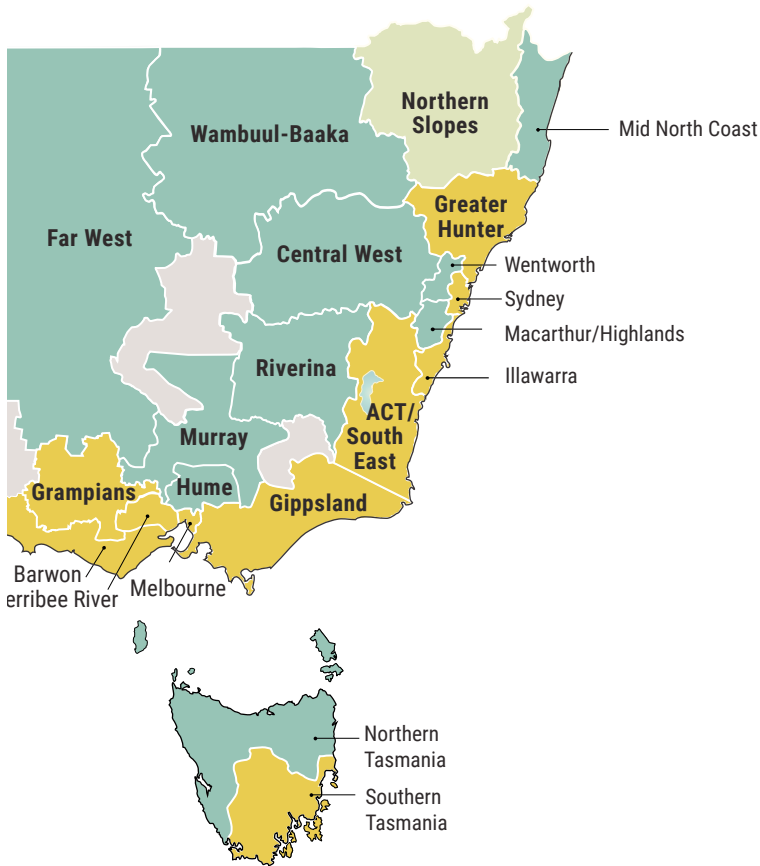
## Western and Central Australia



# Queensland



# South-Eastern Australia



# THE NATURE OF A CLUSTER

The Universal House of Justice defines a cluster as “... a geographic construct, generally defined as a group of villages or as a city with its surrounding suburbs, intended to assist in planning and implementing activities associated with community life”.<sup>1</sup> The purpose of these clusters is to enable the growth of the community to be organised on a manageable scale.<sup>2</sup>

The focus of such clusters is “... initially... the multiplication of certain core activities, open to all of the inhabitants, but with a view to developing the collective capacity needed to address in due time various aspects of the social and economic life of the population as well”.<sup>1</sup>

## MILESTONES – WHAT ARE THEY?

The last series of Plans had a strong focus on understanding the process of growth within a cluster. The Universal House of Justice likens this process to that of walking along a path. As a cluster progresses along this path, they pass through a series of ‘milestones’. With guidance from the House of Justice, we can identify the elements of each one of these milestones.

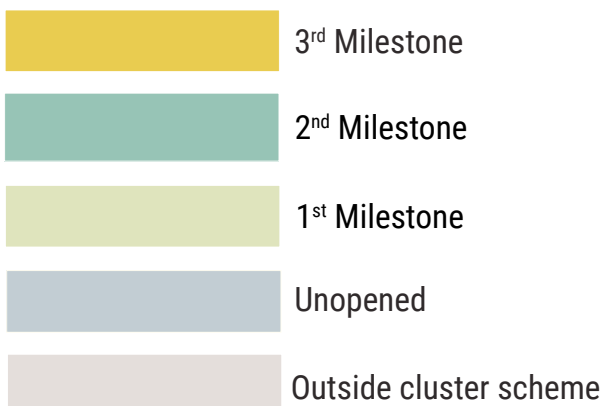
### FIRST MILESTONE

Efforts in a cluster begin when souls with a strong vision, or even a single homefront pioneer, “... enter into meaningful and distinctive conversation with local residents”. Depending on the personal circumstances of the souls involved, from these conversations emerge a devotional gathering, study circle, children’s class, and/or junior youth group, “... any one of these can serve as a stimulus to growth”.<sup>3</sup>

Over time, these various activities may grow at the same or different rates, but:

...the level of cohesion achieved among the core activities must be such that, in their totality, a nascent programme for the sustained expansion and consolidation of the Faith can be perceived. That is to say, in whatever combination and however small in number, devotional gatherings, children’s classes and junior youth groups are being maintained by those progressing through the sequence of institute courses and committed to the vision of individual and collective transformation they foster.<sup>3</sup>

As local residents who are progressing through the courses of the Ruhi Institute enter the field of systematic action, a cluster traverses the first milestone.



## SECOND MILESTONE

As the program of growth in the cluster continues to strengthen over time, it reaches the second milestone along this path. In a cluster that has reached this second milestone:

*“... a steady stream of friends is proceeding through the courses of the training institute and engaging in the corresponding activities, which serves, in turn, to increase the number of fresh recruits into the Faith, a significant percentage of whom invariably enters the institute process, guaranteeing the expansion of the system”.<sup>3</sup>*

Naturally, by this stage, the number of people involved in both driving activities and participating in them has also grown involving *“... perhaps tens of individuals active in the work of expansion and consolidation, while those participating might well surpass a hundred”*.<sup>4</sup> The number of homes being visited, the number of core activities, and the number of souls involved in meaningful conversations also grow. Local Spiritual Assemblies foster participation in the Nineteen Day Feast and Bahá’í Holy Days.

The initial ad hoc approach to mobilising individuals into the field of service *“... ultimately fails to satisfy the demands of planning and decision making, and an Area Teaching Committee is constituted, and reflection meetings institutionalized”*.<sup>3</sup>

The Universal House of Justice says, *“[s]uch advances are the more visible signs of a much finer development: the gradual spread, within a population, of a pattern of community life based on Bahá’u’lláh’s teachings. And, naturally, the number of believers grows”*.<sup>4</sup>

## THIRD MILESTONE AND BEYOND

The Universal House of Justice states that the third milestone *“... denotes the appearance of a system for extending, in centre after centre, a dynamic pattern of community life that can engage a people—men and women, youth and adults—in the work of their own spiritual and social transformation”*.<sup>4</sup> This involves larger numbers of people both participating in and driving activity, as well as the cluster itself possessing *“... the capacity to adapt to a substantial increase in complexity”*.<sup>4</sup> The House of Justice highlights the impact on society of third milestone clusters:

*“One important lesson that has become clear is the immense value, to a region, of a cluster where the third milestone has been passed. Once the friends in a given cluster have developed the range of capacities that such progress implies, and the means to disseminate insights and share experience about community-building endeavours are in place, then a swift acceleration of the work of expansion and consolidation in surrounding clusters becomes possible”*.<sup>5</sup>

Advanced third milestone clusters also become a reservoir of resources for the surrounding clusters.<sup>4</sup>

*Although learning how to embrace large numbers is a characteristic of any cluster where the third milestone has been passed, the focus of the friends necessarily begins to broaden as they approach a point where a significant proportion of the population of a particular area is taking part in community-building activities. This might be true for only a specific residential area in a cluster, or for several such areas, or for a single village; other parts of the cluster might not yet share the same reality. But in such locations, the thoughts of the friends labouring at the grassroots are increasingly occupied with the progress and well-being of everyone dwelling in the vicinity.*<sup>5</sup>



# CLUSTER AGENCIES – AN OVERVIEW

There are three agencies primarily responsible for planning the expansion and consolidation at the cluster level. These are: the training institute, the Auxiliary Board members and their assistants, and an Area Teaching Committee. These three entities are commonly referred to as “the cluster agencies”. In July 2005, the International Teaching Centre explained that “[i]n advanced clusters these entities are directly focused on the planning and execution of teaching plans, ensuring that the victories are immediately consolidated, learning is captured, and appropriate adjustments quickly made”.

Of the cluster agencies, the 'institute' itself includes the three coordinators: for children's classes, junior youth groups and study circles. The Universal House of Justice explains the purpose of the Area Teaching Committee, that their “...principal focus is the mobilization of individuals, often through the formation of teams, for the continued spread of the pattern of activity in a cluster”.<sup>4</sup> The House of Justice further explains that this largely involves a focus on three areas: devotional gatherings, home visits and teaching the Faith.

In executing their plans, the Area Teaching Committee, training institute coordinators and Auxiliary Board members together with their assistants collaborate closely with each other. As growth in the cluster advances, the associated complexities draw the cluster agencies into collaborating not just with their own members, but also with individual Bahá'ís and Local Spiritual Assemblies.

## CORE ACTIVITIES

The ‘core activities’ are open to all people irrespective of their beliefs:

- Devotional Gatherings where people gather to share prayers and Holy Writings
- Activities currently primarily using the material produced by the Ruhi Institute:
  - Study circles: currently using the material produced by the Ruhi Institute.
  - Children's Classes: Using lessons set out in Ruhi Book 3; Grades 1-4
  - Junior Youth Spiritual Empowerment Program. Junior youth are youth aged between 12 and 15.

See the Institute's website at [www.ruhi.org](http://www.ruhi.org) for more detail about their courses. Contact your Local Spiritual Assembly, cluster agencies or Regional Bahá'í Council if you would like to participate in one of these activities.

*The importance of education to a Bahá'í conception of spiritual and social transformation can hardly be overestimated. “Consider”, Bahá'u'lláh states, “the revelation of the light of the Name of God, the Educator. Behold, how in all things the evidences of such a revelation are manifest, how the betterment of all beings dependeth upon it.” The significance of education in the work of community building is unmistakable, and in the field of social action the provision of education remains the signature contribution of Bahá'ís in most parts of the world. Pre-eminent among the structures and agencies created by the Bahá'í world to offer education is, of course, the training institute. Indeed, the network of national and regional training institutes operating with such proficiency around the globe is among the choicest fruits of the previous series of global Plans.<sup>5</sup>*



# CYCLES OF ACTIVITY

In clusters that have passed the second milestone, efforts are increasingly systematic and formalised. The Universal House of Justice notes that where previous efforts may have initially been largely ad hoc, the process of growth now “*consists of cycles of activity, in general of three months’ duration each, which proceed according to distinct phases of expansion, consolidation, reflection and planning.*”<sup>2</sup> These cycles of activity are generally adopted when a cluster traverses the second milestone.

## EXPANSION PHASE

The Universal House of Justice explains that the expansion phase is “*often a period of two weeks*” and “*demand[s] the highest level of intensity*”. In its message to the Continental Boards of Counsellors of 29 December 2015, the House of Justice said that the expansion phase:

*... does so much to determine the outcome of each cycle. The precise objectives of each expansion phase vary, of course, depending on conditions in the cluster and the circumstances of the Bahá’í community. In some instances, its main aim is to increase participation in the core activities; in others, readiness to enrol in the Faith is discovered.*<sup>4</sup>

The House of Justice also commented how an effective expansion phase draws on the capacity built through institute courses:

*Although this phase might include some element of proclamation, it should not be seen as a time to hold a few events for this purpose or to undertake a set of activities that merely convey information. Experience suggests that the more closely teaching approaches and methods are aligned with the capacity acquired from the study of the institute courses the more rewarding the results.*<sup>2</sup>

## CONSOLIDATION PHASE

Following the expansion phase is the consolidation phase – a roughly two-month period, whose exact objectives will be shaped by those of the preceding expansion phase. In describing the consolidation phase in a cluster whose population is receptive to enrolling in the Faith, the Universal House of Justice offers a glimpse of the possibilities of this phase:

*One of the primary objectives ... is to bring a percentage of the new believers into the institute process so that an adequate pool of human resources will be available in future cycles to sustain growth. Those not participating in study circles are nurtured through a series of home visits, and all are invited to devotional meetings, to the celebration of the Nineteen Day Feast and to Holy Day observances and are gradually introduced to the patterns of community life.*<sup>2</sup>

## REFLECTION PHASE

The final phase of the cycle is dedicated to reflection and planning, “*in which the lessons learned in action are articulated and incorporated into plans for the next cycle of activity.*”<sup>2</sup> The House describes this phase as “[k]ey to the progress of an intensive program of growth”.<sup>2</sup> The “*capacity*” to “*learn through action ... is specifically associated with the reflection and planning phase of a cycle, especially the reflection gathering that regulates its pulsating heartbeat*”,<sup>4</sup> but “*also comes to be exercised at all other points of the cycle by those pursuing related lines of action.*”<sup>4</sup> The “*principal feature*” of the reflection phase “*is the reflection meeting—as much a time of joyous celebration as it is of serious consultation.*”<sup>2</sup>

The importance of this final phase may be best understood by reflecting on the mode of learning that permeates the entire cycle, which Ruhi Book 10 explores so well. It is this attitude that motivates each of us to generously share and eagerly receive insights, both at the various formal reflection spaces, as well as through informal interactions. As the House of Justice shared in 2014:

*In many ways, the communities that have progressed furthest are tracing an inviting path for others to follow. Yet whatever the level of activity in a cluster, it is the capacity for learning among the local friends, within a common framework, that fosters progress along the path of development. ... The most dynamic clusters are those in which, irrespective of the resources the community possesses or the number of activities being undertaken, the friends appreciate that their task is to identify what is required for progress to occur ... and then find creative ways in which the necessary time and resources can be made available to achieve it.*<sup>6</sup>



# REGIONAL BAHÁ'Í COUNCILS

## WHAT DO BAHÁ'Í COUNCILS DO?

The institution of the Regional Bahá'í Council was established in certain countries by the Universal House of Justice in 1997 as “a new element of Bahá'í administration, between the local and national levels”. This decision was guided by the principles of Bahá'í administration set forth by Shoghi Effendi and was a response to the “expansion of the Bahá'í community and the growing complexity of the issues which are facing National Spiritual Assemblies in certain countries”.<sup>7</sup> Regional Councils are “responsible largely for overseeing the execution of the global Plan in the territories under their jurisdiction, in collaboration with the Counsellors and their deputies”.<sup>8</sup>

Accompaniment of cluster agencies and strengthening of the training institute are two of the key means by which Regional Bahá'í Councils oversee execution of the Plan. Councils are responsible for appointing members of Area Teaching Committees and also “guide and assist cluster agencies as they learn to support”<sup>9</sup> the efforts of individuals and teams to advance the Plan at the grassroots of each cluster. Regional Bahá'í Councils also support the training institute, both by appointing members of Regional Institute Boards and through maintaining “a close working relationship”<sup>9</sup> with the Board as they execute their plans. “Systematic”<sup>3</sup> support of Local Spiritual Assemblies and mobilisation of pioneers for both homefront and international destinations are also responsibilities of Bahá'í Councils. Finally, other responsibilities include: ensuring that organisational structures are in place to provide financial support; receiving contributions and distributing Bahá'í literature; rapidly disseminating learnings between clusters, including by organising institutional meetings and; regularly communicating with the body of believers regarding the “progress of the plans for the region”.<sup>9</sup>

## BAHÁ'Í COUNCILS IN AUSTRALIA

There are three Regional Bahá'í Councils in Australia, serving the regions of Queensland, Western and Central Australia, and South-Eastern Australia. Their contact details are:

### **Bahá'í Council for Queensland**

[secretariat@qld.bahai.org.au](mailto:secretariat@qld.bahai.org.au)

### **Bahá'í Council for South-Eastern Australia**

[secretariat@sea.bahai.org.au](mailto:secretariat@sea.bahai.org.au)

### **Bahá'í Council for Western and Central Australia**

[secretariat@wca.bahai.org.au](mailto:secretariat@wca.bahai.org.au)

*The movement of clusters along a continuum of development will remain the basic model for the expansion and consolidation of the community.*<sup>5</sup>

## KEY MESSAGES OF THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

Throughout this publication, we have drawn on the messages of the Universal House of Justice where the concept of clusters and other related concepts are explained. To gain a deeper understanding, please refer to the following messages:

1. 26 November 2012 to all National Spiritual Assemblies
2. 27 December 2005 to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors
3. 28 December 2010 to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors
4. 29 December 2015 to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors
5. 30 December 2021 to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors
6. Ridván 2014 to the Bahá'ís of the World
7. 30 May 1997 to National Spiritual Assemblies
8. 31 August 2007 to a National Spiritual Assembly
9. 29 July 2011 to the National Spiritual Assembly of Australia

Most of these messages are available to download from the Bahá'í Reference Library at [www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/](http://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/).