



### **The Kristen Keegan Future Leaders Scholarship 2026**

HunterNet and Business Hunter are proud to announce the opening of applications for the 2026 Kristen Keegan Future Leaders Scholarship, a prestigious award that continues the legacy of one of the Hunter Region's most respected business leaders.

Now entering its ninth year, the scholarship honours the life and impact of Kristen Keegan, a passionate advocate for leadership, collaboration and the future of business in the Hunter. The scholarship provides full tuition for one emerging leader to participate in the highly regarded HunterNet Future Leaders Program 2026, commencing in March.

Ivan Waterfield, CEO of HunterNet Co-operative, said the scholarship remains one of the most meaningful initiatives in the region's leadership pipeline.

"Kristen was a remarkable leader and a tireless champion of our region. This scholarship continues her legacy by empowering emerging leaders to step forward, challenge the status quo and help shape the future of the Hunter."

The HunterNet Future Leaders Program is a hands-on, industry-led development journey that brings together high-potential professionals from across the region to work on real business transformation projects, guided by experienced mentors and business leaders.

2025 Kristen Keegan Scholarship recipient, Sheena Cherian from Monteath & Powys, said the opportunity had been life-changing.

*"Being awarded the Kristen Keegan Scholarship changed my confidence, my career direction and how I see myself as a leader. The Future Leaders Program pushed me beyond my comfort zone and gave me the tools, clarity and support to step up and make a real impact. I'm so grateful for this opportunity and would encourage any emerging leader to apply."*

Applications for the scholarship are invited from emerging leaders (up to 30 years old) in the Hunter region who aspire to make a difference, contribute to the community, challenge the status quo, and actively participate in the HunterNet Future Leaders Program community. Applicants must submit a letter of application addressing key criteria, including the meaning of participating in the program, aspirations, past and future career goals, leadership development through overcoming challenges, and the significance of the region's heritage in promoting positive change and innovation.



#### **Assessment Criteria:**

- Emerging leader (up to 30 years old) from the Hunter region.
- Aspirations to become a future leader across any industry.
- Commitment to making a difference in the region and the community.
- Willingness to take risks and challenge the status quo.
- Commitment to hard work and active participation in the HunterNet FLP community.

#### **Application Requirements:**

- Letter of application addressing specific criteria.
- Demonstration of aspirations and how financial and moral support will contribute to education and personal development.
- Outline of past and future career goals and their impact on leadership skills and business environment.
- Discussion of past, present, and future challenges, and their role in leadership development.
- Reflection on the heritage of the region and its integration with necessary change, innovation, and progression.

**Application Deadline:** Applications close on Friday, 13th February 2026. With Interviews to commence from 20<sup>th</sup> February. All applicants must be available to commence the Program the 5th of March 2026.

For all applications and inquiries, please contact Merran Wiggins, Future Leaders Program Liaison at HunterNet:

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