



Landcare Notes

Succession planning

Leadership is important to the success of your Landcare group. Leaders play an important role, inspiring and motivating their teams.

This note shows the value of having a leadership strategy for your group and gives tips on what elements should be included.

What is it?

Leaders are not necessarily the people in charge; they are the people who play roles which make a group effective and successful. Leaderless groups can struggle to succeed. Think carefully about how to choose and keep your leaders, not just the president but all those involved at different levels of leading group activities and planning.

It requires a conscious effort to recognise, train and support leaders. To do this well you need to have a strategy in place which helps you find the right leaders for your group, and encourage people to take on leadership roles.

Why do you need it?

Over time your group will develop its own 'corporate knowledge and information'. You need to pass that information onto new members so that the knowledge is not lost when a person leaves the group. You need to establish a way to recruit and induct new leaders so that knowledge is passed on.

Having a strategy helps ensure that leadership positions are readily filled, and you have a structure and process in place to fill positions.

Establishing timeframes for roles means that leaders don't risk 'burn-out' from being too long in a leadership position.

How to do it

Leadership strategies differ according to the needs of your group but there are some

common elements that your group should consider when drafting a strategy.

Establishing a leadership structure

The most common leadership structure is to establish an executive committee with a president, vice president, secretary, treasurer and general committee members. Groups may combine some positions such as secretary and treasurer. You may also choose to have additional committee positions in a bigger group, such as a communications officer or a projects coordinator.

The duties and expectations of these roles should be written down even if it is only brief, so that the leaders doing these jobs know what they need to do as well as other members of your group. The roles can be updated as needed and circulated to your members.

Sub-committees/working groups

Landcare groups often establish sub-committees for specific issues, such as project management, events or finance.

These sub-committees also need good leaders if they are to be successful.

A leadership strategy may spell out the role of the members on sub-committees, which may also contain outside specialists. Sub-committees allow opportunities for members to develop leadership skills and keeps people involved in their particular area of interest. The sub-committee can help the executive by reducing some of their workload.

Term in office

How long should leaders stay in their positions? The answer depends on the skills, passion and commitment of the people involved, and the availability of other leaders.

If leadership positions change too often, leaders may feel they don't have time to make changes, can feel they are not accountable for



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what they have implemented, and they are leaving before they have had time to learn the role.

On the other hand, if a leader stays too long, they may lose enthusiasm for the role. As a consequence, the group and level of group activity may fall, and the person can feel burnt out. Alternatively, a leader can gain too much control over the group, which can alienate group members.

Many groups have a term of 2-3 years after which time the person should stand aside. However, the group must be thinking about who will replace the leaders ahead of time so that there is someone to step in come election time.

Methods of appointment

Gradual change allows continuity for your group and helps build on the experience of those going before. Don't change all leadership positions at once – it's better to stagger the changeover so there is continuity of leaders and the assistance they provide.

For example, if your committee positions rotate every two years, consider changing the president in the alternate year to the secretary.

Nomination

Having leadership positions declared open at each AGM is very common but rarely successful, as members are asked to nominate with very little forethought.

This way of seeking nominations may also keep people away from the AGM because they're worried they might be asked to take on an unwanted position. It's better to seek nominations for the crucial positions before the AGM is held. This could be done via a group newsletter, an email update or by word of mouth.

If you're seeking new leaders well before the current leaders' terms are up, you have a better chance of finding a replacement that is capable and committed.

Getting new leaders

It can be hard to find new leaders, especially in small groups or small communities. Some Landcare groups include the role of vice president. They serve as a president-elect taking an in-training role. This means they can easily move to the presidency in the future.

You could also establish an assistant treasurer or secretary with a training role built into their responsibilities so they can take on formal leadership roles later or if there is a need for someone to stand in.

Some Landcare groups ask out-going leaders to find a replacement. This has to be managed carefully, so the outgoing leader does not intimidate someone into taking on the role. It is really the role of the whole committee, or group, to find a replacement.

All leaders – and potential leaders – need help to do their 'leading' by having defined processes, including easy to use pro-formas for letters, reports and strategies. There also needs to be an equitable spread of tasks where possible, see Landcare Note 8.5: Sharing the Load – Delegation.

When talking to others about how your group functions it is important that positions aren't made to be harder or look harder than they need to be. Some executives are meticulous and can intimidate all potential successors.

The Group must be open to change and try new ways of doing things to attract new leaders. New leaders will then feel encouraged to get involved and bring their ideas to the group.

Past leaders as mentors

Encourage your past leaders (e.g. past president) to stay involved – they can play an invaluable mentoring role so other members learn from their experience.

Training and courses

Many local governments, Landcare Networks, agencies and Catchment Management



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Authorities support training for volunteer groups, including courses in governance, succession planning, recruitment and leadership. This may help your group to plan ahead and get some great leaders on board.

Contingency plans

It helps to have contingency plans in case things go wrong. If these plans are recorded as part of the leadership strategy, it will make things easier to rectify.

You cannot plan for all situations but here are ways of dealing with some typical scenarios you may encounter.

Position cannot be filled at nomination time

Ask the previous leader to stay on until a replacement can be found, or for a set period (eg three months). Setting a limit makes it more likely they will stay on for the interim and will give the group a deadline to find a replacement.

Having the position remaining vacant until the next meeting is fraught with danger. You need to ensure a leader is found because groups without leaders may find themselves lacking direction.

Leader wants out before the term is up

Leaders should be supported so they complete their term and gain a sense of achievement.

However, if they need to leave before their term expires, whatever the reason, the group must accept their decision. Before the person leaves, take the opportunity to find out what could be improved for the next person who takes on that role.

A leader is unsuitable

Leaders of voluntary groups need to be supported by others. They are taking on a position of responsibility and are giving up their own time to do so.

However, it is possible the new leader is unsuitable for the position, which could be for

a range of reasons. They may not have the appropriate skills or may not be committed to the task.

In these situations, committee members need to support the leaders as much as possible while being diplomatic. They can offer to help – such as sharing some of the tasks for a certain period – or they may need to suggest a change in some of the ways things are done. If the situation is quite difficult you might seek external advice (e.g. from the Regional Landcare Coordinator) particularly if the leader is upsetting members. You may need to wait until the next group election to enable a change in leaders.

Writing your leadership strategy

Once you have established a suitable leadership strategy circulate it to your members. If members know what's involved in each role they may put their hand up for the next vacant position. Your strategy doesn't have to be complex to be effective. Your group could develop a strategy by using the following headings, and referring to the information provided in this Landcare Information Note.

Our Group's Leadership Strategy

- Leadership positions
- Role of positions
- Length of Term
- Method of appointment
- Committees
- Leadership changes & inducting new members
- Strategy for finding new leaders
- Contingency plans

Further references

Victorian Landcare Gateway
<http://www.landcarevic.org.au>

Our Community website: 'Community Leadership Centre'



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http://www.ourcommunity.com.au/leadership/leadership_main.jsp

Chamala, S and Mortis, P (1990) – *Working Together for Landcare*; Queensland Department of Primary Industries – See Chapter 4, *Developing Leadership Skills*.

Related Landcare Notes

This Landcare Note is one of a series. These notes provide an excellent guide for the ongoing operation of your group.

Landcare Note 1.3: Committee Roles

Landcare Note 8.1: Effective Leadership

Landcare Note 8.5: Sharing the Load - Delegation

Acknowledgements

Nicole Blackett: Landcare Notes – *Leadership Strategies for Landcare Groups* (2002); *Streamlining Administration – Common Roles in Landcare Groups* (2000).

Compiled by the Port Phillip and Westernport Catchment Management Authority's Landcare Support Team

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