

Maintaining a healthy, vibrant and effective Landcare Group

Part C

Group Health

The Victorian Government recognises that maintaining healthy, vibrant and effective Landcare groups is fundamental to the long-term success of Landcare in Victoria.

The Victorian Landcare Program has developed a Group Health Assessment checklist, a self-assessment tool that should involve all members.

Discussions about the group's health can be an enlightening experience and helps members gain a shared understanding of how healthy the group is and where improvements can be made. Tracking group health over time also gives a useful insight into group development.

For further information on group health visit:

Effective Governance

A well managed, open, inclusive and decisive Landcare group provides the ideal environment that encourages people to become involved and remain committed to actively supporting and contributing to their group.

Governance, when practiced well, creates an inclusive, efficient, effective and accountable group. It should not be seen as a separate activity your group has to do; it should become second nature to the group through the standards expected and the actions and conduct of all members.

Effective governance needs clear direction, competent leadership, openness and transparency in all decision making. It also means being accountable for, in control of and competent in meeting all of the group's legal, financial and ethical responsibilities.

The group's Committee of Management has ultimate responsibility for ensuring effective governance is in place, but all group members have a role to play, through their own personal conduct and how they extend support to the Committee of Management and other members.

Effective governance will also assist in reinforcing your group's credibility and capabilities, helping to foster the group's long term viability and ultimate success.

For further information on effective governance visit:

www.landcarevic.org.au/resources/landcare-notes-managing-a-successful-group/



Committee of Management

If your group is going to achieve its goals, an appropriately skilled and effective Committee of Management is crucial in helping your group reach its potential.

Most committees generally have about six to eight people and are democratically nominated and elected to their positions by the group's members.

Electing your groups Committee of Management

Your group's committee should be appointed early in the establishment phase of your group, generally at the first official or inaugural meeting.

Committee positions are then nominated, elected and appointed at the group's annual general meeting each year.

Each Committee of Management generally has, at a minimum, the following positions:

- President or Chair
- Secretary
- Treasurer

Your group can also choose to have additional committee positions, which need to be set down in the group's rules/constitution.

Many groups choose to have shadow positions such as vice president, assistant secretary and assistant treasurer. This model is a great way of promoting the development of leadership within the group and helps plan for succession.

Your group can also show some innovation in the creation of its positions. You don't have to be constrained by the roles many groups choose. One approach is to look at the objectives of your group and match positions accordingly.

Also look at the interest and skill base of your group's membership and try to match roles with member's interests and skills.

Each of the group's Committee of Management positions carries certain management responsibilities. The committee is given a degree of authority by its membership to make sound decisions on behalf of the group's members in relation to the group's day to day operations.

All committee members and for that matter all members are responsible for externally and internally explaining and promoting the group's work and actively supporting the group's development.

An essential tenant of holding a committee position is to not let your personal opinion override the democratic process needed to ensure the effective and open conduct of the group's business and decision-making processes.



Delegation and sharing the load

The Committee of Management must be prepared to delegate and share the workload to prevent people becoming 'burnt out'.

Delegating and sharing tasks is a great way of making others feel involved and included, as well as be an effective way of building the skills, confidence and leadership potential in others.

Sub Committees

Establishing sub-committees in your management structure provides opportunities for others to become more actively involved in decision making.

Generally sub committees are established with a particular focus or issue in mind and may be established for a specific timeframe.

Sub committees can provide an efficient way of matching a member's particular interests and passions with an opportunity for direct involvement in making decisions.

Planning for succession

It's important to continually look for and mentor potential leaders in the group and encourage their development.

Signs of potential Landcare group leaders include:

- Friendly and open personality
- Someone who gains respect of others
- Good local knowledge and contacts
- Displays a variety of existing skills or has a strong interest in developing skills
- A high level of enthusiasm and motivation
- Is a 'doing' person and sets good examples
- Proactively takes on tasks

As the group's president is usually elected because of their inherent leadership attributes, they are in a great position to play an active role in identifying other people's potential and ensuring others are provided with plenty of opportunities to grow and apply their leadership attributes.

Openly approach people to discuss their skills and interests and identify a person's potential for assuming a leadership role. If a person shows interest, start by giving them small and achievable tasks to increase confidence and ensure they are provided with adequate support during the early stages until they become more confident and competent in their abilities.



Committee member changeover

Changeover of the Committee of Management needs some careful and pre-planned consideration. Committee members develop a great deal of organisational knowledge and it's important that during the transition between committee position holders, such as at election time, this knowledge is not lost all at once.

One solution to this is a staggered changeover of committee positions, so some existing people are retained on the committee as new members join.

This helps provide a balance of new enthusiasm and the injection of new ideas as well as retaining historical knowledge.

Having assistant, deputy or junior positions also provides a planned approach for making transitions between committee positions much smoother.

If the group has a small membership base and taking on a committee position is hard to avoid, rotating positions on a planned and regular basis can be a way of helping to reduce or spread the workload among group members more equitably.

For further information on Committees of Management visit:

www.landcarevic.org.au/resources/landcare-notes-managing-a-successful-group/committee-function-advice-for-groups/

Conducting effective meetings

There are many different meeting types your group may hold, each with a particular purpose, structure, content and level of formality.

It is essential that those invited are clear about the meeting purpose, the content to be covered and the expected outcomes.

The group shouldn't get into a habit of convening a meeting without having a clear purpose. Most people now lead very busy lives and the last thing people want to do is attend a meeting that has no real purpose or outcome.

Annual General Meetings

It is mandatory for incorporated associations to conduct an Annual General Meeting (AGM), which form an important aspect of good governance.

AGMs are a more formal type of meeting with a structured format and agenda, including presenting of reports on the group's past year's activities and achievements. These reports can be from the president outlining the group achievements or a financial report from the treasurer. An audited financial report is strongly encouraged and copies of this should be presented at the AGM.

Other reports can also be presented if applicable.



Special business items can form part of the AGM agenda. This may include such things as the reviewing of and (if appropriate) re-setting of the group's membership fees, appointing the group's financial auditor etc.

Committee of management elections

The election of your Committee of Management is an important part of the group's inaugural meeting and subsequent AGMs.

For the election of the committee, it is a good idea to have an independent person to chair that part of the meeting.

The chair should start the election process by declaring all (or the relevant) positions vacant and, depending on whether pre nomination forms have been lodged or nominations are called for during the meeting, the chair read outs or calls for the nominations for each position.

Important points to make clear for each nomination are: the person being nominated, the nominator and seconder for each nomination.

If only one nomination for a position is received, then that person is considered elected to that position. For more than one nomination, members present cast their vote by ballot.

People nominated and contesting positions should leave the room while the ballot is held.

The ballot can either be a show of hands or by written vote, which provides greater confidentiality in the process.

General meetings

General meetings are the most common type of meeting your group will have and should be held to allow members to hear information or make decisions about issues relating to the objectives and activities of the group.

Committee of Management meetings

These meetings are usually closed to allow the committee time to focus on issues relating to the business and effective functioning of the group.

Generally at these meetings the committee reaches its decisions and reports to members at the next general meeting. The committee will seek member feedback and reach an endorsed set of recommendations.

At Committee of Management meetings, special invites can be extended to others asking them to attend part or all of the meeting.

Sub Committee meetings

Sub committee meetings are generally chaired by a member of the Committee of Management. A sub committee cannot make a decision in isolation, it needs to discuss issues, reach consensus and then present its recommendations to either the Committee of Management or at a general meeting for final decision.

Meeting minutes

A written record of the proceedings of all meetings must be kept. These are known as meeting minutes and are scribed during the meeting by the secretary or their delegate or assistant.

Minutes become a reference and record of the meetings content, the resolutions and decisions made as well as recording the details of those in attendance and apologies for the meeting.

At the next meeting, the minutes must be confirmed and seconded as a true and accurate record of that previous meeting. The seconder does not need to have been at the meeting.

Minutes of a previous meeting should be sent out with the notice for the next meeting as this saves time.

Meeting action list

As part of the meeting minutes or as a supplementary attachment, an action list should be developed that outlines the tasks identified and assigned as an outcome of the meeting decisions.

An action list should identify what action was agreed to (i.e. what the tasks are) who is responsible for each specific action item and the timeframe in which the action needs to be completed.

An action list helps to clarify meeting outcomes and ensures there is active follow up after the meeting.

Meeting agendas

Every meeting should have a clear, concise, prioritised and time specific agenda and it is usually the responsibility of the president and secretary to ensure a meeting agenda is compiled and distributed.

An agenda helps ensure the items of business are identified, their order planned and makes others aware of the topics/subjects to be covered. It's a good idea to separate the meeting into two categories – items being presented for information only and items requiring a decision and action.

Meetings should aim to eliminate general business as an agenda item all together. This can be achieved by giving all members the opportunity to submit items of business before the

meeting and have these items (if appropriate) included on the agenda which is sent with the meeting notice.

This lets everyone know the discussion topics and gives people appropriate notice to do some pre meeting research for each of the listed agenda items.

Keeping meetings to time

The meeting start and finish times should be included on all meeting notices.

It is also an essential role of the meeting chair to make sure the meeting starts exactly on time. Many people made sure they arrived on time, so don't let late comers dictate when your meetings start.

If people know your meetings start when stated, they'll soon get into the habit of arriving on time as they realise that the meeting won't wait for them.

It is also important to prioritise the business to be covered with the most important items to be addressed first. If you think you're going to run close to the stated meeting finish time at least the important items of business will have been covered.

If there's only a few agenda items remaining and you can see that you may need to go over time, ask the attendees ahead of the advertised finish time if they are happy to go slightly overtime to finish all the meeting's business.

For further information on effective meetings visit:

www.landcarevic.org.au/resources/landcare-notes-managing-a-successful-group/effective-meetings-advice-for-groups/

Effective planning

Effective planning helps a group be clear on what it wants to achieve and how it will do it, it helps map out the future of the group and identifies how and what the group needs to do to get there.

The elements to an effective planning process include:

- Identifying the reasons why the group exists (what's the group's mission or objectives)
- Analysing the current situation (where is the group at now and where does it want to be)
- Identify what's needed to get from where the group is now (i.e. the current situation) to achieving the group's ultimate objectives.
- Developing and implementing the actions to get there (action planning)

The planning process

There isn't any one particular formula, method or process to follow when developing a group plan. Each group has their own particular and unique elements and a process that works well for one group may not necessarily work for another.

What is important is that the group recognises the value of having a plan and sets out to confirm common goals and the pathways to follow to get there.

Levels of planning

There are many forms of plans with a variety of titles. The two most common plans used by most Landcare groups are strategic plans and action plans.

A strategic plan is more visionary in nature and should identify the longer-term objectives of the group and some of the broad ways in which it will set out to reach those goals.

When preparing the strategic plan it is important to consider, and document in the plan, the methods of how the group will monitor or evaluate the success of the plan's implementation.

A strategic plan may have an outlook period of anywhere from 5, 10 to 20 years.

An action plan is short-term in focus and should contain a range of specific activities assigned for action. Each of these activities should be given a timeframe for implementation and have ways of being monitored and measured.

An action plan should detail all the short term activities that when combined, contribute to helping the group reach its long term objectives, i.e. those outlined in the group's strategic plan.

An Action plan should be reviewed and updated every 12 months.

Using plans to communicate

Once developed, a plan can be a highly effective tool for communicating a group's purpose to others and to demonstrate how the group plans to go about achieving its goals.

A plan can also be given to prospective members or distributed within the community to spread the message about the group's purpose.

A well constructed plan can be an essential tool in attracting the resources needed to achieve goals, such as in-kind support or financial assistance.

The group may also find that opportunities arise where your group can feed its plans into those of other organisations, e.g. your local council, CMA etc.

Being adaptive

When developing the strategic and action plans, it is worth remembering that we live in an ever changing world and what is seen as important today may change and this may influence the environment in which the group operates.

While a good plan provides an effective blueprint of the group's direction, it also needs to ensure it is open to change.

A group's long term goals shouldn't change too much, but the way those goals are achieved may be influenced by external factors.

For further information on effective planning visit:

www.landcarevic.org.au/resources/landcare-notes-managing-a-successful-group/group-planning-advice-for-groups/

www.landcarevic.org.au/resources/landcare-notes-managing-a-successful-group/strategic-planning-advice-for-groups/

www.landcarevic.org.au/resources/landcare-notes-managing-a-successful-group/action-planning-advice-for-groups/

Recruiting and retaining members and volunteers

Being part of a group should be an interesting, enjoyable and rewarding experience.

Members, non-members and other volunteers should be given the opportunity to take part in all group activities. The level of involvement sought by people will vary from person to person but everyone should have the opportunity to contribute.

Attracting people to group activities and making the transition from volunteer to group member requires careful consideration.

Groups should cater for the interests of its members and community. Being able to offer something to everyone in your local community is very important.

Tips for involving people include:

- Make group events a fun and social occasion
- Arrange interesting and topical guest speakers
- Ensure there is a range of varied practical, hands on activities



New Landcare Group Start Up Kit

- Work with schools and other community groups as they are a great access point to other members of the community
- Conduct field trips to interesting places
- Promote skills training for members

Conduct a skills audit

Successful groups find ways of involving everyone and they allow each person to have their interests met and talents utilised in some way.

A skills audit is a great way to identify what skills, talents and interests people have within the group.

The group can use the skills and interests of its members and match these against the actions needed to achieve the group's goals.

Be an inclusive group:

Openly invite new people to activities and ensure they are made welcome. Make sure if people ask if they can do something to help, their offer is taken up and they are given the chance to get actively involved.

For further information on recruiting and retaining members and volunteers visit:

www.landcarevic.org.au/resources/landcare-notes-managing-a-successful-group/recruiting-and-retaining-members-advice-for-groups/

Effective networks, partnerships and collaboration

Landcare groups can benefit from forming partnerships and building networks with a range of people and organisations that may have a mutual interest in the group's activities and long term goals.

Effective collaborations are always based on a two-way relationship so the group needs to ensure there is clarity on why the group is seeking to collaborate and what the benefits are for the other organisation.

Partnerships

Partnerships can be a one-off, or may be developed as a longer term relationship and can vary from a tree planting venture with the local primary school to entering into a large scale agreement with an international company.

Once the group has a clear idea of what it wants from a partnership and what it can offer to the other partner or partners, be open to the range of potential partnership opportunities that may be available.

The Landcare brand has a great deal of leverage, so use it to your group's advantage.

Networks

Networks can be defined as the extent of contacts your group has with other entities and the level of mutual trust existing between the group and the other party.

Having an extensive network makes it easier to get things done, whether this is in the form of information, technical assistance, physical support, or provision of materials or financial assistance.

All members in your group will bring their own range of networks and it's important to recognise and use these in carrying out the group's activities and events.

The established networks each of your members have personally can easily be transformed into collaborative partnerships for the benefit of your group.

For further information on developing partnerships visit:

www.landcarevic.org.au/resources/landcare-notes-managing-a-successful-group/partnerships-and-collaboration-advice-for-groups/

Effective communication

Effective communication is an essential aspect of keeping people informed and involved in the group's activities and is one of the most pivotal components to a group's success.

Clear, concise and timely information minimises the chance of any misunderstandings and ensures the group continues to operate smoothly.

The group should spend some time considering the important information that needs to be communicated and in determining the most effective methods to use.

You may find the group will need to use a range of communication methods to ensure as many people as possible become aware of the information being circulated.

The group could also develop some key messages or catch phrases the group can use to help inform people of the group's purpose.

Effective communication in a Landcare group relies on all members being willing to participate and to respect each other when it comes to informing, discussing, listening and making group decisions.

The group will need to have some ground rules for communication as well as a process for decision-making, the structure of meetings, the way records are kept and accessed and its processes, methods and mediums for external communication.

Remember that everyone in the group has something to learn and everyone has something to contribute.



New Landcare Group Start Up Kit

For further information on effective communication visit:

www.landcarevic.org.au/resources/landcare-notes-managing-a-successful-group/effective-communication-in-your-group/

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ISBN 978-1-76047-314-3 (pdf/online)

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