

Landcare Notes

Landcare Note 1.1
September 2010

1.1 Starting up a Landcare group

If you're thinking about starting up a Landcare group in your area, there are a few things to consider before you start. This note includes the first steps in setting up a Landcare group, as well as some suggestions to help you succeed.

What is a Landcare group?

A Landcare group is a group of people interested in sustainable production, land, water and biodiversity issues who want to work together to improve the health of the land in their area.

How do you get a group started?

There are no rules to starting a Landcare group and you may find that the following steps occur in a different order to what is suggested below, or you would like to take a different approach. This information is simply a guide based on the past experiences of others.

Some key steps:

What is the issue?

Start some local discussion about the type of activities Landcare can do, what the issues are and establish the need for a local group. If you do start a group what is it you would like to do? You might have discussed some issues with your neighbours; such as the problem of rabbits or weeds spreading in the area, or protecting the local waterway. Think about what the issues might be and take your discussions further afield.

Growing the idea in your local area

It seems obvious, but first you need to find out if your community supports the idea and thinks a local group is needed. Talk to a range of people to see if they share your view and are likely to want to be involved. Keep a list and contact details of people who are interested.

It's a good idea to talk to the local council, other community groups and networks, staff working at local parks and reserves, industry associations, people working in the agriculture sector, environment fields and local schools. Many people may want to be involved, so think broadly when you are considering setting up a group.

Having a Landcare group is not just about trying to solve complex, large-scale environmental issues. Many groups find the sharing knowledge and resources, learning new things and social aspects of Landcare are important for the community and a good reason to be involved.

Holding a public meeting

Take note of the feedback you get from people. Once you are confident there is significant interest from some key people in your community and you have some information about the issues people would like to cover, then you could hold a meeting to discuss the idea together.

Organise a meeting or event and invite the people who have expressed interest. Hold the meeting at a time and place that suits as many people as possible, especially those vital to the group's success.

Publicise the meeting widely – through word of mouth, the local media and notices around the area.

Discuss the idea with your local council, Catchment Management Authority or Landcare network. They may be prepared to call the meeting, which gives you official support and recognition.

Tips on holding a public meeting

The meeting should be chaired by someone who knows how to chair a meeting (see Landcare Note 1.4: Meeting types) and who is enthusiastic about starting a group.



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Consider a current topic or speaker that will capture the interest of your neighbours. You could also include a meal, walk or slide show in the program.

At the meeting

Ask people to register their names when they arrive so you have a record of who is interested. Make sure people have name tags, so they can get to know each other.

Refreshments at the end of the meeting will encourage discussions and connections.

Open the meeting by explaining why it's happening. This will help update those who people who have not been involved in previous discussions.

During the meeting people should be given a chance to identify what they consider to be important issues, explain what sort of impact these issues are having and what action, if any, has already been taken.

Use photos and displays to help focus your discussions and consider asking relevant people to speak. If problems have already been identified in the area, someone from a relevant government agency could talk about the plans for tackling the issue, or someone from the Landcare network could talk about similar groups in other areas.

If the meeting decides that Landcare action is needed, then a start-up committee should be proposed with people who are passionate and keen to get a group going.

Tasks of the start-up committee

A start-up committee may only be small but it should include about six people to ensure the group has a strong start. The role of this committee should be to do some key tasks to get the group underway.

Developing goals

At your first group meeting, discuss what you would like to do and set some goals.

You might want to consider:

- Local environmental issues the group is concerned about
- How you might tackle the issues, short-term and long-term
- Who you should talk to about these issues (seek advice and ideas from inside and outside the group)
- Who might be interested in getting involved.

Establish the group's boundary

When a Landcare group starts up, it can be difficult to define how big an area it will cover.

Look at where the current members live and what issues they want to tackle in the immediate area, or perhaps use the local sub-catchment boundary. You should also check where neighbouring Landcare groups are operating, so you can avoid overlapping or creating any gap areas.

Some groups start small and find their boundaries expand after two or three years because of the needs of their community. Defining the group's boundary does not limit who can be involved, but means that others can see where your group's area of focus is. The state government collects and maps this boundary information to share with others.

The committee

All groups will need an executive committee which usually includes a chair or president, treasurer and a secretary to cover the group's essential operations. The group needs to consider what each of these roles involves and the term the members will serve (see Landcare Notes: 1.2 Committee function; 1.3 Committee roles).

Other committee member roles can also be established. These members will need to be involved in regular meetings and help the executive committee with tasks that need doing on behalf of the group.

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Administrative tasks

You will need to consider the formalities such as a constitution, membership fees, insurance, a contact list, the frequency and structure of meetings and other procedural matters so everything can move smoothly as soon as the group begins meeting regularly. This could be done before the group is launched. Check with your local Landcare Coordinator for help with these tasks as there are tools, resources and some funding available for groups starting up (see further references below).

At some stage you should also vote and formally agree on the committee roles. This could be done within your start-up committee or at the group's launch.

The next step

There is no set way for going about the stages of establishing your group, but a launch can be a successful way to let your community know that you are up and running and seeking members and support.

Further references

Victorian Landcare Gateway – Resources for Groups www.landcarevic.net.au.

Charmala, S and Mortiss, P D (1990): *Working Together for Landcare – Group Management Skills and Strategies*, Australian Academic Press Pty Ltd.

McFarlane, G, Carpenter, J and Youl, R (1996): *Group Skills and Community Action*, Department of Natural Resources and Environment.

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 1.2: Committee function

Landcare Note 1.3: Committee roles

Landcare Note 1.4: Meeting types

Landcare Note 1.5: Effective meetings

Landcare Note 2.1: Planning

Landcare Note 2.2: Strategic planning

Landcare Note 7.2: Incorporation for Landcare groups

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