

2012

Council Connections Project Summary

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Victorian Climate Change Centre for
Adaptation Research

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What is Council Connections?

Council Connections is a peer to peer learning program for local government practitioners who are undertaking work in the adaptation field. The program workshops series was delivered in collaboration with Victoria's urban greenhouse alliances, The Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) and also The Victorian Climate Change Centre for Adaptation Research (VCCCAR).

The initial concept was developed by Celeste Young when she was the Executive Officer of the Western Alliance for Greenhouse Action (WAGA) and is based upon an innovation learning model that she developed whilst working in industry.

The idea of the program was to assist practitioners with "connecting the dots" in relation to adaptation by connecting them with other adaptation practitioners and stakeholders and also connecting researchers and research to the practice in a meaningful way.

The model has been adapted specifically for local government practitioners through a collaborative process with the initial project partners and local government practitioners.

The result is a learning process that is relevant and supports the needs as they emerge of practitioners in the field of adaptation in a process that directed by practitioners and guided by researchers and experts.

What is the need for this program?

Adaptation is a newly emerging field of practice and one of innovation. It requires a bottom up top down model of practice for effective implementation. This means that there are often not previous case studies, benchmarks or available training so practitioners are working with unknown outcomes and developing skills as they undertake the work.

Because of the nature of adaptation work practitioners are faced with a number of challenges:

- The primary source of knowledge and learning for many practitioners is other people in other locations undertaking the same work.
- The need to effectively engage with stakeholders across a number of different areas both internal and external to their organisations
- An understanding of different types of knowledge and how to combine these effectively eg: local knowledge, cultural knowledge, scientific knowledge.
- How to make decisions as to what is suitable for their specific working context
- The need to engage with the current research in this field in a way that leads to understanding as many practitioners expressed confusion with the variation of research.
- The need to develop new frameworks at an operational and institutional level
- Lack of resources, including staff, expertise and funds, in some councils.
- Lack of training available for adaptation practitioners.

Benefits for local government

Council Connections has had a number of benefits to date these include:

- Bringing together practitioners from all areas of local government to share and learn in an environment where researchers and experts are present to support participants in their learnings.
- A forum that exchanges knowledge between different levels of stakeholders that may not happen otherwise.
- The development of supportive knowledge networks.
- Capture of learnings as they arise - this allowed knowledge to be shared as a catalyst for action and development of skills.
- The development of a community of practice.
- An acknowledgment that significant learning comes from practitioners within the workshop.
- More effective engagement with Climate Change research and researchers.
- Stimulation of new ways of thinking.
- The building of new understandings and new relationships within and across councils in relation to climate change adaptation.

The first phase project partners and their representatives

- **The Western Alliance for Greenhouse Action (WAGA):** Celeste Young – then WAGA Executive Officer and now Stakeholder and Engagement Coordinator, VCCCAR
- **The Northern Alliance for Greenhouse Action (NAGA):** Judy Bush: Executive Officer, NAGA
- **South Eastern Council Climate Change Alliance (SECCCA):** Greg Hunt: Executive Officer, SECCCA
- **Victorian Centre for Climate Change Adaptation Research (VCCCAR):** Rodney Keenan: Director, VCCCAR
- **The Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV):** Ben Morris: Manager Environment, MAV
- **Tangent Consulting:** Geoff Brown, Facilitator for the workshop

The format

The three workshops undertaken have focused on three key areas of Adaptation:

- Risk and legal liability.
- Planning and urban growth.
- Social issues and public health.

The workshops comprised of a mixture of formal presentations and working exercises. To date, presentations have been given by participating councils who have undertaken work in this area and also adaptation experts from research bodies and private sectors.

Working sessions involve a series of presentations and guided exercises where participants and experts work in groups to identify and share learnings. The group then came together to share all findings with the larger group.

These findings were then collated into a report which was put on the MAV website and the link sent to all participants following the workshop.

For an example of a Council Connection agenda please view Attachment A.

The process

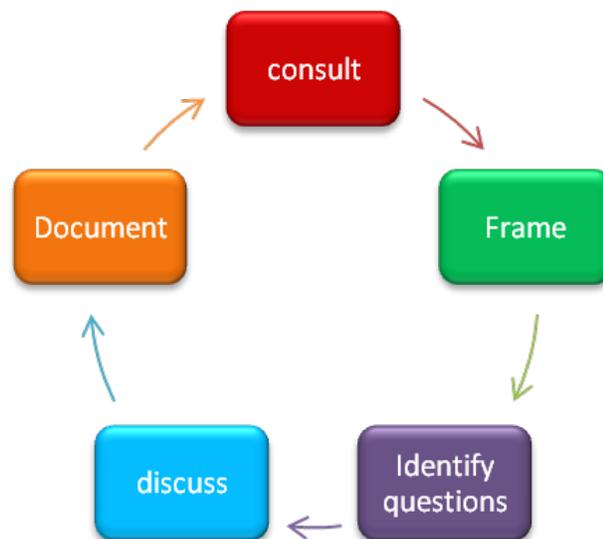


Figure 1: SSS, Innovation learning model process, Celeste Young 2007

The project partners took this process model and adapted it specifically to meet local government practitioner needs.

1. **Consult:** Consult with the practitioners prior to the workshop development; find out what they want to know.
2. **Frame:** Frame the topic in context of what your practitioners want to know. Who do you need to frame your conversation/what sort of presentations? To date we have used one “big picture” presentation that frames the big questions for the day. This is followed by an example of implementation within the principles and contexts of the big picture.

3. **Identify questions:** The preferred format for identifying questions has been an “open space” or “cafe style” discussion that allows the participants to find the questions that are relevant for them. This ensures they have the conversation they want to have in the workshop not in the coffee shop or pub after the event.
4. **Discuss:** This section of the workshop acts as a filtering process and uses table hosts and provocateurs. Table hosts are there to notate the conversation and feedback to the main group afterwards. The provocateurs are deliberately selected from outside of the local government sector and are there to stimulate thinking in a different way. This role has also allowed other stakeholders such as state government representatives and researchers to contribute to practitioner conversations and helps build greater understanding and trust between the sectors. The final stage of the discussion is a consolidation of the key learnings and findings of the day.
5. **Document:** The findings were collated into a report which was posted on the MAV website along with the presentations. The link was then circulated to the participants of the workshop. This allowed for the learnings to be captured and also for actions to be listed and followed by the participants and alliances. The designated scribe for the day was responsible for sending the notes to the coordinator of the workshop who then compiled them into a report.

Allocation of roles

Each member of the collaboration was a pivotal part of the success of Council Connections as they all had specific roles that enabled the desired outcomes. All parties shared the following responsibilities:

- Development of key themes and workshop structure.
- Recommendations in relation to the presenters for each forum.

The Alliances

Greenhouse and Climate Change Alliances are partnerships of local governments and other organisations responding to climate change through implementing projects. Covering 70 councils and most of Victoria, the nine current greenhouse alliances work with their members, communities and partners in mitigation and adaptation activity.

The alliances led the workshop process by acting as the coordinators between the other collaborators and the practitioners within their own councils. An Executive Officer of each alliance led one workshop of the cycle and this meant that the work was shared amongst the Executive Officers. The combination of the three alliances working together with the other collaborative bodies ensured the critical mass of participants attended the workshops.

Their key tasks were:

- Coordination of one workshop per alliance.
- Financial contribution.
- Sourcing information and feedback from practitioners in Local Government.
- Coordination and promotion between their member council practitioners.
- Follow up on actions identified and sharing of information with relevant stakeholders who did not attend the workshop.

MAV

As the Victorian Local Government peak body, MAV had a long standing and established relationship as a provider of training resources and information to Local Government. Supporting capacity development is also a recognised key function of MAV. MAV had identified the need for Peer to Peer learning in their report; *Stocktake of Current Victorian Local Government Climate Change Adaptation Planning, Final Report 2011* and their involvement gave credibility to the program at all levels of Local and State Government.

Further to this MAV also provided:

- Management of workshop reports and data on MAV website.
- The venue.
- Management of bookings and catering.
- Promotional support.

VCCCAR

As a Victorian based adaptation research organisation whose focus is collaborative, action based research, VCCCAR provided research support for the workshop. As a body that collaborates with a number of universities across Victoria, VCCCAR were able to recommend and access appropriate researchers for workshops. It also added to the program's credibility in research and State Government areas.

They also provided:

- Financial support for the workshops series.
- Promotional support.

Tangent consulting

Tangent consulting provided the facilitator for the workshops.

The facilitator was pivotal to the success of the workshop series. Our facilitator was skilled in "open space" facilitation, psychology and group dynamics and he assisted the team in developing a clear purpose and specific format for each workshop. He also understood our objective to allow the

practitioners to lead the workshop with his guidance and our notion of creating a community of practice.

Why this model worked

1. It is driven by practitioners' needs

We designed these workshops with practitioners for practitioners and they were based upon the need that was articulated by local Government practitioners. The alliances acted as the key conduit between practitioners and other stakeholders to enable the workshop.

2. Early engagement with participants

Our council practitioners and the project partners were all an active part of and will continue to be an active part of the development process of each workshop.

3. Diversity of practitioners and participants who attended

Through the series of three workshops we were able to engage with a number of practitioners across local government organisations. This was really important as we were able to start developing a common language around some of the key areas. The inclusion of researchers, state government people and adaptation experts also allowed practitioners to have conversations they would not have been able to have otherwise.

4. A safe space to talk

We created a space where people were able to have “honest conversations” about their work. If you can't talk about a problem you can't solve it. This has meant that they were able to look at what they needed to enable them to work through these problems. It has also helped practitioners realise that they are not alone in the challenges they face with this work.

5. The focus was the work

The focus of the workshop was always practitioners' needs and their work rather than considering political agendas.

6. The collaborative relationship between all the parties

The collaborative working relationship between the different project partners was key to this program's success. The combination of the regional alliances meant that we had the ability to create the critical mass of practitioners we needed to enable the workshop. The alliances, because of the trust established through their close working relationship with the councils, were able to engage with the practitioners effectively. The support and advice from the MAV and VCCCAR gave the program credibility and enabled us to engage with stakeholders outside of local government more effectively.

7. Clear allocation of roles

We allocated clear roles so that the work load and the development of each workshop was shared amongst the group.

8. The framework is flexible

Because adaptation is highly innovative, the research and knowledge is evolving. This means the needs of practitioners will also change as they progress through different stages of their adaptation journeys. The basic format can be used and adapted to suit these needs as they arise in a way that is context specific to the audience.

Findings so far

Key findings to date that have emerged in all three workshops are:

- Key areas of challenge for practitioners: Governance, leadership and communication
- Need for specific training to be developed.
- Need to mainstream across organisations - whole of organisation approach not just the environment department.
- As adaptation is context specific, tool kits are not always useful, practitioners need process tools.
- The primary form of learning for most practitioners in the field is still from other people undertaking this work.

The Future

Council Connections has completed its first cycle of workshops and will now have a plenary session to assess what has happened so far and decide what the next cycle of workshops will be. There has been interest expressed by regional alliances within Victoria in being part of this process and this option is currently being explored.

Council Connection Contacts

If you would like further information please don't hesitate to contact one of our team:

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Attachment A



Climate Change Risk Assessment Workshop Agenda

9.30

Arrivals

Welcome & Context

Celeste Young – Executive Officer WAGA

Outline of the purpose and need of today's workshop.

Introductions

Presentation 1

Alice Skipper – Senior Associate, DLA Piper

The Legal Risks of Climate Change Risk Assessments

Alice will cover the legal risks that may arise for councils who have undertaken or are undertaking a climate change risk assessment. She will also discuss what future legal frameworks may look like in relation to this using some overseas examples.

Facilitated Discussion and questions with Alice Skipper

Presentation 2

Hartmut Fuenfgeld – Research Fellow, RMIT Climate Change Adaptation Program, Victorian Centre Climate Change Adaptation Research

Climate Change Risk Assessments - The Process

Hartmut will outline the different frameworks that can be used for undertaking a Climate Change Risk Assessment and will explain the different components involved in these processes.

Facilitated Discussion and questions with Hartmut Fuenfgeld

Setting the Agenda for the post-lunch conversations

Topics for discussion that stem from the morning presentations and practitioners own agendas will be selected with the group for discussion in the afternoon.

12.30 LUNCH

Afternoon Session

1.00 Peer learning tables

Using the topics selected in the morning session conversations will be led by table hosts to identify priorities and opportunities that can support ongoing practice and assist the building of capacity within councils.

Table hosts

Grace Girardi – Maribyrnong City Council

Burke Renouf – City of Greater Geelong Council

Sheridan Blunt – Moonee Valley City Council

Hugh Butcher – Brimbank City Council

Judy Bush – Northern Alliance for Greenhouse Action

Greg Hunt – South East Council Climate Change Alliance

Provocateurs

Rodney Keenan - Director, Victorian Centre for Climate Change Adaptation Research.

Hartmut Fuenfgeld - Research Fellow, RMIT Climate Change Adaptation Program, Victorian Centre Climate Change Adaptation Research

Ben Morris - Team Leader Environment, MAV

Zoe Wood - Department for Sustainability and Environment

Celeste Young - Executive Officer, Western Alliance for Greenhouse Action

Dr Tim Morrissey – Policy Analyst, Office of the Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability

Converging & Reflections

Consolidating the primary lessons learnt today and identifying actions that have arisen from this process that will assist ongoing support for future work practices.

3.00 Close

