COLLABORATING

FOR SUSTAINABILITY

www.sustainablecouncilsnetwork.org.au

IDEAS, TOOLS & LESSONS FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT

GOVERNMENT

LESSONS

TOOLS

IDEAS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This guide has been developed as part of the dissemination activities for the CEEchange Program, which was assisted by the NSW Government through its Environmental Trust.

Many thanks to all involved in the production of this guide for their passion and hard work!

Guide produced with sustainability in mind:

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A COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIP:

ORIGINAL PARTNER COUNCILS:

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ABOUT THIS GUIDE

LESSONS

This is a guide to help councils embed sustainability in their operations and local government areas through effective collaboration, engagement and education.

1.1| Why this guide was developed

The tools, lessons and ideas within this guide are the culmination of what was learnt during the three years of the CEEchange Program, which was assisted by the NSW Government through its Environmental Trust. The guide has been produced as part of the dissemination activities required under the grant funding agreement.

This guide will be particularly useful for sustainability/environment officers and managers looking to complement existing sustainability programs and activities, as well as individuals within local councils who are looking to create positive, sustainable change in their council and/or local community.

One size does not fit all

It is intended that you will be able to pick and choose tools, techniques and activities according to what is suitable for your council and local government area (LGA) and based on where you are on the sustainability journey.

THIS GUIDE WAS DEVELOPED FOR A NUMBER OF REASONS

1. Local councils are in a unique position to influence local communities and to provide leadership in creating more sustainable communities.

2. While most councils are already delivering sustainability programs internally and externally, common barriers exist and effective engagement is needed to enable behavioural and cultural change for sustainability.

3. The CEEchange Program has demonstrated that these barriers can be effectively addressed and that these lessons are worth sharing across the sector.

4. As in other workplaces, many council officers would like to make their workplaces and work behaviours more sustainable and are keen to learn what others have done and what works.

A COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIP:

CEE change | NSW GOVERNMENT | NSW Environmental TRUST | NSW GOVERNMENT Office of Environment & Heritage

ORIGINAL PARTNER COUNCILS:

Mosman COUNCIL | CITY OF SYDNEY 2030 | Coast Harbour City Council | Wyong Shire Council CENTRAL COAST | Ku-ring-gai Council | ORANGE Australia's Colour City

EXTENSION PROGRAM COUNCILS:

Bellingen Shire COUNCIL | City of Canterbury City of Cultural Diversity | GOSFORD CITY COUNCIL CENTRAL COAST | PARRAMATTA CITY COUNCIL | Waverley Council

Representatives from the original CEEchange partner councils came together at the end of 2011 to share their experiences and learning.

1.2| About the CEEchange Program

The CEEchange Program was a three-year partnership between the NSW Environmental Trust, the NSW Office of Environment and Heritage and the councils of Ku-ring-gai, Coffs Harbour, Mosman, Wyong, Orange and the City of Sydney. Given the overall success of the program activities in the partner councils, a mini-version of the program was extended to an additional five councils in 2012: Bellingen, Canterbury, Gosford, Parramatta and Waverley.

The vision for the CEEchange Program was as follows:

Creating a cultural change model for local government that supports integrated community education and engagement and the advancement of sustainability for local communities.

The Program aimed to realise its vision through a series of specific objectives:

- Use an action research approach to investigate the barriers and drivers to integrating (CEE) for sustainability in core council business.

- Develop and deliver program activities to trial a model of cultural change for the advancement of sustainability in local government.

- Enhance the capacity of council staff and the community to lead and manage sustainability initiatives and deliver effective CEE.

- Measure the outcomes of program activities through a series of cultural change 'indicators'.

- Foster learning and exchange of community education and engagement (CEE) practice and delivery among program partners and disseminate knowledge gained to the wider local government community.

THE VISION OF THE CEECHANGE PROGRAM

1.3| Conceptual model of the CEEchange Program
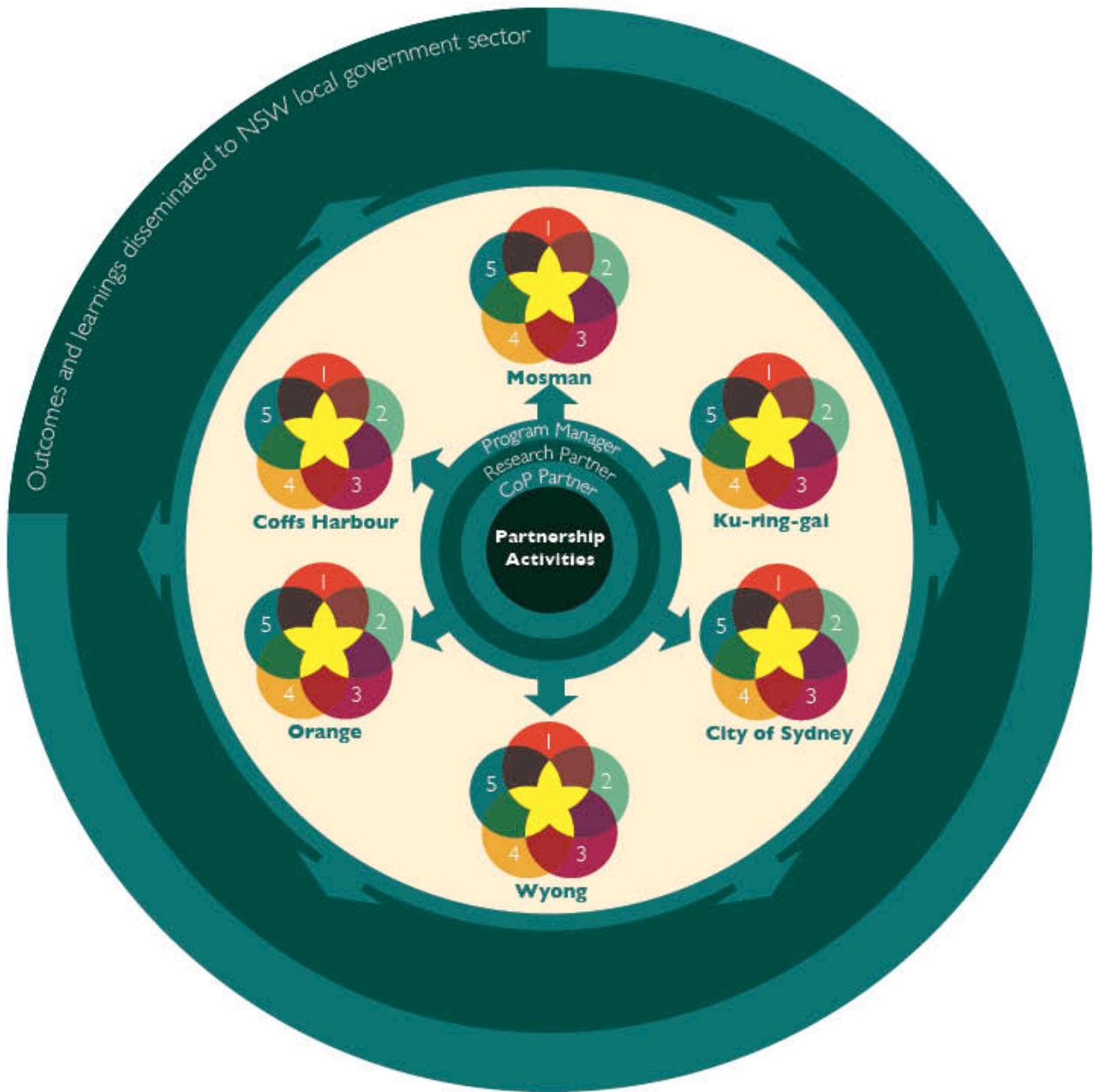
Council Activities
- ● 1. Collaborative network
- ● 2. CEE pilot project
- ● 3. CEE strategy/action plan
- ● 4. Reference groups
- ● 5. Action research

Partnership Activities
- **A.** Vision forum
- **B.** Steering committee meetings
- **C.** Partners' reflection workshop
- **D.** Partners' online website

The star represents the cultural change which supports the integration of CEE and improved sustainability.

The CEEchange Program consisted of two main pathways of activity:

PARTNER-LEVEL ACTIVITIES

Partner-level activities which focus on building capacity across all partners to develop skills, extend knowledge and share experiences:

- A strategic planning process for all partners to refine the direction of the program.

- Creation of governance and communications mechanisms.

- Visioning forum that engages the NSW local government sector to focus on the future priorities for CEE for sustainability in local government and actions to progress these priorities.

- Training and coaching on collaborative networks (or 'communities of practice') to facilitate professional learning and exchange within each partner council.

- Partners' reflection workshop.

- An online partners' collaborative network, to facilitate collaboration across the councils and offer an opportunity for the cross fertilisation of ideas and the discussion of similar challenges - the Sustainable Councils Network (**www.sustainablecouncilsnetwork.org.au**).

- Action research, to explore the current context for CEE in each partner council; identify barriers and drivers to effective CEE; monitor changes; generate new knowledge and capture learning and experience.

- Dissemination of the research findings, a guide to using the collaborative network approach and case studies of partner council learning and experience to the local government sector more broadly.

COUNCIL-SPECIFIC ACTIVITIES

Council-specific activities which focussed on each partner council individually exploring the role of community education and engagement for sustainability:

1. Collaborative network
Establishment and development of a collaborative network, to foster a whole-of-council approach to sustainability and the delivery of effective CEE within each partner council

2. CEE pilot project
Design, development and implementation of a pilot CEE project that addresses a council management plan priority and responds to the priorities for action identified at the visioning forum

3. CEE strategy/action plan
Development of a medium-term CEE strategy/action plan for sustainability to guide the integrated delivery of CEE within council and/or the community

4. Reference groups
Establishment of an internal and external reference group with broad representation, including councillors, management and operational staff

5. Action research
Participation in steering committee meetings and research activities designed to yield case studies and evaluative information.
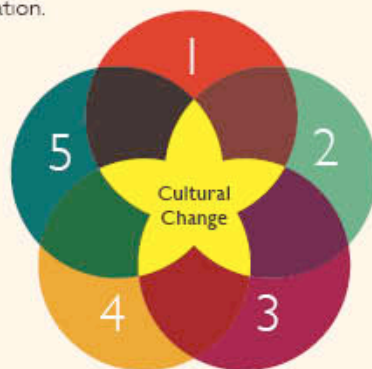
The program provided support and mentoring for the six original council partners. This included the services of a program manager in the lead council (Ku-ring-gai Council) and external expertise to undertake research and deliver collaborative network training and mentoring.

The CEEchange Program – and this guide – were focussed predominantly on striving for better environmental sustainability outcomes. However, the broader meaning of sustainability is also recognised in that the equally important 'pillars' of financial, social and cultural sustainability are always relevant. For the purpose of this guide, the UNESCO definition of sustainability applies with "sustainable development" being development that "meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs".[1]

The visioning forum itself was highly collaborative with great contributions by representatives from across local government.

1. World Commission on Environment and Development. (1987). Our Common Future. The Bruntland Commission, UNESCO.

2. RESPONDING TO THE CHALLENGE OF SUSTAINABILITY IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

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RESPONDING TO THE CHALLENGE OF
SUSTAINABILITY IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

LESSONS

For councils – or indeed any organisation – to change to a culture of sustainability and achieve real results, changes to formal organisational strategy, structure and process are important. Ensuring that strategic plans, policies, key performance indicators (KPIs), role descriptions, etc., make meaningful reference to sustainability is essential. However, doing these things will not in themselves be sufficient to generate lasting change. Many councils have the formal building blocks for sustainability in place but still struggle to "activate" them.

2.1| Barriers to a culture of sustainability in local government

Towards the end of 2009, the CEEchange Program hosted a visioning, peer-learning and consultation forum with the NSW local government community in Sydney. The Local Government – Creating Sustainable Communities Through Learning Forum attracted 148 local government and agency staff, decision-makers and elected members from 49 councils across NSW.

As identified during the forum and evidenced during the CEEchange Program itself, there are a number of consistent barriers to the integration of sustainability into council operations internally and within the local community. Those barriers include:

- A lack of understanding of what sustainability really means

- The "silo" effect between council departments and their staff
- The hierarchical nature of local government in decision-making
- The degree of political and managerial support for sustainability
- The availability of resources to dedicate to sustainability
- Uncertainty as to the role of council in delivering local sustainability initiatives

Formal structures and processes need to be complemented by 'informal' staff engagement processes if deeper, cultural change is to take place. Engaging employees, engaging management, fostering networks and collaborative work styles, and harnessing the passion of individuals is required to drive meaningful change.

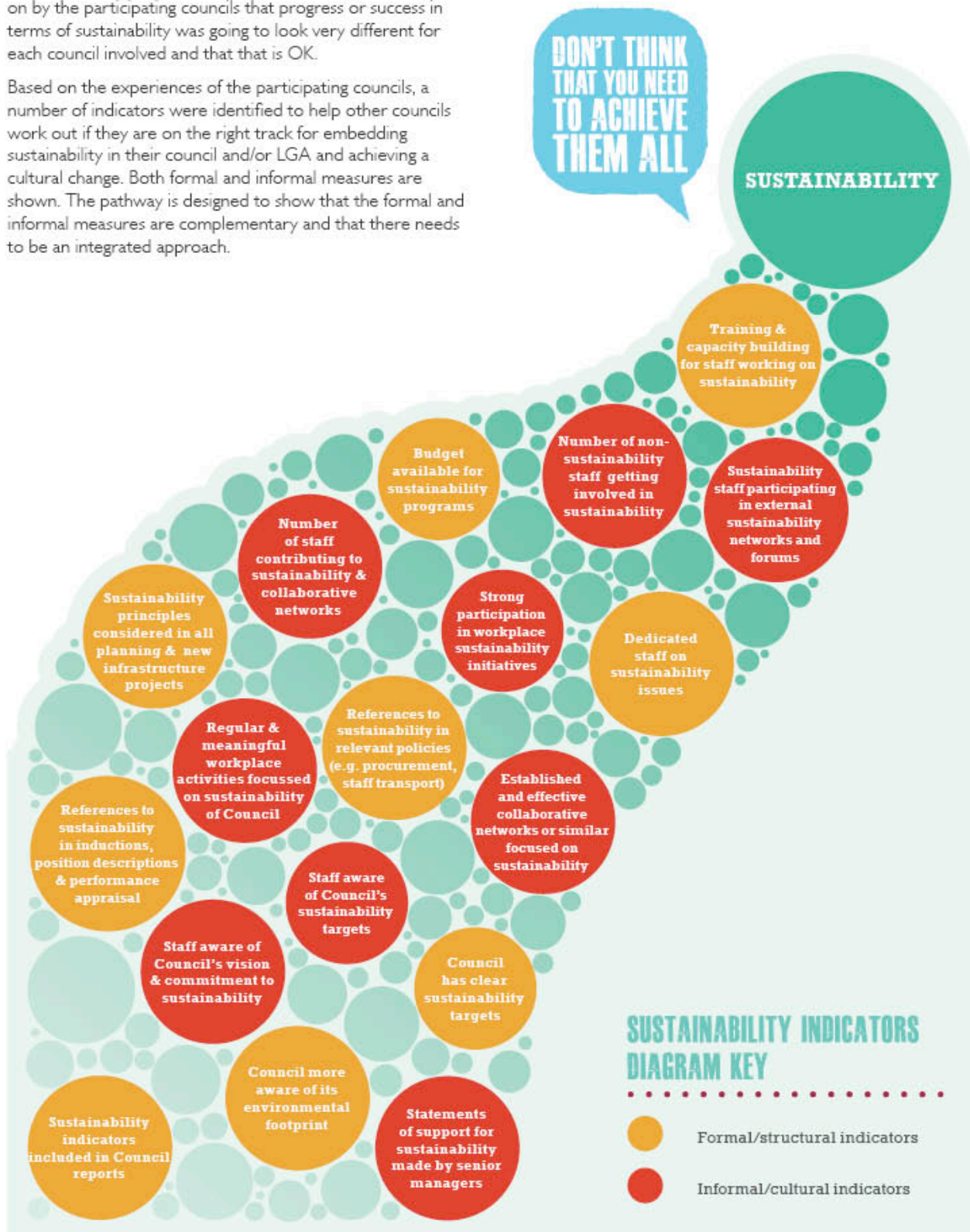Many councils struggle to activate the building blocks of sustainability.

2.2| Indicators to show you are on the path to sustainability

The figure below is intended as a guide for councils wanting to consider their progress on the journey to sustainability. As mentioned below, formal and informal approaches are necessary and complementary on this path.

Built into the design of the CEEchange Program was the understanding that every council is different - different in size, demographics, environment, focus, funding and culturally. Given these differences, it was accepted early on by the participating councils that progress or success in terms of sustainability was going to look very different for each council involved and that that is OK.

Based on the experiences of the participating councils, a number of indicators were identified to help other councils work out if they are on the right track for embedding sustainability in their council and/or LGA and achieving a cultural change. Both formal and informal measures are shown. The pathway is designed to show that the formal and informal measures are complementary and that there needs to be an integrated approach.

Don't think that you need to achieve them all! Based on your council, achieving just one key indicator might be a major achievement. Or you might be able to tick off a number of them but still feel that you have a way to go. Simply use this diagram as a source of ideas as to what other councils are doing and seeking to do as they pursue sustainability.

DON'T THINK THAT YOU NEED TO ACHIEVE THEM ALL

SUSTAINABILITY

Training & capacity building for staff working on sustainability

Budget available for sustainability programs

Number of non-sustainability staff getting involved in sustainability

Sustainability staff participating in external sustainability networks and forums

Number of staff contributing to sustainability & collaborative networks

Strong participation in workplace sustainability initiatives

Dedicated staff on sustainability issues

Sustainability principles considered in all planning & new infrastructure projects

Regular & meaningful workplace activities focussed on sustainability of Council

References to sustainability in relevant policies (e.g. procurement, staff transport)

Established and effective collaborative networks or similar focused on sustainability

References to sustainability in inductions, position descriptions & performance appraisal

Staff aware of Council's sustainability targets

Staff aware of Council's vision & commitment to sustainability

Council has clear sustainability targets

Council more aware of its environmental footprint

Statements of support for sustainability made by senior managers

Sustainability indicators included in Council reports

SUSTAINABILITY INDICATORS DIAGRAM KEY

● Formal/structural indicators

● Informal/cultural indicators

2.3| Integrating community education and engagement for sustainability

'Integrating community education and engagement (CEE) for sustainability' is a process of bringing together the processes of integrating sustainability and integrating CEE in council activity. While these two change processes can be thought of separately, they are intrinsically linked. Once the work of establishing and integrating sustainability as a core organisational value gains momentum, the need for different and more effective models of CEE becomes more obvious.

The convergence of the two streams of change is represented in the figure below. It includes some of the key indicators for the integration of sustainability within council and the indicators (or necessary ingredients) for integration of effective CEE with an external community.

INTEGRATING CEE FOR SUSTAINABILITY

Staff champion sustainability

Flagship projects

Continuous improvement

Develop capacity, use appropriate tools

Provide expertise and leadership

Use for strategic purposes

Appreciate value, power of CEE

Integration of sustainability

Own house in order

Overcome resistance and fear

SUSTAINABILITY INDICATORS DIAGRAM KEY

- Integrating sustainability
- Integrating community education and engagement

A poster promoting Wyong Shire Council's organisational survey for CEEchange.

2.4| Action research for sustainability

An important component of the CEEchange Program was the measurement and evaluation of measures implemented by the councils and across the program. This was not just to demonstrate achievements as part of grant requirements; without understanding where you are starting from in terms of CEE and/or sustainability, it is almost impossible to plan your strategy and then demonstrate results from its implementation.

During the CEEchange Program the baseline, interim and final research and evaluation aimed to help understand:

- The degree to which CEE is incorporated in key planning instruments and strategic statements.

- Organisational and cultural factors that facilitate or impede the practice of CEE around sustainability.

- Personal and organisational capacity to engage with the community and to influence council decision-making.

- Historical 'wins and losses' with regard to CEE around sustainability issues.

- Expectations of participation in activities.

- Some possible indicators to judge the impact and success of the program.

A number of methods were used to undertake research and are recommended to other councils looking to undertake activities similar to those in the CEEchange Program:

- Literature review

- Staff interviews
  One-on-one interviews with key individuals in each partner council including operational staff, management staff and councillors.

- Policy review
  Review of strategic and policy documentation and findings of community and staff research conducted by partner councils.

- Annual organisational surveys
  The aim of the organisational survey (conducted both online and in hard copy) was to further establish the organisational context for each of the councils to put other findings in context. Special efforts were made to ensure the views of all staff, including outdoor or operational staff, were collected and considered. Specifically, the survey attempted to measure:

  - The predominant organisational culture of each council as it relates to sustainability and CEE.

  - Staff awareness and understanding of, and engagement with, sustainability issues.

Examples of questions included in the organisational survey will be posted on the online collaborative network for this Program, the Sustainable Councils Network at www.sustainablecouncilsnetwork.org.au

MEASURE UP!

Action research is key to planning and evaluation

3. THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY EDUCATION AND ENGAGEMENT FOR SUSTAINABILITY

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THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY EDUCATION AND ENGAGEMENT FOR SUSTAINABILITY

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Community education and engagement is an integral part of moving organisations and communities along the path to sustainability.

The unique position of local authorities to play a pivotal role in driving sustainability outcomes has been acknowledged at a national and international level:

> "Local councils are in a unique position to engage with and educate at the local level – to equip community members with the knowledge, skills and motivation they need to manage their property, household, business and lifestyle in a more sustainable way."[2]

Organisational or societal change depends on behaviour change at the local and individual level. This, then, becomes a question of generating the motivation for behaviour change. Community education and engagement (CEE) should be thought of as an integral part of the process of generating the motivation to change. An essential measure for sustainability, engagement and education is complementary to the other structural, regulatory, economic and infrastructure measures which move organisations and communities along the path towards sustainability.

The 'community' in 'community education and engagement' can be defined as both the 'internal community' (i.e. employees, management, councillors) and the 'external community' (i.e. residents, businesses, community organisations). The benefits of staff engaged on sustainability extend beyond council operations; they become agents for change in the community. By demonstrating leadership within council and "having one's own house in order", councils have the ability and credibility to engage with their LGA communities.

3.1| The difference between CEE and community consultation

It is common for people to have a narrow view of CEE. For many, CEE is simply the new term for what used to be called 'community consultation'. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Traditionally – and still – local councils have tended to tell people in the community what they are doing and to ask for their input. There is widespread reliance on fairly passive communication approaches – exhibiting plans, accepting submissions, doing surveys, staging information evenings etc. There is nothing wrong with these things. They still have a place but they are not what CEE is all about.

CEE is about building a trusting relationship. It is an ongoing process of raising awareness, shifting attitudes and creating the impetus for behaviour change. Educating and engaging with the community takes time. CEE is a goal or a process rather than an activity (though of course there are activities that contribute along the way) and it is important for both internal and external council activities.

The field of CEE is a burgeoning one and there is a vast array of tools now available, beyond the traditional survey and focus group. New media technologies provide all kinds of opportunities for councils to engage with their internal and external communities, including those audiences that have been historically difficult to engage.

CEE IS ABOUT BUILDING CAPACITY

Local councils have established networks and working relationships with community groups and individuals through which they can work. In fact, local government has an enviable reach into local communities, through which behaviour change can (theoretically) be brought about.

A reliance on traditional means of consultation helps to maintain the status quo in local council. Choosing different ways to consult the community, and looking to more deeply engage the community through deliberative processes presents a threat to this status quo. Change can therefore be resisted, particularly by elected councillors and by established consultative groups in the community, many of which have their own agenda. Effectively engaging with councillors and senior management about the role and potential benefits (including cost benefits) of more effective CEE is an important part of the change process.

The process of more effectively engaging with local communities requires a reassessment of the role of council and the role of the community. Councils need to wrestle with their own identities and the role they play in bringing about enhanced sustainability. Is council a facilitator, an advocate, a sustainability leader, an educator, a partner, a service provider, a regulator or an enforcer? Under what circumstances do councils play each of these roles and is there strategic intent behind the different roles that councils play in different circumstances?

2. "Learning for sustainability – what it means for local government: NSW Environmental Education Plan 2007-10", NSW Council for Environmental Education, October 2006, viewed at http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/cee/resource+kit.htm, 27 August 2010

3.2| Barriers and enablers to using community education and engagement for sustainability

The literature[3] pertaining to the experiences of local councils in using CEE as a tool for achieving stronger sustainability outcomes highlights a number of issues that act as barriers to, or enablers of positive change. Some of the main barriers or enablers include the following.

MAIN BARRIERS OR ENABLERS

- The degree of political and management support

- The availability of resources to dedicate to initiatives

- The priorities and values of the local community (internal and external)

- The existing level of engagement and community participation

- The ability to translate the theory and 'language' of sustainability to meaningful and effective policies, programs and initiatives

- A narrow or marginalised view of 'sustainability' as an environmental concern unrelated to economic and social priorities

- The perceived role of local council in addressing sustainability and engaging the community

- Organisational culture and decision-making processes and practices – in particular openness to collaborative approaches

- The degree of commitment to organisational learning

- The use of good practice community education and engagement strategies.

3.3| The importance of organisational context

The effort to advance notions of sustainability and the benefits of CEE are context-dependent, not only in terms of one organisation to the next, but from one year to the next. A newly elected council, a new general manager or management team, or an organisational restructure can all be 'game changers'. The old adage that 'change is the only thing that is consistent' is very relevant here – as is the adage that 'everything old is new again'. From the perspective of someone working to embed CEE and sustainability in council operations, organisational context can be somewhat 'tidal' or 'seasonal'.

The lesson here is that those looking to champion CEE for sustainability need to be thoughtful of the current and emerging culture of their organisations and to adjust their methods (and possibly their expectations) appropriately. It can be difficult to maintain enthusiasm during those times when the council leadership and pervading culture does not support or allow collaborative efforts to make councils and communities more sustainable. However, it is better to use these times to prepare for the days when more ideal conditions exist and to avoid a standing start when conditions do change.

Conversely, it is important to not be profligate during the 'good times' but to ensure that full advantage is taken of the opportunity to advance the sustainability agenda. The change in approach may simply relate to the language that is used and which of the pillars of sustainability are given more emphasis. The obvious example here is that during the inevitable 'efficiency drives', the language used with decision-makers needs to relate to financial sustainability more so than to environmental sustainability (even though the two are intertwined).

KEEP MOMENTUM

DON'T GIVE UP!

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4. EDUCATION AND ENGAGEMENT THROUGH COLLABORATIVE NETWORKS

EDUCATION AND ENGAGEMENT THROUGH COLLABORATIVE NETWORKS

🎓 LESSONS

One of the findings from the CEEchange Program is that collaborative networks are invaluable for achieving community education and engagement in councils.

4.1| Collaborative versus hierarchical cultures

Sustainability challenges are complex ones. Climate change, for example, is often described as a 'wicked problem'. There is a well-established link between the extent to which organisations can grapple with and respond to complex problems and the nature of the learning culture of the organisation[4]. Those that can be considered to be 'learning organisations', 'adaptive cultures' or 'collaborative cultures' are, in general, more capable of handling and responding to complex challenges, such as sustainability.

On the other hand, organisations that can be described as 'hierarchical', which operate on a 'command and control' basis are often less equipped to address complex problems. Hierarchical organisations are well suited to addressing technical problems, where there is a well-defined objective but problems that do not have a clear solution are often put aside or else addressed in an inappropriate way. Many organisations, including local councils, are strongly hierarchical – very efficient and effective in doing 'core business', but less so when dealing with less well-defined and complex problems.

The types of organisations that are well positioned to address complex problems typically make extensive use of mechanisms that support informal learning and capacity building. These mechanisms are often designed to allow and encourage informal and creative collaboration between people so that expertise can be generated and shared. They bypass the hierarchy where the hierarchy does not help.

It is for these reasons that measures emphasising a more collaborative approach to sustainability, such as collaborative networks, were major features of the CEEchange Program in an effort to overcome barriers specific to local government.

4.2| What is a collaborative network?

A collaborative network can be described quite simply as:

'A group of people who are passionate or concerned about something and who voluntarily interact regularly as peers to learn, to solve problems and to take action'.[4]

Collaborative networks, also known as communities of practice, give people autonomy to pursue their interests and the opportunity to increase their expertise; and they create space for people to contribute to the purpose of the organisation in surprising and innovative ways. Consequently they can be extremely motivating.

Collaborative networks are not a new idea

Sitting around fires in caves, people talked about ideas on cornering prey, the shape of arrowheads and which plants were edible. They collaborated. In ancient Rome and during the Middle Ages, guilds of metalworkers, stonemasons, potters, etc. performed a business function (training, apprenticeships, spreading inventions, and setting standards) and a social function. We all belong to collaborative networks: soccer mums and dads, book clubs, social groups and many others.

Collaborative networks have been effectively established in a plethora of industries and organisations. The CEEchange Program has demonstrated that they can also be extremely effective in a local government context.

Importantly, we know that collaborative networks do not need to be left to chance. They can be created deliberately and can contribute significantly to organisational culture change and the achievement of strategic objectives. To do so requires an understanding of how they differ from traditional organisational structures and how different managerial approaches need to be applied to them.

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4. Senge P, The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organisation, Currency, 1990, De Geus A, ''The living Company'', Harvard Business Review, March – April 1997

OVERCOMING BARRIERS IS ALWAYS A CHALLENGE

4.3| The difference between a collaborative network and a project team or committee

You might say, "This just sounds like another committee!" However, collaborative networks are very different to committees in operation and potential outcomes. Some of the key differences between a collaborative network and a project team or committees are shown in the table below. The table indicates that many traditional management approaches are not suitable for collaborative networks.

	Collaborative network	Project team/committee
What's the purpose?	Varies. Involves sharing knowledge, tackling complex issues and developing individual and organisational capabilities	To accomplish a specific task
Who participates?	Self-selection based on expertise or interest	Participants are nominated or have a direct role in the project's tasks
What holds them together?	Passion, commitment, and identification with the group and its expertise	Project goals and milestones, agenda, governance requirements
What happens?	Focus on finding new ways, experimenting, creating, learning. Emphasis on doing [practices] rather than reporting	The agenda is set by management. Focus on tasks. Formal reporting arrangements
How clear are the boundaries?	Fuzzy and dynamic	Clear

4.4| Creating the conditions for success

One the best ways to describe the nature of collaborative networks is to examine the very different management philosophies that must be applied in order to develop effective groups.

Executives in council have an enormous impact on the success of a collaborative network. While the resources provided to support the network may vary dramatically between organisations, in successful models what does not vary is the executives providing a supportive environment: legitimacy, a 'license to operate' and regular encouragement for the network's activities.

Members derive substantial value individually from participating. The role of executives is to create an environment where people willingly contribute their energy and ideas beyond the level required by their roles alone. You can't mandate participation in a collaborative network; the leaders' role is to create the conditions where it is attractive for people to participate.

In successful models, executives and senior management provide a supportive environment in the following ways:

- Not 'over-managing' groups — rather than the natural tendency to ask for regular reports and progress against key performance indicators, encourage the group to try things to see what works and if they don't then encourage them to try something else.

- Asking the group for indicators that suggest the collaborative network is making progress. For example, the number of messages posted to the group forum is an indicator of the level of group activity.

- Resisting the natural inclination to make these indictors into measures or targets (e.g. the group must post X messages per month). Indicators are useful. Turning them into targets creates behaviour that 'games the system' to ensure the target is met.

- Letting other people know they support the collaborative network: it's more than being supportive, it is publicly demonstrating your support.

- Making sure all managers know the senior leaders support the network and that they know their support is critical as well. If managers don't support the collaborative network they will send subtle messages that discourage their staff from contributing. **More information on the important role of leaders can be found in Chapter 5.**

Collaborative networks usually take the form of an informal peer-to-peer learning structure which complements the formal structures of the organisation. These networks largely facilitate grassroots activities which change behaviour and cultural norms and can achieve things that are difficult using the formal structures.

4.5| The value of building a collaborative network

Collaborative networks can deliver value to councils in the following ways.

DELIVERING VALUE TO COUNCILS THROUGH COLLABORATIVE NETWORKS

1. Cost savings and efficiency through the transfer of best practices.

2. Better decision-making as a result of advice obtained from colleagues (including those in different departments).

3. Innovation through the combination and cross-pollination of ideas.

4. Better capability for coordinated action across divisions.

5. A more motivated workforce that delivers better service to the community.

6. Staff equipped with the knowledge, resources and tools to deliver sustainability outcomes within council and in the local community.

4.6| Collaborative networks within the CEEchange Program

Collaborative networks were implemented by all councils within the CEEchange Program, with some councils establishing more than one. While most of the networks focused on the sustainability of internal council operations, some were external collaborative networks designed to improve engagement and sustainability within the LGA community. For example Ku-ring-gai Council sought to create a collaborative network in one of its neighbourhoods to support efforts to reduce water consumption and conserve a valuable riparian zone.

However, one council chose a different focus but still with sustainability in mind. In addition to a collaborative network focussed on internal sustainability, Coffs Harbour City Council created CHAOS (Coffs Harbour Agents of Sustainability) which actually sought to improve engagement within the Council in order to deliver improved engagement with the community. The CHAOS network is a place that council officers can present ideas and proposals and seek feedback and advice from members across council operations. A number of projects have now benefited from CHAOS review and advice resulting in better project outcomes.

4.7| The benefits of collaborative networks observed during CEEchange

Through the CEEchange Program, a number of positive outcomes were observed (in addition to those listed above) when collaborative networks were developed to deliver CEE for sustainability.

POSITIVE OUTCOMES

1. Some immediate improvements to sustainability performance – e.g. energy saved, waste minimised.

2. An educative function – staff were more cognisant of their own footprint and changing behaviour and were starting to educate others.

3. Sustainability as a concept was more firmly positioned in council and among decision-makers.

4. An outlet was provided for individuals with a passion.

5. Senior management were engaged around sustainability, and were given a reason to engage.

6. Council processes were influenced and sustainability became more embedded in organisations, for example through inclusion of sustainability references in human resource tools and frameworks.

7. Traditional, hierarchical decision-making processes were challenged.

8. Some defences were broken down in relation to engaging the external community.

Although the 'norm' of hierarchical decision-making will in all likelihood persevere among the CEEchange councils, a 'softening' of this approach was detected and there was more openness to innovative, creative and collaborative means of working. Indeed, the CEEchange Program has given cause to a number of councils to reflect more broadly on the way teams work together.
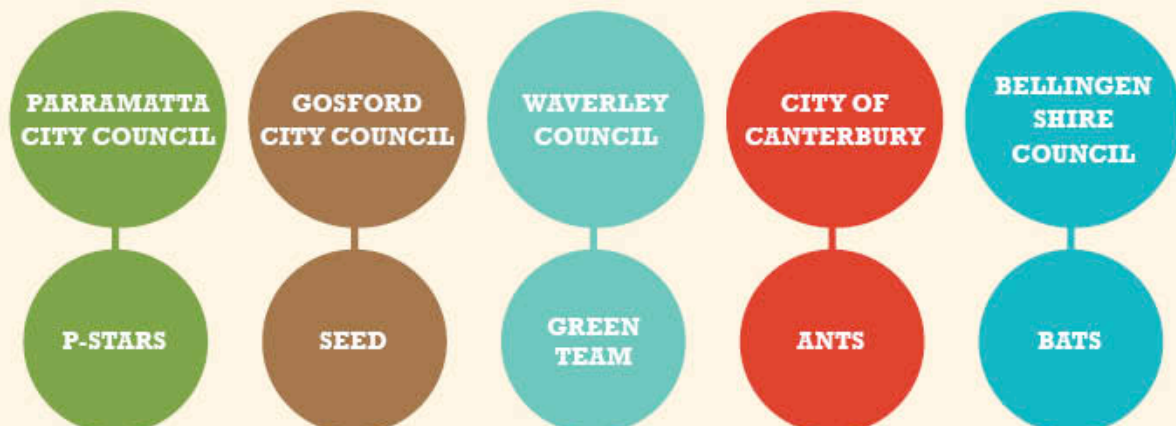
THIS IS NOT JUST ANOTHER COMMITEE

Internal collaborative networks focused on internal sustainability

CITY OF SYDNEY

GREEN CHAMPIONS

WYONG SHIRE COUNCIL

S-TEAM

MOSMAN COUNCIL

THE PIRATES

Internal and externally focused collaborative networks

COFFS HARBOUR CITY COUNCIL

CHAOS

S-TEAM

FOCUSED ON INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL ENGAGEMENT

INTERNAL SUSTAINABILITY

KU-RING-GAI COUNCIL

TANKS-A-MILLION

THE KGB

EXTERNAL COMMUNITY SUSTAINABILITY

INTERNAL SUSTAINABILITY

CEEchange extension councils collaborative networks focused on internal sustainability

PARRAMATTA CITY COUNCIL

GOSFORD CITY COUNCIL

WAVERLEY COUNCIL

CITY OF CANTERBURY

BELLINGEN SHIRE COUNCIL

P-STARS

SEED

GREEN TEAM

ANTS

BATS

Collaborative network identities can be found at the back of this guide.

5. IMPLEMENTING A COLLABORATIVE NETWORK

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IMPLEMENTING A COLLABORATIVE NETWORK 🔧TOOLS

In this chapter, you will find a wealth of information designed to help you develop, implement and maintain effective collaborative networks in your council. These instructions are based on the experience gained during the CEEchange Program between 2010 and 2012.

General Manager of Ku-ring-gai Council, John McKee, with one of the Council's sustainability mascots, Energy Man.

5.1| The 7 critical success factors for collaborative networks

This section describes seven critical factors for the successful establishment and growth of an effective collaborative network. Subsequent sections provide much greater detail on many of these critical success factors.

The seven critical success factors discussed in this how-to guide are:

1. Executive support
2. Network coordination
3. A topic that people are interested in
4. Investing in social capital
5. Taking action
6. Keeping it interesting
7. Building participation

1: Executive support

"Executive support is like oxygen for a collaborative network."[5]

Without sufficient and visible support from leaders in an organisation, collaborative networks will struggle to survive. At its core, the role of leadership is to provide a space for the group to operate in. This is not an onerous role but it does require leaders to visibly demonstrate their support to the organisation. It is not sufficient to tolerate the network's existence: the support of executives must be visible to the entire organisation.

Ideally, the CEO/GM of the council will champion the network.

Collaborative networks need the support of senior leaders who appreciate the value of the network and provide it with resources, recognition and guidance. They remove the barriers that might impede the group's development. In most cases, these leaders are not active participants in the group's activities.

A key principle in leadership support for collaborative networks is that little things can make a big difference. It can be as little as sending out an email as a senior manager telling people about the intention to establish a collaborative network and encouraging them to participate.

VISIBLE SIGNS OF SUPPORT

The City of Sydney sustainability network is called the Green Champions. One of their early initiatives was a Switch-Off Blitz designed to encourage people to turn off their computers and monitors at night. Staff received a thank you note from the Green Ninja (the face of the network) and a Fair Trade chocolate if their computers and monitors were turned off. The Green Ninja also left an information note on desks where the computers and monitors were not turned off. The Blitz was a huge success, but some staff, including some managers, were not quite as receptive. The morning after the Blitz, City of Sydney CEO, Monica Barone, sent an email to all staff to the effect of: "The Switch-Off Blitz is a great idea. Go the Green Champions!" This simple action sent a clear message to the organisation that the Green Champions and their activities were legitimate.

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5. Quote from Sarah Hatcher, Mosman PIRATES collaborative network, 4 April 2012

ASPECTS OF LEADERSHIP SUPPORT FOR COLLABORATIVE NETWORKS

- ### Take an interest in the group's development

  One of the simplest actions leaders can take is to pop in to occasional network meetings. Open the door, look at the people in the room, and say "I can't stay, but I just wanted to let you know that sustainability is important to our Council and your group is an important part of helping us become a more sustainable organisation. Keep up the good work."

- ### Support participation in the group

  In organisations, people are fascinated by things their superiors are interested in. A great way to generate interest is for leaders to ask a simple question in meetings with their direct reports. "Are any of your staff members of our sustainability network?"

- ### Provide feedback on the group's activities and contribution

  When the network undertakes an activity, send an email to all staff pointing it out and saying "well done."

- ### Encourage other leaders to support the group

  One of the common challenges evident during the CEEchange Program was where senior leaders supported the network, but their support was not visible. As a result, some line managers discouraged staff from participating (although not overtly) focusing staff on their core duties because there was no visible support from senior leaders for the network.

- ### Tackle barriers to the group's progress

  In some councils, a reference group of senior leaders has been established to help guide the development of the collaborative network. The reference group meets quarterly or half-yearly and provides feedback on the group's activities using the Most Significant Change process (**refer to Chapter 5.7**). This process takes approximately 45 minutes and engages the reference group members in a discussion about the relative value of the network's activities.

  One of the key requirements in maintaining executive support is to focus on identifying and demonstrating the value of the network. An essential activity is sharing the success stories, which is discussed in **Chapter 5.6.**

2: Coordination

An enthusiastic and effective coordinator is absolutely essential for a successful network. The coordinator will handle the administrative duties for the network and facilitate the network coming together.

One of the biggest risks for a network is when the coordinator moves on. There will normally be a few people in the group who are really passionate about its activities. It's a good idea to increasingly involve these people in activities to coordinate the network. These people become a 'core team' for the network. The core team distributes the coordination workload and makes the group much less reliant on a single individual. The role of coordinator is discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

The CHAOS collaborative network at Coffs Harbour City Council.

3: A topic of interest

If leadership support is the oxygen for a network, the fuel that drives the group is the shared passion for the topic of the network. The topic of the CEEchange Program is sustainability and community education and engagement. There is no shortage of interest from council staff for these topics so there tends to be plenty of 'fuel' to support the group's activities.

While most of the focus of this guide is on sustainability, the content is equally applicable to developing and sustaining networks on an infinite variety of topics within councils. The key pitfall to avoid is for the leaders to mandate a topic for the network that people aren't interested in. The network will be doomed before it begins.

4: Social capital

People participate in collaborative networks because they choose to. The topic is of interest to them and they enjoy being with the other network members. It's completely different to being a member of a committee where you are participating because it's your job.

A priority for collaborative networks is to build a network of relationships between the members that keeps them connected and enables a high degree of knowledge sharing and resilience to get through difficulties. So, networks need to expend some of their effort in activities designed to build social capital. Put simply, members need to know each other and trust each other.

In many cases where groups are struggling, the root cause is a failure to put sufficient emphasis on building relationships. Collaborative networks are built on social capital.

5: Taking action

People are motivated when they are involved in something that makes a difference. It follows then that the network members will be more motivated when the group is taking action. There are many potential activities that a collaborative network focused on sustainability might undertake. The first meeting of the group should establish a set of actions for the group to take (refer to **Chapter 5.2 Getting a collaborative network started in your council**). Once this is done, it is essential that one or two actions get underway as quickly as possible. In many ways, it doesn't matter exactly what the action is as the group just needs to start somewhere.

The councils participating in the CEEchange Program have undertaken a wide variety of activities. Rather than reinvent the wheel, refer to the case studies at the end of this guide and additional case studies available on the CEEchange online collaboration platform, the Sustainable Councils Network, at **www.sustainablecouncilsnetwork.org.au**. The resources needed to undertake many activities are already developed. Find an activity that make sense within your council context, borrow the resources from the site, call a few people in other councils who have done it already… and get underway.

It can be very de-motivating when groups don't take action. Much of the group's effort should be focused on implementing ideas and actions. Avoid getting into the pattern where a group repeatedly has discussions about what it should do. This is self-defeating. There is no right answer. The best bet is to pick something and start.

6: Keep it interesting

The network should have an established routine that makes participation easy. This routine is like the heartbeat of the network. For example, the group might have its scheduled meetings on the third Thursday of every month at 11.00am in a set location.

Between meetings, the group is likely to have sub-groups getting together to progress initiatives and there is likely to be electronic communication, hopefully through a collaboration platform such as the one used by the CEEchange councils, the Sustainable Councils Network. Groups should avoid using email for organising events, routine communication and implementing their actions, as email is not persistent.

The network's routine should be varied from time-to-time to maintain interest. For example, have a meeting at an off-site venue or take a trip to a nearby organisation that has some sustainability credentials (Wyong Shire Council's S-Team visited the nearby Bluetongue Brewery which was making boutique beer in a very water efficient manner), get an external speaker to talk to the group (ensuring the speaker talks for no more than half the available time and the rest of the time is available for questions and discussion), or organise a film and invite the whole council to watch during lunchtime.

Find ways to make it fun. Combine routine and excitement.

7: Participation

Of course, a collaborative network doesn't exist without members. The more members the group has, the greater its influence across the council, the greater its ability to implement actions and the more areas of the council that will be represented.

People will participate to different degrees in the network activities. It's a good idea not to make membership contingent upon regular attendance at meetings. You'll find some people participate deeply in activities that are of interest to them but allocate less effort when they are not so interested. A person might be too busy to attend many meetings but may put in a lot of effort to implement the group's activities.

In general, it's a good idea to welcome people's participation no matter its extent. A useful analogy is a whirlpool. At the centre of the whirlpool there is a lot of activity and people are actively involved. The further you move from the centre the calmer the water. Some people will stay in the calm water, sometimes for a long period of time. But something will happen eventually that will draw them into the whirlpool, seeing them become more involved in the group's activities. Conversely, some very active people will lose energy over time and temporarily retreat to the calmer waters.
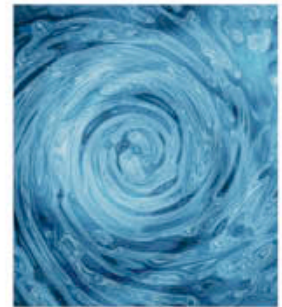
A more detailed discussion of building participation in collaborative networks, particularly considering involvement of outdoor staff, is provided in **Chapter 5.3: Building participation in your collaborative network.**

GROW THE GROUP

WELCOME ALL LEVELS OF PARTICIPATION

5.2| Getting a collaborative network started in your council

How can you establish a collaborative network in your council? Developing these networks is an organic activity. Every council context is different and there are no guarantees about what will happen or whether the network will succeed. You cannot control it in any traditional sense. However, if you understand some of the fundamentals, you have a good chance of successfully establishing a collaborative network in your council. And take heart: these networks are thriving in councils large and small and you can achieve the same results!

Getting the basics in place

As discussed in Chapter 5.1, there are critical success factors for establishing collaborative networks. In this section we will discuss the three things you need in order to start the process of establishing a collaborative network.

- A topic that enough people are interested in/passionate about – such as sustainability or community education and engagement.

- Sufficient support from the executive or organisation leaders for people to participate in the collaborative network.

- Someone, or a small group of people, to help coordinate the network and its activities.

HOW TO GAIN THE SUPPORT OF COUNCIL LEADERSHIP

- **Just ask** – General managers, directors and senior managers are often keen to participate in initiatives which help them connect with staff and show that they are interested in more than just budgets and meetings. Don't assume they won't be interested.

- **Link it to strategic objectives** – Your pitch will be stronger if you can demonstrate how your activities will help council to achieve its goals, as that is what is front-of-mind for leadership in their decision-making.

- **Show me the money** – Make sure your arguments are backed by facts and if possible demonstrate potential savings for the organisation – environmental savings, but particularly dollar savings.

- **Go to them** – Rather than organise your own meeting and seek their attendance, present your pitch for leadership support and involvement at their regular meetings, preferably with other senior management in attendance (a bit of peer pressure to do the right thing never hurts). Just five minutes to present is a good start. You can build from there.

- **Make it easy** – Those in leadership positions are generally rather busy, so make it easy for them to participate. You can help by drafting emails for them and organising quick photoshoots showing them demonstrating support.

- **Say thanks** – Remember to thank them often for their support and be sure to give credit where it is due in your communications with all staff.

Coordinators are essential to the establishment and growth of a collaborative network. The coordinator does not need to be the council expert in sustainability. It's often best that the coordinator is not a senior manager or a manager at all. The key criteria for being a coordinator include being passionate about the topic, warm and approachable (i.e. a people person) and interested in putting in some effort to establish the collaborative network. The coordinator's manager must be supportive of their role regarding the collaborative network.

For more information on the role of the coordinator, please see **Chapter 5.5: The network coordinator's role.**

Identifying interested people

Collaborative networks don't work without members. One of the first challenges is to identify people who are interested in the particular topic area (sustainability, community education and engagement, etc.) and invite them to come along to the kick-off meeting. Membership of the network is defined by interest – not by level, function, expertise or division. Your network needs to cater for varying levels of participation. Some members will be active and regular; some will be infrequent participants.

Ideas for recruiting people to the networks

1. Work your network

List all the people that you know who have shown any interest in sustainability (for example). Get two or three of them together and brainstorm ideas for additional members. Then, visit each person on the list and let them know about the collaborative network, how it might work and the things they might be interested in. Ask each of them if they know of others who might be interested and ask them to go and chat with them. The emphasis is "I know you're interested in sustainability, and this is what we are doing and I wanted to talk to you so you know what's going on before we send out an email to everyone". It is an important step - the personal touch says "You are important" to the person and they are much more likely to advocate for the collaborative network when the wider call for expressions of interest goes out.

2. Open invitation

A key activity in generating interest is an email to all staff inviting them to express interest. This email is best coming from the general manager, CEO or one of the senior leadership team.

3. Ask the leaders

Ask the directors and managers if any of their staff have shown an interest in sustainability and ask them to talk to these people to let them know the collaborative network is happening and encourage them to join in.

The first meeting

The first meeting is an opportunity for the most interested people in the council to get together and decide some of the key dimensions of the collaborative network. Ideally, you need a day for this activity, however, in most of the councils we have worked with, we have only been able to get half a day for this initial meeting.

Every group is different and there is no cookie cutter process for the running the first meeting. It's vital to understand the needs of the group before trying to tell them things. A good icebreaker is to ask everyone to introduce themselves: their role, their interest in sustainability and why they are here today.

A second very useful activity is to understand the story of sustainability in your council. This activity will take approximately 30 minutes but will help frame the context of the group's activities and establish a baseline for the participants.

Ideally, the general manager or other senior manager should pop into the meeting for one or two minutes and talk about their support for the group and the network's role in helping the council become more sustainable.

It's unlikely that everybody who is interested in sustainability will be able to attend the first meeting. A simple idea for those that can't attend for the full or half day is to hold a lunch and invite everybody who's interested to come along to the lunch. People who don't have much time, or who are uncertain about committing to the network, are then able to attend. It's an opportunity to let them know that the group is fun, voluntary and that they can participate as much or as little as they choose.

THE STORY OF THE GROUP

Invite participants to create the story of the network. You can do this even if the group is brand new.

Parts of the story can include:

1. In the past:

- How do people in the organisation view sustainability?
- Do we work together and communicate effectively between divisions or are there silos?
- To what extent is sustainability embedded in strategies, policies and processes?
- What are the barriers to sustainability and what is the organisational culture?
- Good or bad things that have been done?

2. Turning points:

- When did we start getting dedicated sustainability staff or a sustainability section?
- Is the a leadership support?

3. What will we do?

This is the group's strategy, the things it will pursue to make a difference. This is covered later in the day.

- What will we be like in the future?
- If the group is successful, what will our council be like in the future?

Establishing the right patterns

Patterns of behaviour can form remarkably easily. It's a good idea if you can get some external facilitation for the first group meeting. Your facilitator will need to have some knowledge about collaborative networks, a good bank of examples to illustrate various points and experience in using emergent practices to facilitate the day. The worst thing that can happen is for the first meeting to be run using a command and control mindset.

A good principle to bear in mind for the first meeting is "Ask, don't tell!" What this means is that the group needs to engage in dialogue and conversation to explore issues and to understand the various perspectives in the room. It's much more about conversation and much less about transmission of messages. It's good to get into the habit of involving the group in decisions. **If in doubt, ask the group.**

Identifying your purpose

An activity to get the group thinking about the purpose of the network should be undertaken early in the training day. In general, the purpose will be something like "helping make sustainability a part of the council's day-to-day activity". One of the key questions will be whether it's about sustainability in a broad sense (environmental, financial and social), simply about being 'green' or about improving engagement of staff and/or the community.

This 'purpose' will be of enduring value to the group and will help focus the group's activity. It's worth spending the time to get the purpose statement agreed. However, don't get caught up in word-smithing as it's easy to spend an hour or more finessing the words. Instead, ensure the key concepts are captured and if necessary, ask a small group to take the purpose statement and refine it before the next meeting.
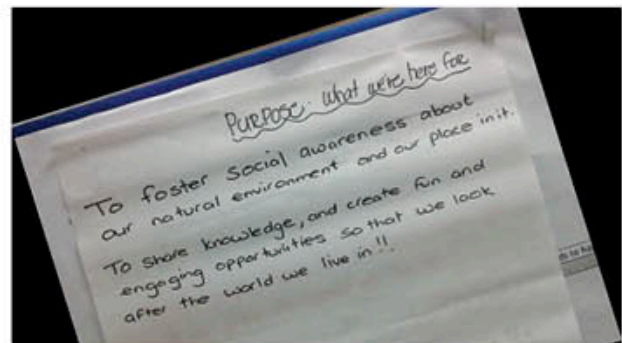
The Mosman Council PIRATES identified their purpose statement during a LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY™ workshop with members.

Network identity

A key activity is for your group to establish an identity. This identity is important in helping to distinguish the network from 'normal' council activity. If possible, it's also very useful to create a character (mascot) that the group's activities can be attributed to. These identities help the groups take on things that would normally be inappropriate or impossible to get through the hierarchy and give a sense of fun.

It's unlikely, though possible, that the group will arrive at the final identity at the first meeting. Agreeing on the identity is one of the first priorities for a collaborative network.

Please refer to the full list of networks on the back page of this guide.

NETWORK IDENTITIES ARE VALUABLE

Ku-ring-gai Council: Stella the Spider for the KGB (Ku-ring-gai Green Backs)

Mosman Council: The PIRATES (Proactive Innovation and Responsible Action Towards Environmental Sustainability)

City of Sydney: Green Champions identity featuring the Green Ninja

Action planning

The action planning process starts by getting members to work individually to come up with three actions the group should work on. Next, they join into groups of three or four with the instruction that they should work with people that they know the least. The small groups are required to come up with three actions they think as a group that the network should focus on. Then you get all the action items onto the whiteboard. You will generally need to have a few minutes discussion on each action item so everybody understands exactly what it is about and what it's aiming to achieve.

Then follows the prioritisation activity, after which members are asked to identify the ones they are most interested in being part of. There is often a big difference between the initial priorities and the things they are interested in working on personally.

FOLLOW THE PASSION

At the Bellingen kick-off day, the group identified a list of actions, including introducing electronic timesheets, surveying the Council and encouraging sustainability to be embedded in policies, etc.

But when asked to identify the things they wanted to work on, the priorities were completely different. This time the top two priorities were to introduce 'Boomerang Bags' and to conduct a lunchtime 'Food4Thought' session.

The things people are interested in are the things that will get done.

Immediate next steps

The first meeting needs to finish with identifying the immediate next steps for the network. When will the group meet next? Where will the group meet? What specific actions will people take as a result of the day? It is important that the group gets off on the right foot and starts to take action immediately.

One of the key risks, one that we have seen in a number of councils, is that the group leaves the room with good intentions but fail to take action. When they do finally hold another meeting, they tend to go round the buoy again and have additional discussions about what actions they should take. This is a self-defeating pattern where the group ends up spending much more time and energy talking about what they are going to do rather than simply picking something and making it happen.

Establish a rhythm of activity

The network will use a variety of channels for communication. One channel will be face-to-face meetings. It's a great idea to have a high degree of consistency for your regular meetings. For example, meeting in the large breakout room at 11.00am on the first Thursday of each month, followed by lunch together. If you can, find a venue other than a meeting room for a more relaxed atmosphere.

Another channel of communication will be electronic. Some councils have well-developed IT infrastructure providing collaborative spaces on the intranet, however, many councils do not have this. Most of the councils participating in the CEEchange program used the Sustainable Councils Network collaborative platform provided by the program for this purpose. It's easy to do. Visit **www. sustainablecouncilsnetwork.org.au** to sign up. There is a central forum where individuals can share ideas and you can create a group space for your collaborative network – a separate, private place where individual council networks can communicate internally.

Launching the network

Normally, the first meeting is not the place for the official 'launch' of the network, where the network is unveiled to the organisation. The launch normally occurs as an event, often a lunchtime information session combined with launching a network initiative, such as Boomerang Bags **(see the Ku-ring-gai Boomerang Bags case study).**

Several councils have used a concept called viral marketing. This approach aims to generate interest across the council so they start asking questions.

It is during the launch of the network that leadership support is best expressed to the staff community - at least for the first time. There is more on leadership support on the following page.

VIRAL MARKETING

At Ku-ring-gai Council, the sustainability network is called the KGB (Ku-ring-gai Green Backs). Over the course of several weeks, the network members put signs in prominent places such as in lifts and photocopy areas. The signs said things like "The KGB are coming…". Staff started noticing the signs and asking "What is the KGB?" People were talking about the network before they even knew what it was.

The leaders' role

As mentioned previously, executives have enormous impact on whether collaborative networks flourish or wither. This point cannot be emphasised enough. While the resources provided to support collaborative networks will vary dramatically between organisations, what cannot vary is the leaders providing a supportive environment – legitimacy, a 'license to operate' and regular encouragement for their activities.

Executive sponsorship typically consists of senior leaders who appreciate the value of the network and provide it with funding, recognition and guidance. They remove the barriers that might impede the group's development. In most cases, these people are not active participants in the group's activities. The role of providing leadership support to a collaborative network is not onerous. It can be as little as sending out an email from a senior manager telling people about the intention to establish a collaborative network and encouraging them to participate.

The natural tendency of managers and leaders will be to ask for regular reports and progress against key performance indicators. This is fine, but the way it's done is critical. Countless groups have ceased to operate through being 'over-managed'. Executives and leaders should encourage the group to try things to see what works and if they don't then encourage them to try something else.

Leaders' thinking needs to move from 'if you can't measure it, you can't manage it' to a far more appropriate philosophy espoused by Einstein: "Not everything that counts can be counted and not everything that can be counted, counts."

Leaders, let people know you support the collaborative networks. Make sure managers know you support it and that they know their support is critical as well. If managers don't support the collaborative networks they will send subtle messages that discourage their staff from contributing.

5.3| Increasing participation in your collaborative network

Developing a vibrant and effective collaborative network requires participation from across the council. There needs to be sufficient members to share the workload so that the group can take action to improve the sustainability culture in councils. Ideally, every department/division would be represented in the network.

Guidance on activities to build participation when launching the network is provided here and in the previous section.

Cater for all levels of participation

People will participate to different degrees in the network activities. It's a good idea not to make membership contingent upon regular attendance at meetings. You'll find some people participate deeply in activities that are of interest to them but allocate less effort when they are not so interested. A person might be too busy to attend many meetings but may put in a lot of effort to implement the group's activities.

Membership changes over time

As your collaborative network grows and evolves, its membership will change. New members will bring new interests; active contributors get pulled away by new jobs and demanding projects; organisational priorities will change (see **Chapter 3.3: The importance of organisational context**). Sometimes these changes increase the activity levels of the network and sometimes they drain the network's energy.

Collaborative networks go through cycles of high and low energy as they grow, respond to changes and adjust and reorganise. Coordinators and core team members need to be constantly aware of the changing dynamics within their network.

DON'T PANIC

NETWORK ENERGY LEVELS WILL GO THROUGH CYCLES
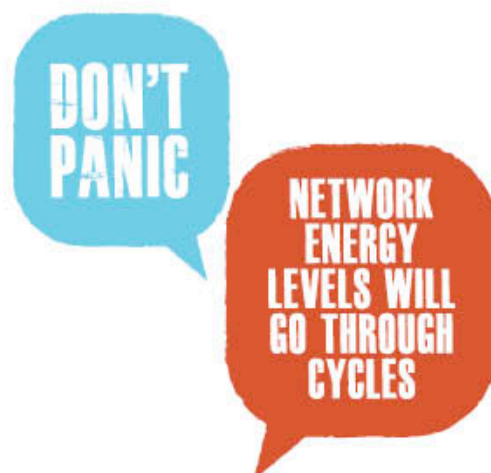
Building participation

Ideas on how to build participation in your network and its activities include:

- **Demonstrated executive support**
  Getting senior managers to say positive things about the network, which demonstrates to people that participation in the network is valued by the organisation

- **Focus on action**
  People who are passionate about sustainability or community education and engagement are motivated when their activities make a difference. A key principle in building participation is to focus on 'doing' rather than simply talking. A group that does lots of talking without much action will find members losing interest and drifting away.

- **Engage the detractors**
  When collaborative networks take action, they are generally trying to create positive change in an organisation. It is highly unlikely that everyone in the organisation will openly embrace the desired changes. There will always be people who complain. A good habit to get into is to personally engage with people who criticise or complain about the network or its activities. Treat these critics as potential members of the network. You might be surprised at what happens.

- **Find the influencers**
  There are people in your council who are very influential and 'well connected'. Ask yourself and others 'who do people go to to find out what's going on around here?' and you will know who they are. These influencers may not be interested in sustainability or community education and engagement and they may not want to be part of the network. Nonetheless, it's important to keep them in touch with the purpose of the network and what it's doing. Negative comments from influencers can have a disproportionate effect on people's willingness to participate. You can't stop them saying negative things but if you keep them informed and ask them for their ideas on things, they at least have the opportunity to be a positive influence for the network.

- **Discuss 'value' regularly**
  One of the things that builds participation (and encourages retention of members) is understanding how the network adds value – to the council, to the community and to the network members themselves. In the early days the emphasis will likely be on value to the members (learning, building relationships, knowing who to contact to solve problems, increasing profile, etc.) and to the council (through actions that improve sustainability, save money, change behaviour, etc.). Encourage members to have regular discussions about how the network is adding value – this will help do more things that members find valuable and help them communicate the value of the network to their colleagues.

- **Strategic 'targeting'**
  Look at the network members and which areas of the council are represented. If there are areas that should be represented, but aren't, speak to the manager of the areas identified or staff in the area that members may be familiar with and find out if there are any staff in those areas interested in sustainability.

Engaging outdoor/operations staff

A common challenge across all of the councils participating in the CEEchange Program was engaging outdoor staff in the collaborative network.

Outdoor staff have a significant role in the council's sustainability activities and are often the first point of contact between the council and residents. Therefore, engaging them in the collaborative networks around sustainability has been a priority for many councils.

However, there are often significant cultural differences between indoor staff and outdoor staff. We have yet to see a local government collaborative network that effectively bridges this cultural divide on an ongoing basis (although the City of Sydney has made a good start). The recommended strategy is to design your collaborative network in a way that works effectively for indoor staff. By all means, invite participation from outdoor staff, but have realistic expectations about the extent to which they can engage. Once your collaborative network is functioning effectively, consider establishing a separate network or sub-group for the outdoor staff. **The City of Sydney 'Fluoro Green Champions'** case study at the back of this guide is a good example of this strategy in action.

Trying to design a hybrid network that works for both indoor and outdoor staff is likely to result in a design that doesn't work for either, in large part due to different locations, different work hours and different areas of interest.

Notwithstanding the above, a range of actions can be taken to increase participation of outdoor staff in your collaborative network, including:

- Looking for and promoting actions taken by outdoor staff that have a sustainability benefit (though in many cases the outdoor staff themselves will not have attached the label of 'sustainability 'to the idea);

- Using 'wet days' as an opportunity to meet with outdoor staff and share information about sustainability pertinent to their roles

- Communicating with outdoor staff in their natural environment, such as at smokos, during tool-box talks or at shift change-overs.

IT'S JUST COMMON SENSE

The outdoor staff at Wyong Shire Council had started using fly ash from a local power station as road base. It was lighter and cheaper than other alternatives, and just as effective. It also meant that the fly ash was recycled and didn't end up as landfill. "We didn't do it because of sustainability," stated one of the supervisors, "It's just common sense."

5.4| Reinvigorating a network

It's tempting to think that once a collaborative network has developed, or is mature, that it becomes relatively stable. However, collaborative networks change and grow during their development and maturity as much as they do during their formation. Changes in membership, organisational context and focus of the group cause the network's energy level to fluctuate over time.

Collaborative networks can lose energy for a range of reasons:

- **Expecting too much too soon**
  Networks need to 'crawl before they can walk'. Numerous times during the CEEchange Program we heard the question, "Why aren't they tackling the big issues?" Although done with good intentions, this type of expectation can put unnecessary pressure on a voluntary group.

- **Changes in organisational context**
  A newly elected council, a new general manager or management team or an organisational restructure can all be 'game-changers'.

- **Over-management**
  Collaborative networks need autonomy. Too much 'command and control' from either management or the network coordinator can cause participation to evaporate.

- **Members getting low value for their time**
  People participate in a collaborative network as volunteers. They do so because they get value from their participation: learning, ability to make a difference, being a bit 'edgy' in the organisation, having fun, building relationships, etc. As soon as the 'value' drops below a threshold level, they will lose interest. The group might become boring, there might be too much emphasis on administrative tasks, individuals might be dominating the discussion and agenda etc. Be aware of these issues and regularly discuss the 'value' of the group with members.

- **Insufficient leadership support**
  Having leadership support is only half the battle. This support must be visible; members need to 'feel' that their participation is valued and that the group is supported.

- **Insufficient 'social capital'**
  The effective working relationships in groups is the social capital that binds them together in many ways. This social capital is mostly built during face-to-face activities. If groups meet infrequently, and if meetings don't provide enough opportunity for them to interact, not enough focus on the network's social capital.

Diagnosing the challenge

In general, asking the group 'why' questions is not a particularly effective approach as it generally generates lots of opinions that, while interesting, aren't specific enough to be actionable. Asking more specific questions such as "When did you start losing interest?" and "Was there a moment, or a change in the way the group operated, that caused you to ask whether being part of the group was worthwhile?" will generally be more effective.

GAME CHANGERS

During the CEEchange Program, one of the partner councils went through an intense 'efficiency review' that significantly reduced people's willingness to participate. They were focussed more on 'doing their jobs' lest their participation in the collaborative network be seen as them being under-utilised in their primary role.

Conversely, another council experienced significant leadership changes that greatly assisted the collaborative networks, with senior leaders actively encouraging participation and looking for ways to improve cross-council collaboration.

INVISIBLE SUPPORT

One of the CEEchange councils had a sustainability network that had been operating for several years, but which was flagging. As part of the program, the coordinator approached senior leaders to ask if they would be part of the reference group for the network. She was amazed at how supportive they were and impressed by the group's efforts: "It's the first time I've been given any inkling that executives thought the network was worthwhile!"

Activities to reinvigorate the group

The following list provides some ideas about reinvigorating a network when energy and participation is flagging.

- **Understand the value**
  Conduct regular discussions with members about the value of the group – value to the organisation and to the members. Have this sort of discussion as soon as you notice energy levels dropping.

- **Focus on action**
  Reflect on the group's activities for the past year. Can you write three half-page 'success stories' about the group's activities? If the answer is no, then the group probably needs to focus more on action. Action is a panacea for many of the illnesses of a network. Members get satisfaction from delivering results, leaders see the value of the group and members build relationships by working together to tackle issues. Ask the group 'what one action will we undertake?' and the important follow-on question 'who will get involved to make it happen?'

- **Review the 'orientations' of your network**
  Conduct a discussion with members to determine the current 'orientations' of the network and their views about what these orientations should be in the future. The 'network orientations' are described in **Chapter 5.6: Monitoring and Evaluation**. To conduct the activity, break the members into groups of three or four and ask them to consider the current situation against each of the orientations and what they think the network should be like in the future. Get them to score each orientation from 0 (this orientation is a very low priority for our network) to 5 (this orientation is a very high priority for our network). The resultant 'radar chart' will show what changes in emphasis are required for the group's activities.

- **Engage executives**
  Executive support is critical for a network's success. It is essential that leaders articulate their expectations of collaborative networks, are clear about their role as sponsors and understand the value the collaborative network is delivering. An effective way to do this is to collect 'success stories' (three half-page stories are sufficient) and run a 45-minute Most Significant Change (MSC) selection process with key managers to build understanding of what's important and to build their support for the network. It ensures they have a clear picture of how the network adds value and will provide feedback to network members. **A step-by-step on the Most Significant Change process can be found in Chapter 5.7 of this guide.**

Spice it up

Do a few activities that 'break the mould'. Instead of their usual meeting, the Wyong S-Team visited some local organisations that were making a difference with sustainability. At Coffs Harbour, the S-Team met over a lunch in the park. Other groups have held their meetings at the depot site and other council locations. Identify 'patterns' that are holding the group back and do something to break these patterns and create new ones.

5.5| The critical role of the network coordinator

The coordinator of a collaborative network has a critical role in the development of a collaborative network. They set the direction and help the network to not only see the benefits of collaboration but also actively work towards creating the environment for success.

Their responsibilities include:

- Organising network meetings
- Maintaining the network email/mail distribution lists
- Taking responsibility for and making sure the shared information/knowledge resources are sustained
- Keeping an eye on how effectively the network is operating, and ensuring network members are motivated and kept on track when and where appropriate
- Representing the network, both internally and for the broader organisation.

This is not necessarily a role for subject matter experts. Rather it is the ability of the network coordinator to engage and involve others that is important. There is a lot of effort needed behind the scenes to keep the network, and interest in it, bubbling along.

The role of the coordinator is not to tell the network what to do or to try to 'manage' its activities. The coordinator needs to care about the network and its area of interest and help facilitate and nurture the group's development. Network coordinators during the CEEchange Program spent anywhere from four to 16 hours per week on network-related activities. The workload tends to be higher in the early stages of the network's development as the coordinator needs to apply considerable effort to get the network of the ground. Because the coordinator role is critical to the establishment of a collaborative network, network coordination activities during CEEchange were funded by the Program. If a council is committed to establishing a collaborative network, allowing the coordinator to have their coordination role and a set number of hours written into their work plan will help to ensure health of the network.

> During the evaluation of the CEEchange Program, researchers were told consistently by all councils involved that having a coordinator to do basic administrative tasks for the network was important, and that it would be beneficial for that role to be included in the coordinator's work plan in recognition of the network's legitimacy and executive support.

Developing a core team

As you can imagine, all the ideas and activities discussed in this guide can be very time-consuming for an individual coordinator. So we suggest a 'core team' approach where the workload is distributed and where reliance on any single individual is minimised.

Another reason to build a core team is that one of the riskiest times for a collaborative network is when a coordinator changes. Developing a core team is a key strategy in mitigating this risk as responsibilities are shared rather than being vested in one individual.

Coordinators should pay particular attention to the people that are most interested in the network and its activities. Delegate responsibilities to these people and get them more involved in running the network and in key decisions. This has an important additional benefit in distributing the workload of coordinating the network.

Regular activities

The coordinator should set up and manage the online methods used by the network to communicate and collaborate. Some councils have intranets with fully functional collaboration functionality. For councils without this infrastructure, the CEEchange Program has established a collaboration platform that can be used by any council. It's easy for all participating councils to set up a private group section site for use by its network members. The site is at **www.sustainablecouncilsnetwork.org.au**

The online collaboration platform is an important communication tool for 'lurking' and as yet uninvolved/ uncommitted network members. The core team/ coordinator act as owners of the membership list and are responsible for list administration such as adding or deleting members and moderating posts (should this be required).

They also need to be aware that the initial stages of a discussion require considerable energy from the core team, both online or in "back-channel"[6] activity to encourage others to post messages or to respond to them.

Build social capital

Build social capital by ensuring the group doesn't become too fixated on task. Remember that a network's strength comes from the web of relationships that connect members. Whenever the group's energy starts waning or when the group is not as collaborative as they should be, it's a good bet that you need to do something to build the social capital of the group. Ask the group members what they'd like to do to get to know each other better or post a question to the community in the groups discussion forum on the Sustainable Councils Network.

Communicate regularly

A regular message to the group is an opportunity to interest those on the periphery of the group. For example, send out a weekly summary of activity with links highlighting a "help wanted" request or a great tip/trick or a discussion seed.

Responsiveness is important in the early days of the network so the core team/coordinator should be willing to work behind the scenes to get answers up quickly.

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6. 'Back channel' communication is the behind-the-scenes activity the coordinator does to help develop an active online presence for the group and to involve people in the network's activities

DEVELOP THE NETWORK'S CONNECTIVITY THROUGH REGULAR COMMUNICATION ACTIVITIES

- Feature a network member on the discussion list or intranet
- Ask a member to keep an on-line learning journal (perhaps as a blog) for a week
- Communicate with a participant in the discussion forum
- Send out a monthly newsletter
- Feature interesting or controversial content
- Conduct a simple email survey
- Interview a network member
- Develop a quick quiz or network challenge with a fun prize
- Find and link to interesting content from elsewhere in the organisation or externally
- Meet with a network member for a coffee conversation. Listen for success stories.
- Send a welcome letter/or email to new members

Welcome!

Be quick to welcome new contributors/members as soon as they make their first move towards participating — a direct message, question or comment. Send them a message thanking them for their contribution and expressing your hope that they continue to bring their expertise to share with the network.

Get the network some broader publicity

What opportunities are there for communicating to the broader organisation? Write a few paragraphs, including stories when you can, for any internal newsletter or website which describes the network and what it's doing/trying to achieve.

Shout about quick wins

When a tricky question has been answered or a great idea has been shared between the network members that makes a real difference to the business, celebrate and make sure that everyone hears about it.

Monitoring activity

Take a strong lead in monitoring activity — in the online as well as real time spaces. How well are the discussion forums or blogs going? Assess effectiveness through the following measures:

- Contribution frequency
- Response frequency
- How many questions/challenges are still unanswered?
- How many new members have we got this quarter?
- How many members have left or are no longer contributing? Follow up to find out why.

More information on evaluating activity can be found in Chapter 5.6: Monitoring and evaluating the progress of collaborative networks.

Keep the connectivity going

Schedule regular teleconferences, publicise and celebrate successes, put together a page of frequently asked questions and contribute regularly to the discussion forum.

Face-to-face meetings

It's vital to hold face-to-face meetings — monthly is strongly recommended. Meetings in real life allow network members to strengthen relationships, spark ideas off each other and it is the ideal time to introduce any new members.

Maintain a business solutions focus

The network is improving its practices for the benefit of the council. Continue to strive for answers to questions and take every opportunity to publicise the success stories. Wherever possible, link the network activities to an aspect of your council's strategy.

Performance needs regular review

Conversations with network members regularly will put you in touch with the stories being told in the network. There is also a lot to be said for testing commitment by raising the possibility of stopping the meetings or removing an unused tool — people will quickly object if they believe in it or if they are using it.

Stay open to tweaking

Be aware of the possibility that the network might need to be "tweaked" or re-invented or even divided into sub-communities. Look and listen for the signs that the network might be running out of steam or getting too big to manage comfortably in its present format. Be responsive to the direction that the network is taking and don't be afraid to take action for change.

TIP: SHARE THE LOAD

One of the key pitfalls to avoid is the coordinator doing all the work. This pattern can be easily established, especially when the coordinator is really enthusiastic and very keen for the group to make progress.

The net result is that the group continually looks to the coordinator as the person to execute their ideas. To overcome this, ask the group to identify the specific actions needed to achieve their objectives. Once this is done, ask the group who is going to do what. If no one is prepared to contribute to the activity simply drop the activity and ask the group what things they would be more interested in doing.

5.6| Monitoring and evaluating the progress of collaborative networks

Collaborative networks, like most other council activities, will inevitably face questions around its of "return on investment" and measurement of progress.

We have two pieces of advice. Firstly, the progress of collaborative networks and the value they add to organisations is largely intangible and difficult to measure using quantitative techniques favoured in most councils. It is more productive to think of the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) task in terms of 'indicators' and 'signs of life'.

The monitoring and evaluation task has two dimensions: activity and effectiveness. One-off measurements (spot values) can be misleading and they are much more useful when they provide a longitudinal view. Thus, the selected indicators/signs of life should be collected regularly and the results viewed in the context of their change over time.

The second word of advice is to start your M&E activities immediately. Don't wait until you are asked to demonstrate the value of the network.

Adding value

It's useful to revisit the various ways that collaborative networks can deliver value to councils, which include:

- Cost savings and efficiency through the transfer of best practices

- Better decision making as a result of advice obtained from colleagues

- Innovation through the combination and cross pollination of ideas

- Better capability for coordinated action across divisions

- A more motivated workforce that delivers better service to the community

- Staff equipped with the knowledge, resources and tools to deliver sustainability outcomes within council and in the community

The M&E task must consider the different ways in which the networks can add value.

Don't get too fixed on what you are trying to measure. Many of the benefits of these networks emerge over time rather than being planned.

Success stories

The single most important facet of monitoring and evaluating collaborative networks is to notice and collect examples of the group's activities and impact – the success stories![7] Success stories are not case studies, they are real-life descriptions of what happened. They do not need to be lengthy. They need to describe how network activity translated into organisational value: behaviour change, community reputation, improved processes, efficiencies, standardisations, etc.

> These stories are not fiction; they are facts, wrapped in context and delivered with emotion.

A common mistake is to collect these examples only when they are needed: for a report, to stave off pressure about the network's value, etc. Don't wait until you need them, start collecting them now and it should be an ongoing activity. One way to organise the examples is using a story bank application like Zahmoo (www.zahmoo.com).

Putting together these success stories will involve getting both sides of the story from the people featured in the activity and the people affected or benefiting from the activity. Success stories describe what happened and why what happened was significant.

Collecting success stories is a little like journalism. There are three main steps:

- Start by noticing something significant;

- Then collect information about the event through research and interviews, including describing the issue or challenge that was being addressed; and

- Construct a brief and compelling account of the matter.

Success stories also perform another key role: they provide recognition for the people involved in the network's activity. They also build the identity of councils around the network topic. For example, a council that values sustainability will be teeming with stories about sustainability.

These success stories also become the key input for another aspect of M&E for collaborative networks, the Most Significant Change Process.

Monitoring progress using Most Significant Change

Most Significant Change (MSC) is a relatively recent innovation in monitoring and evaluation. It was developed by Rick Davies in the mid-1990s as part of a water infrastructure project in Bangladesh. It is widely used by government and non-government agencies to assess the impact of hard to measure initiatives. In 2008 the American Society of Evaluation selected MSC as the most important new evaluation technique.

MSC involves the regular collection and participatory interpretation of stories (examples) about change rather than predetermined quantitative indicators. These examples are reviewed through various levels within the organisation and feedback is provided at each level as to why particular examples were selected as most significant.

7. Wegner, E., McDermot, R., and Snyder, W., Cultivating Communities of Practice, Harvard Business School Press, Boston, 2002, p168

MSC is strongly recommended to form part of the M&E plan for each council's collaborative network. It should be done quarterly or half-yearly, engaging network members, managers and senior executives as the layers of selection.

The MSC process would use examples of the network's activities (the success stories being collected on an ongoing basis) as a key input. The various selection levels will gain a strong gut feel about how the network is making a difference and provide feedback on the things that are considered most important/significant.

This feedback will enable the network to continually monitor and adjust its activities.

A description of how to conduct the MSC process is included in the following pages.

Net promoter score

Net promoter score is based on a simple idea: if you have more promoters than detractors your group/organisation will thrive. The net promoter score[8] (NPS) is based on a single question around the likelihood that the respondent would recommend something to a friend or colleague.

For collaborative networks, two questions are suggested. The first question is "How likely is it that you would recommend the [insert collaborative network name] to a colleague or friend?" This question is posed to the members of the network and the result is monitored over time.

The second question is "How likely is it that your manager would recommend the collaborative network to their staff?" Again, this question is posed to network members. This question will indicate the extent to which they feel supported by their manager in participating in the collaborative network.

The idea is that this metric will encourage the networks to use their own judgement and initiative to identify how to maintain/improve the NPS – in other words, how to make their participation in the network more rewarding/enjoyable/valuable.

The second question will provide some insight into the executive support the members are experiencing. Calculation of NPS is recommended each quarter.

BUILD STRENGTH THROUGH COLLABORATION

Calculating your network's NPS

Calculate NPS by getting collaborative network members to respond to each question by giving a score between 0 (not at all likely to recommend) and 10 (extremely likely to recommend).

- Count the number of respondents who scored 9 or 10. These are your promoters.

- Work out the percentage of promoters in the whole group.

- Count the number of respondents who scored 0 through to 6. These are your detractors.

- Work out the percentage of detractors in the whole group.

- Subtract the percentage of detractors from the percentage of promoters to calculate your net promoter score.

For Australian organisations, an NPS score of +40 is very good. The very best organisations have an NPS of +50 or more. Don't be put off if your NPS is zero or lower. Many of the CEEchange networks experienced these scores early in their development. The key question is "How do we make the network as valuable as possible to its members?"

Signs of life

There are many indicators that are useful 'signs of life' of collaborative networks. These are indicators of activity (including participation) and are useful when viewed as trends over time. Be careful when considering changes as stand-alone events.

- Membership level (noting that what constitutes membership needs to be clear)

- Membership growth

- Number of meetings, attendees per meeting, repeat attendees and number of unique attendees over time

- Number of contributors to online discussions

- Activities undertaken by the group

Some networks might find it useful to record the amount of time that members spend on network activity which can provide rough order of magnitude indications of return on investment.

Community orientations

Collaborative networks learn together in different ways. Nine different orientations, or areas of focus, have been identified[9] and every network has different orientations. These orientations are influenced by the context within which the group operates and will have significant influence on the type of technology required to support the group's activities.

'Radar charts' can be produced showing your group's orientations and an example is included below. For most networks, the orientations will change over time. As part of the M&E process, revisiting these orientations every six to twelve months is strongly recommended.

8. Reichheld, Frederick F. (December 2003). "The One Number You Need to Grow". Harvard Business Review
9. Wegner, White and Smih; Digital Habitats: Stewarding Technology for Communities, CPSquare, Portland, 2009.

COMMUNITY ORIENTATION MAPPING
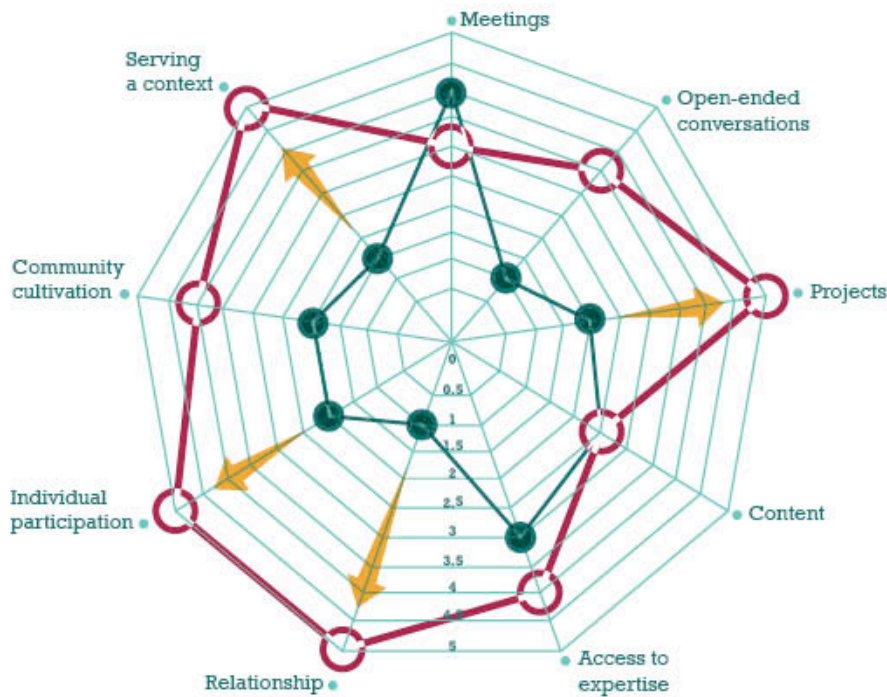
To map your orientations get your group to score itself from 0-5 on each of the orientations listed below.

Major changes

Current

Future

THE NINE ORIENTATIONS ARE:

1. Meetings
Emphasis is on regular meetings and the visible participation of the group asserts the network's existence.

2. Open-ended conversations
Some networks rarely or never meet and they conduct their 'conversations' through online technologies such as discussion lists.

3. Projects
The group focuses on specific issues, often splitting into sub-groups to tackle particular tasks.

4. Content
The group is primarily interested in creating, sharing and providing access to documents, tools and other content; it may involve the creation of content or the organisation of content to make it more accessible to others; leads to standardised practices.

5. Access to expertise
These groups focus on answering questions from members, fulfilling requests for advice or engaging in collaborative, just-in-time problem-solving.

6. Relationships
Building effective relationships, credibility and trust; breaking down barriers to collaboration; there is an emphasis on knowing each other personally.

7. Individual participation
This orientation ensures members can participate in highly customised ways, using the content of the group to support their individual needs, tools and methods of operating.

8. Community cultivation
This orientation has a focus on democratic governance structures that give members a voice in the group; lots of attention is on convening meetings, undertaking projects, connecting members and developing the 'sense of community' that underpins the group's development.

9. Serving a context
Many collaborative networks focus on serving a context, such as sustainability, that goes beyond the learning of members. These groups are 'outwards-facing' and feel a responsibility to develop capabilities that help shape organisational practice and behaviours.

These orientations are not mutually exclusive. Most collaborative networks will have aspects of many of the nine orientations. Importantly, orientations are not fixed and their mix changes over time as the group evolves.

5.7| The Most Significant Change process

Step 1 – Collect stories of significant change

When collecting success stories about network activities, ask two simple questions of the people affected by the initiative:

1. What is the most significant change that happened since the initiative started?

2. Why is this change significant for you?

Step 2 – Identify and assemble the decision-makers

This step is crucial to the success of the evaluation and consists of the evaluation designers asking the question, "Who needs to know, in their gut, the impact this initiative is having?" These decision-makers could be at any level in the organisation, in any location. The evaluation designer then arranges the decision-makers into groups of six to eight people and arranges for these groups to meet for 45 minutes or so to consider the significant change stories collected in Step 1.

Step 3 - Facilitating the MSC selection process

The selection process lies at the heart of Most Significant Change.

Remember that the aim of the selection process is to generate conversation, discussion, debate so that participants learn about the topic under consideration and about one another – what they see as important and what as a group they see as important.

Try to work with three stories of network activities.

Use a whiteboard with five columns: Story Title, Facts, Opinions/Reactions, Voting, Why Selected.

The MSC selection process

1. Ask each participant to take turns reading a network activity story. Remind them that the selection process works best if the stories are heard because we are dealing with oral stories.

2. After each story is read ask the participants about the essence of the story, key words, facts they heard. The facilitator writes this in the Facts column. Eliciting facts help everyone really hear and remember the story. Try to avoid eliciting opinions at this stage but if opinions are forthcoming, move to the next column and ask for reactions and opinions, both positive and negative, about the story. But don't compare to the other stories. You might divide the opinions column into positive and negative.

3. Read the next story.

4. Repeat steps 1 and 2 until all stories are done.

5. When all the stories are read, and facts and opinions have been elicited, the facilitator should then read back all the notes in the Facts and Opinions columns.

This gives participants some thinking time before voting starts.

6. The next step is to pose the question for the selection process. This question needs to reflect the purpose of the inquiry. For example, if you are interested in how well your new activities were implemented, you might ask: which stories best illustrate activity impact?

7. Voting. Then, with a show of hands, ask people to vote. Write up the number of votes for each story in the Voting column.

8. Why selected? Start with the lowest vote (hear the minority voice first because they might have a radically different perspective the others should hear) and ask why these people chose these stories. Record why they chose these stories.

   Documenting the reason for selection is the most important part of the process and should be done carefully and fully. Get all the reasons why people made their votes.

   Once all the reasons why people have voted the way they have has been drawn out, the facilitator encourages debate and dialogue among the participants about which story best represents the impact of the branding initiatives.

   Then re-vote.

9. After the re-vote, negotiate which stories will be chosen. Ideally a single story is selected but this is not always possible. And because the aim is to generate discussion, it's not vitally important how many stories are selected. Here it is important to gain agreement from the group, even if it is to agree to disagree, which stories will be selected. If someone disagrees with a story that is chosen by the majority, document that a person disagrees strongly. Include any caveats with each story and document clearly why the story was selected.

   After the main selection process set aside some time for reflection and ask the following types of questions to the group:

   - What was not in the stories that you thought might have been there?

   - What are some of the provocative questions you could ask? For example, why such pathetic stories?

   - What actions should occur? What should be dropped, kept or created?

   - Are there any lessons for practice?

The selection process might take 45 minutes or more depending on the length of conversation generated. The first story will take longer than subsequent stories as people get used to the process.

Further Reading:
Dart, J. and Davies, R., A Dialogical, Story-Based Evaluation Tool: The Most Significant Change Technique, American Journal of Evaluation, 24(2), 2003, 137.