

**SEARCH CRITERIA**

<b>Model</b>	Model B: Programmed learning Model
<b>Industry</b>	government, commercial, community
<b>Focus/Level</b>	Industry, Community
<b>Delivery Mode of Learning</b>	Adult learning
<b>Outcomes</b>	Technical training, Building leadership skills, Personal capacity building training
<b>Special Interest Groups</b>	Other

**1. PROJECT TITLE**

Building Regional Capacity Short Course: Natural Resource Management short course

**2. FUNDERS**

The Building Regional Capacity: Natural Resource Management Short Course (BRC) pilot project was funded by Agriculture Fisheries and Forestry, Australia, Environment Australia and developed by the Australian Landcare Council working group with advice from the funders and the National Landcare Facilitator. It was delivered regionally with the use of regional examples and regional networks.

The total cost was \$300 000

**3. PROVIDERS**

The key providers were trainers from the group Working With People Pty Ltd. Working with People is group of 6 private consultants based nationally. Their work is in rural and regional Australia and they have skills that span economic, social and environmental education and extension. The project was managed by Land Connect Australia Pty Ltd.

Registered Training Organisations within each regional provided the means for participants to build on the work done in the course work towards accreditation for a diploma.

**4. KEY CONTACTS**

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## 5. INDUSTRY/ISSUE/GEOGRAPHY

This project was for individuals who work locally with natural resource management issues at all levels within regions, that is at government, commercial and community levels.

The issue was dealing with the interface between rural production and nature conservation as well and natural resource management for sustainable farming.

The project was aimed nationally although it was offered to 8 regions in Australia:

South Australia	South East
Victoria	Glenelg Hopkins
NSW	Hunter
Tasmania	Whole of Tasmania
ACT	Upper Murrumbidgee
Western Australia	Northern Agricultural
Queensland	Burdekin Dry Tropics
Northern Territory	Alice Springs.

The Module Program covered all of the requirements for the Diploma in Natural Resource Management (Community Programs),

ie: five core units plus six generic units (two of which can be substituted for technical units).

It must be noted that significant work will be required beyond the course sessions to satisfy the assessment criteria for each unit.

The subjects were:

- COMM02A: Develop Community Networks
- HUMS02A: Analyse Own Performance
- GFGM15A: Demonstrate Basic On-Site Skills
- COMM01A: Explore and Work Within Community Cultures and Goals;
- PROJ05A: Manage Projects
- GFGM06A: Facilitate Development of Group Goals and Projects
- CHGE02A: Support Group and Community Changes in Resource Management
  
- EVAL02A: Conduct Project Evaluations
- HUMS03A: Implement the Organisation's Health and Safety Policies, Procedures and Programs
  
- REGP03A: Devise and Conduct Community Consultation
- REGP04A: Contribute to Regional Planning Process

## 6. PROJECT CONTEXT:

The National project grew out of an Australian Landcare Council recommendation for high quality training for Landcare facilitators, coordinators and community leaders at a regional level. The training was extended to included members of the community beyond this group such as members of local government and others involved with natural resource management.

**7. PROJECT NICHE (SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES):**

Although it was a national program, the intention was for it to be delivered regionally with the use of regional examples and regional networks. The project aims were to...*support and build on the skills of the wide range of people at the regional level who are responsible for natural resource management and have been critically important in the delivery of NHT programs.*

The training package is designed to:

- Equip people with the skills to create and build effective communication networks within their region
- Increase understanding of the roles and skills needed by voluntary community leaders and community groups
- Provide skills that will improve the efficiency of Natural Heritage Trust project work
- Support increased knowledge of regional strategies, policies and projects
- Equip participants to be proactive in terms of leadership, conflict and change
- Provide opportunities for participants to work on identified regional issues in a project format
- Improve knowledge of Natural Heritage Trust monitoring and evaluation criteria and processes
- Enable participants to develop personal and career directions
- Provide opportunities for participants to complete accredited training

**8. PHILOSOPHY/APPROACH:**

This course had a prescribed content as well as building the capacity of the participants to solve Natural resource management issues. Building capacity was done through the development and implementation of a regional project.

The course used active learning principles with a focus on identified regional issues as the regional project. The aim of the course was to provide a reference for future projects, whilst addressing current regional concerns.

Components of the course are based on David Foreman's National Competency Standards for Regional Facilitators, Coordinators and Leaders at the Community Group Level.

**9. RESOURCES, MANAGEMENT AND STAFFING STRUCTURES:**

The project was jointly administered by Agriculture, Fisheries and Forests, Australia and Environment Australia.

It was managed by Land Connect Pty Ltd and delivered by a consortium, consisting of Land Connect Australia Pty Ltd and Working With People Pty Ltd in partnership with regional training providers.

Land Connect Australia Pty Ltd is a registered training organisation which has experience providing training in natural resource management, rural development and agriculture.

Project co-ordination and training assessment were provided by Land Connect Australia Pty Ltd and the co-ordinator of the project is Victoria Mack, a Director of Land Connect.

## **10. PROCESS/METHODS USED:**

### **Course design**

- The training course was based on the overall results of the training needs analysis, utilising units from the Skills Toolkit.
- Given the common theme emerging from the training needs analysis the consultants did not have to provide a customised course for each region.
- Local regional projects or “case studies” were a part of each pilot. This approach has considerable potential but was only partially successful in the pilot and needs to be reconsidered.
- The course content was broken into three workshops (modules). An outline of the full eight day version is attached.

### **National accreditation**

- The course offered participants the opportunity to achieve a nationally recognised vocational level qualification (certificate or diploma) from the NHT Skills Toolkit.
- Assessment of prior learning and the awarding of credits for units from the Toolkit based on evidence provided by participants for each unit, confused participants not familiar with the new competency based training framework.

The format for the eight day course is:

Module One:	three days
Module Two:	three days
Module Three:	two days

### **Training needs analysis**

The TNA Questionnaire was modelled on the Natural Heritage Trust Skills Toolkit which was developed after broad national consultation with stakeholders.

As part of the Building Regional Capacity pilot short course, the consultants designed a training needs questionnaire. The questionnaire was circulated to individuals nominated by local advisory committees, some of whom went on to be attendees at the short courses.

The questionnaire was designed in three parts.

**Part 1** asked respondents to answer 26 questions to assess how well equipped project staff and volunteers are to deliver Natural Heritage Trust Programs in the respondents' regions.

**Part 2** asked respondents to assess their own skill level and to assess the importance in response to 36 questions. Each of these questions related to the competencies identified in the NHT Skills Toolkit developed by David Foreman and accredited in South Australia.

**Part 3** of the questionnaire was designed to find out about the respondents. This part of the questionnaire related to the role and experience of the respondent. Part 3 also asked respondents to make comments.

50% of respondents were tertiary educated to degree level.

8% of respondents held no formal qualifications.

### **Using the Questionnaire as a Training Needs Analysis.**

The questionnaire was used in the course design in some cases to confirm the inclusion of material in some areas and in others to strengthen the amount of time spent on issues.

In particular, the course design addressed the difference in the importance of a skill in relation to the current skill level as shown in part 2 of the questionnaire.

There were some questions where in all regions the current skill level was lower than the importance of that skill. This indicates a strong training need.

### **Registered Training Organisations (RTO's) – Regional Training Partners**

Expressions of interest were sent to regional RTO's nominated by the Advisory Groups. Advisory Groups were then asked to select an RTO based on the expressions of interest received against selection criteria. Successful training organisations were then asked to accept an agreement to undertake participant assessments for those who wish to seek a qualification from the NHT Skills Toolkit based on their prior experiences and learning and current work, voluntary or paid.

## **11. IMPACTS TO DATE (AND EVALUATION APPROACHES USED):**

For evaluations immediately after the workshops, data were collected via a written questionnaire that was given to participants at the conclusion of the workshop. Data were also collected from presenters. Presenters were asked to keep a learning log and to record their observations and reflections about their experiences when running the workshops.

Data for an evaluation to measure impact were gathered through workshops with past participants and interviews by telephone with other key individuals such as members of the advisory groups. Participants who could not attend a workshop or where none was available in their region, were invited to submit their thought through an emailed questionnaire.

Data were analysed to measure progress against stated objectives of the pilot and to provide information to the organisers about on-going improvement of the workshops.

The evaluations assessed progress against stated objectives, and provided recommendations for a possible next stage or next offering of the course.

The results of the two evaluations were that, the content of the course was of value to the target audience. Topic areas such as communications and cross-cultural awareness were mentioned on numerous occasions as being particularly useful and applicable.

A total of 133 participants completed the course. The majority were involved with Landcare in a variety of capacities. Fourteen were members of an assessment panel.

Seventy one percent of participants had their expectations met, for 6%, they were not and 23% were undecided. All of them (100%) indicated that the course had an impact on them.

There was some attrition between stages 1 and 3 (WA could not be measured) with Tasmania being the highest.

The presenters rated very highly among the participants. Their delivery style was well received.

### **The workshop**

Some sentiments about the workshops shared by the presenters and participants were that:

- Introductions are important and need to be done well
- There was too much material for the time; and
- The regional project needed better planning.

Views specific to the presenters were:

- The workshops were hard work especially with only one presenter;
- Strategic regional development material needed to be better explained; and
- The course should be adapted to suit the needs of the participants.

One presenter felt that flexibility should be built into the structure. He went on to state that rather than delivering the content as prescribed, he negotiated a learning plan with his group "at the beginning and used this to fine tune the program". He also felt that this "exposed [them] to some useful processes and techniques [about negotiation] as well as determining the content for the workshop".

### **The regional project**

As part of the action learning approach taken by the course, participants were asked to complete a project relevant to their local area. All the participants in the Burdekin group felt that they could apply their learning to the project. The regional project has the potential to pull together regional issues and the skills developed in the workshop. In other regions it had mixed success with most individuals abandoning it although the group from WA implemented the project as a group and set up a regional communication network and some individuals in South Australia and Victoria completing useful projects.

### **Achievement of course objectives**

There is no doubt that the objectives of the pilot program were achieved through the delivery of the workshops. A summary of achievements against each objective (real and projected) is presented below. More details can be found in the summary of each workshop in the body of this report.

#### **1. The role of community leaders is better understood**

This objective was directly assessed and 64% agreed that it was better understood, 22% were neutral and 14% disagreed. In some cases, participants already knew

about the role of community leaders, in other cases, suggestions were made to invite more community leaders to the course.

## **2. Trust funded workers are effective contributors throughout their short term contracts**

This objective was also directly assessed when participants were asked to respond to two statements: (1) *I have a greater appreciation of the skills required to be an effective contributor to natural resource management programs.* A total of 87% agreed with this statement, 11% were neutral and 2% disagreed. (2) *The course has enhanced the role of coordinators and facilitators working on NHT programs.* A total of 74% agreed with this statement, 24% were neutral and 2% disagreed.

Positive responses to other statements such as : *Skills developed in the training course will help me support myself in the delivery of NHT programs* (83% agreed, 0% disagreed), and: *I now feel better networked with others involved in Natural Heritage Trust programs in my region,* (84% agreed, 0% disagreed) indicate that trust fund workers will be more effective contributors as a result of the training received in the course.

Responses to these statements coupled with participants' comments about what they found useful and what they would implement also indicated that they have the potential to be effective contributors. However, a better assessment can be made by interviewing them 3 – 12 months after completion of the course when they have had an opportunity to practise and apply their skills.

## **3. Improved skills and clearer understanding of issues within Natural Heritage Trust assessment panels**

This objective was difficult to assess given that only 10% (14) of participants were members of an assessment panel. However, these individuals stated that they had learnt about themselves, about other players and other issues. It may be assumed that they will have a clearer understanding of NHT issues given their increased knowledge of regional issues, NHT networking, and cross cultural issues. This should help them in their role as assessment panel members.

## **4. Natural Heritage Trust criteria and processes are better understood**

This objective was not directly evaluated although positive responses to improved networking with others involved in NHT programs would help to achieve this objective. It is understood that presenters talked about specific NHT processes in their workshops.

Data to measure achievement against this objective could be collected in future evaluations.

## **5. Better targeted projects are developed**

This objective cannot be adequately assessed now. Participants need time to implement their learning. However, projections can be made about the likelihood that this will occur.

The raised awareness of cultural differences (87% participants, stage 3) combined with improved communication skills (responses to questions 2 and 4) and a recognition of the need to involve a range of stakeholders in natural resource management (100% participants stage 3) could lead to wider consultation during project development and therefore create better targeted projects. Comments relating to project planning and management in the stage 2 evaluation (questions 2 and 5) further support progress towards this objective. The stage 3 evaluation

showed that 66% had a better understanding of regional issues, and 84% had improved their networking which could lead to the development of new projects better targeted to address regional needs.

### **6. Improving integration of Natural Heritage Trust programs through improved networking.**

Participants were very positive in their comments to open ended and graded scale questions about the value of the course for networking. As already mentioned. 84% improved their networking and 72% improved their understanding of regional networks.

### **13 months after the workshops**

#### **Longer term outcomes**

The course had a significant positive impact on most participants. Those with little or no prior exposure to material about personal development and group dynamics found the course extremely valuable and used their new skills within their varied roles after the course.

The details of what participants still found useful from the course and what they had been able to integrate into their work fell into broad areas of:

- *Personal development*
- *Working with groups*
- *Networks*
- *Project management*
- *Cross cultural awareness*

#### **Cutting edge development in community engagement**

There was strong evidence in this and a previous evaluation (Roberts 2000) that both trust and relationship were created not just among the participants in the course but also within the wider community. The inclusion of the advisory groups, and hence a degree community ownership, was beneficial in this process. Most of the positive impact on community engagement resulted from the personal development and networks gained by course participants.

#### **Effectiveness:**

Cross-cultural awareness was a component of the course that was highly rated by participants. There were some good examples of where it impacted on participants' actions and approaches after the course.

There is no doubt that the course and the current group of trainers should be retained although the course could do with some modification and strengthening as set out below.

#### **Vocational and educational training**

The accreditation of participants' learning under the VET system was generally a failure – however some motivated individuals were able to pursue the qualifications. Expectations of participants were not met – the course itself provided little direct meeting of the required competencies for accreditation. A major flaw was the general lack of understanding of the VET sector and failure to follow-up by the nominated RTOs. It was also felt that RTOs in remote areas were not well enough resourced to cope with accreditation at the level required for this course.

**The (BRC) not designed to duplicate or replace state training initiatives.**

Many participants were experienced facilitators and had already been to courses with similar content. However, most still found value in affirming and updating their skills and knowledge. They did not see that the BRC short course duplicated what they had done but added to it.

**Strategic planning**

There were differing views on the value of strategic planning within regions. There was an expectation from the participants that regions will need to take a stronger role in planning and implementing regional priorities.

**Analysis of training needs**

The national nature of the training course and its embedding in the NHT Skills Training Kit limited the local influence and content in the course. The course directly related to coordination and facilitation skills rather than NRM technical management. Needs in both areas were identified by participants and advisory groups. A stronger link to regional NRM projects was seen as needed.

**Use of the regional project.**

Regional projects were treated differently in the different regions. They had mixed success and impact. They did provide value in grounding the theory for participants and in some cases provided an opportunity for an integrated community event post the workshop. They also created and strengthened networks where the projects were carried out.

**12. PROJECT DOCUMENTATION AVAILABLE**

Commonwealth of Australia 2001, *Australian Landcare Council Annual Report, 2000 – 2001*, Commonwealth of Australia, Kingston ACT.

Johnson, M. undated, *Building Regional Capacity – pilot short course: Cross Cultural Awareness Report*, Land Connect Australia Pty Ltd.

Mack, V. and Stephens, M. 2001, *Building Regional Capacity Natural resource management pilot short course, Final report*. Land Connect Australia Pty Ltd and Working with People Pty Ltd.

Roberts, K. and Coutts J. 2002, *Evaluation of the impact of the Building Regional Capacity short course*, Roberts Research and Evaluation Pty Ltd, Melbourne, Vic.

<http://www.affa.gov.au/content/output.cfm?ObjectID=C686D6F0-1FF4-4166-AC6BA187056F8D45>

Roberts, Kate 2000, *Building Regional Capacity Short Course: Final report*, The Rural Extension Centre, University of Queensland, Lawes, Queensland  
<http://www.affa.gov.au/>

**13. ISSUES**

One of the main issues was to make a national course relevant and accepted by the regions. This course was successful in that local examples were used to support some of the generic material such as cultural issues, communication and strategic planning. The regional project served to make the course relevant locally. The use of a team of trainers who were associated with each other through a national organisation (Working with People Pty Ltd) but lived regionally was useful to add a local perspective. Also the use of regional advisory groups was critically important to

help with introductions to local people, selection of participants and identification of regional and local issues.

The action learning component of the course relied on the regional project for its implementation. Given that the completion and assessment of this project was voluntary, the action learning component also suffered.

Another issues was that:

*The concept of Capacity Building requires further definition and development if it is to be adopted in regional communities. Participants react positively to the notion but are unsure what it exactly means or how to do it. Feedback from participants on the value of the course as a capacity building initiative indicates that the gaps in capacity also need to be considered. Assessment of capacity perhaps should be undertaken prior to capacity building initiatives. Capacity development is firstly about education and training to build skill and capability in individuals. However, capacity building could also be regarded as a wider initiative, involving many stakeholders, with a shared vision, issue, or problem, and with education and training as a means to link and coordinate a collective effort.*

Mack and Stephens, 2000 p10.

#### **14. COMMENTS/CONCLUSIONS:**

The course was a pilot for the development of regional capacity building courses in natural resource management. It trialled many aspects important for regional development such as strategic planning, building networks, and cross cultural communications. Some, such as greater coordination with and influence on strategic planning could have been done better perhaps through the regional project. But that is not the point. What this course showed was that it could be done and seen from that perspective, there was great value of this pilot not just for the trial of a national program but also to show how content could be applied locally, how action learning could be implemented, the value of specific content such as cross cultural communication.

#### **15. REVIEW METHODS:**

There were evaluations at three levels. When one considers Owens five forms of evaluation (Owen and Rogers, 2000), these three were:

*Form C: Interactive* where the design of the project is monitored for appropriateness. Form C looks at improvement of workshops or to the way activities are carried out. Information collected at this level is not usually aggregated to provide data about impact. It is usually just used to make improvement to the design or execution of workshops or activities. However, data for both Forms C and D can be collected at the same time. Form C evaluation allows for an action research approach if required and appropriate hence the encouragement of presenters to keep learning logs.

*Form D: Monitoring* where the project objectives are monitored for progress. There may also be some indirect effects. Information collected for this reason can be aggregated to provide data for the final form of the evaluation, Form E.

*Form E: Impact* where the project is finally assessed to determine if the objectives have been achieved. This phase also allows for the reporting of indirect effects and any recommendations.

The workshops were evaluated immediately after they were delivered and the comments fed back to the presenters so that they could make changes for subsequent workshops. Data to measure progress against objectives were also collected at this time.

Thirteen months after the pilot project was run, an evaluation was commissioned by AFFA and the results are contained in this report. The overall objective of this evaluation was to assess the longer term effects of the course and to provide further information on issues such as the place of strategic planning and the ability of the Regional Training Organisations to provide accreditation of courses.

An attempt was made to contact all past course participants, and advisory group members via email, and also to contact all community members of the Australian Landcare Council by telephone. In total, 42 participants with various roles provided comments for this evaluation. Thirty two were course participants (this represents 19% of total), 4 from the advisory groups, 2 were members of the Australian Landcare Council, 1 was the project manager and 3 were from a Registered Training Organisation. Of the 32 course participants, 23 provided comments through one of four evaluation workshops, the balance by email or telephone.

## **16. LESSONS LEARNED**

National projects can be made locally relevant but they on local examples and are helped by local, highly skilled presenters.

Learning projects are critically important not just for learning but for building the capacity of participants. Their importance is not understood well enough.

Evaluation of the workshops at the time of the delivery and later to measure impact were implemented and seen a useful.

Regional advisory groups to advise on local issues and help select participants were very useful to make the course have an impact o the region.

The whole of Tasmania is too large to be considered as one region.

Regions that are very large, require additional resources to enable people to physically come together.

Community members and volunteers are a vital part of a capacity building initiative and incentives to assist them to participate need to be developed.