

Our Place Regional Initiative Evaluation Report

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Acronyms

| | |
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| CALD | Culturally and Linguistically Diverse |
| CSU | Charles Sturt University |
| KEQ | Key Evaluation Question |
| M&E | Monitoring and Evaluation |
| OEH | Office of Environment and Heritage |
| OST | Open Space Technology |
| UNRCE | United Nations Regional Centre of Expertise in Education for Sustainability Development |
| UWS | University of Western Sydney |

Executive Summary

The Our Place Regional Initiative (the Initiative) is a small-scale, place-based community engagement program which helps communities develop, or get involved in, projects to protect their local environment and help them live more sustainably. The Initiative is delivered by the Office of Environment and Heritage (OEH) in collaboration with a partner organisation. Since commencing in 2012, the Initiative has been delivered in four regions – Western Sydney, Hunter, Riverina and Illawarra.

The evaluation was framed around the following key evaluation questions (KEQs):

1. What were the outcomes (positive and negative, expected and unexpected) of the different regional projects and how did they contribute towards OEH goals?
2. How appropriate and effective were the different regional approaches, and which aspects are worth replicating?
3. How does Our Place Regional Initiative fit within the broader suite of Trust funding programs – including the synergies and overlaps?
4. How well were the different aspects of the program managed by OEH, and what areas could be strengthened?

To address the KEQs, project data and reference materials for the Initiative were reviewed and 34 semi-structured interviews were conducted with stakeholders (eight with Initiative-level informants, seven with regional level informants, and 19 with participants). Observations made at the launch of the Initiative and at the Illawarra community forum informed the evaluation. The data was analysed by collection tool and the results were synthesised into preliminary findings against the KEQs. A summit workshop was then held where OEH staff and regional partner staff tested the findings and recommendations. These findings and recommendations informed the creation of this report.

Findings

The Initiative broke new ground and was innovative in its attempts to engage with hard-to-reach community members and empower them to develop and implement their own projects. In judging the success of the Initiative, a parallel can be found in how one might judge a venture capitalism investment – here an investor may fund ten projects with the expectation that at least one will succeed – this success alone will cover the cost of the nine failures and more. Of the 17 projects that were funded through Our Place, eight delivered positive outcomes and four are continuing to do so. In addition, 13 unfunded spin-off projects emerged, some of which were implemented and have delivered outcomes. This is a strong start for the Initiative and a good basis for improvement and learning.

Although the number of community members who participated in the Initiative state-wide was small (138), the reach of the 30 community-delivered projects that emerged through the process was significant – exposing 3,500 people to sustainability-related information, products, resources, activities and organisations.

Community members who participated were given the opportunity to be involved in government decision making (Goal 32) and look after their local neighbourhoods and environment (Goal 23). As a result of their participation community members:

- built relationships with other community members and participating organisations;
- experienced a reduced sense of isolation;
- gained increased confidence;
- received validation of their work and concerns;
- experienced an increased willingness to discuss sustainability publicly;
- gained new knowledge and skills
- volunteered a total of 1000 hours to projects

Outcomes were also observed in participating organisations. Organisations have:

- learned how to more effectively reach out to community members to get them involved in caring for their environment. This outcome makes it easier for individuals to be more involved in their communities (Goal 24).
- built relationships with other local organisations including councils, universities, government departments, local businesses and community organisations
- sparked new projects which capitalise on relationships developed through the Initiative

There is limited evidence of environmental outcomes occurring as a result of the Initiative (Goal 22). However, this may be due to the fact that, for many of the projects, insufficient time has passed for environmental outcomes to occur. Additionally many of the projects did not aim to explicitly and directly achieve environmental outcomes.

The leaders of the 13 spin-off projects who did not receive seed-funding leveraged a total of \$230,000 in funding to resource the delivery of their projects. As a result of the unfunded projects implemented to date, there has been a reduction in rubbish in a riparian area in Western Sydney; newly arrived migrants in Albury developed relationships with other community members and are feeling more empowered individually and collectively; and 45 school teachers learned about sustainability education.

The innovative approach adopted by the Initiative compared favourably with the approaches taken by other OEH programs and government programs more broadly and was well aligned with best practice approaches to engaging community members in sustainability.

No significant duplication was found between the Initiative and other Environmental Trust-funded programs. There are several key differences between the Our Place grants and the Environmental Trust's contestable grants. The broader focus and the greater flexibility around delivery allows the Our Place grants to fund a much broader and more innovative set of projects than the contestable grants. Additionally, the simple application process and provision of seed funding allows Our Place grants to act as a spring-board to enable new individuals and organisations to access funding who wouldn't be able to access contestable grant funding.

There are clear opportunities for synergies between the Initiative and other Environmental Trust-funded programs. In particular there is an opportunity for the OEH Sustainability Programs (of which the Initiative is one) to be more interconnected to make it easier for community members to access the different programs.

Given the complexities of managing an emergent program from within an organisation undergoing major structural change, OEH staff managed the Initiative well. Selecting appropriate regional partners was a major challenge for OEH staff. It was difficult for staff to anticipate whether an organisation possessed the required experience, capacity, community connections and commitment to ongoing involvement before they were contracted. Despite this, OEH staff developed positive and effective relationships with regional partners and these relationships have continued with two of the four partners since the conclusion of the contracts. The seed funding process was also managed well by OEH staff, with applicants and regional partners finding the process straightforward, easy and quick. Unfortunately, the speed and ease of the process came with a cost – there was a lack of clarity around what was expected of the project leaders in terms of deliverables and outcomes. Facilitation of the process by the regional partners was effective; however, the under-resourcing of regional partners for the provision of ongoing support may ultimately impact on the sustainability of the outcomes.

Recommendations

The following recommendations have been developed in light of these findings:

1. **Retain and build on the Our Place model in future iterations.** When designing the approach of future iterations, the following principles should be adopted. These principles build on the successes and learnings from the Our Place program:
 - go beyond the usual suspects
 - adopt a strengths-based approach
 - tailor the approach and activities to the context
 - take a community driven approach, yet ensure the scope is within the program goals
 - offer easy-to-access seed funding
 - offer flexible timeframes for project completion.
2. **Strengthen the follow up support for community-led projects.**
3. **Supplement the regional partner approach with a dedicated regional facilitator/broker.**
4. **Strengthen the project application process.** This should include: ensuring sufficient time for project planning, requiring all seed funding recipients to develop a project plan, allowing for variations, and ensuring the criteria for seed funding are made clear to community members before they engage in the process.
5. **Reconsider the approach to funding community projects.** Given the small amount of money provided to community project leaders through seed funding, it is important to either refine or manage expectations of what can be achieved by the projects or increase the amount of funding provided. Investigate the introduction of two tiers of funding - small funding for small projects and bigger funding for bigger projects that can be accessed once projects demonstrate that their small project has been successful. Projects that receive funding and deliver successful projects should be encouraged to graduate to Environmental Trust funding.
6. **Create a clear narrative for the Initiative.** Given that this is a complex initiative, it is crucial to develop a clear narrative around how it works and how it contributes to OEH goals, and aligns with other programs.
7. **Integrate the Initiative and other OEH sustainability programs.** This could be achieved by linking the Initiative into the strategy for Sustainable Communities and by using Our Place

as an access point/hub/node that provides a means of exposing the community to all of OEH's Sustainability Programs' offerings.

1. Introduction

1.1. Overview of the Our Place Regional Initiative

The Our Place Regional Initiative (the Initiative), funded by the Environmental Trust, is a small-scale place-based community engagement program which helps communities develop, or get involved in, initiatives to protect their local environment and help them live more sustainably. The Initiative commenced in 2012 in the Western Sydney region and has since been delivered in three other regions (Hunter, Riverina, and Illawarra). The Initiative is delivered by the Office of Environment and Heritage (OEH) in collaboration with a partner organisation in each region (see Table 1 below).

Table 1. List of regions, regional partner organisations and the amount of funding partners received

| Region | Regional Partner/s | Funding received |
|----------------|---|------------------|
| Western Sydney | University of Western Sydney (UWS) & United Nations Regional Centre of Expertise in Education for Sustainability Development Greater Western Sydney (UNRCE) | \$100,992 |
| Hunter | Hunter Wetlands Centre | \$58,845 |
| Riverina | Charles Sturt University (CSU) & United Nations Regional Centre of Expertise in Education for Sustainability Development, Murray Darling (UNRCE) | \$80,000 |
| Illawarra | Green Connect | \$29,500 |

The approach used by the regional partners to engage with communities varied across the four regions; however all involved community forums. These forums provided an opportunity for attending community members to network, share resources, showcase local services and providers, identify local priority issues, learn new skills, recognise local achievements, and develop projects to address the priority issues identified. Project leaders then applied for seed funding to cover some of the costs of delivering the projects.¹

The objectives of the Initiative were to:

- develop local visions that incorporate environmental dimensions and considerations into a range of issues that matter to people
- increase participants' knowledge and understanding of the local environment e.g. soil, air quality, biodiversity etc. and the quality of life in the place where they live
- establish and/or strengthen local networks and partnerships between local groups, community organisations, OEH and other government agencies

¹ Seed funding was not available to project leaders in Illawarra.

- identify, promote and increase ways that community members can be involved in local sustainability activities, projects, clubs and community groups. This includes involvement of Aboriginal communities, CALD communities, new arrivals, businesses, and schools.

The different approaches adopted in the four regions are described below.

Western Sydney & Hunter

Western Sydney was the first region to roll out the Our Place program. The place-based approach used in all four regions was designed by UWS and OEH staff. The approach involved the following steps:

1. Sustainability Educator Focus Groups - Focus groups were held with sustainability educators in each community to understand each others' networks and how they support the community to get involved in local places. This was done through creative place-based story maps.
2. Recruitment - Sustainability educators and community leaders helped recruit community members to attend the forum, and were encouraged to offer support to or participate in any resulting community projects.
3. Community forum - Community members attended a community forum in their local area where they networked and learned from each other and shared their visions for local places and what they were passionate about. Open Space Technology (OST) was then used to help participants develop new project ideas and form coalitions to implement these ideas.
4. Seed funding – Some project leaders applied for and received seed funding to cover part of the cost of delivering their projects.
5. Project support – Project groups are provided with the support they require to successfully deliver their projects.

Hunter Wetlands Centre adopted UWS' approach (outlined above) without any modification.

Riverina

CSU modified the approach to better suit the communities they were working with – which included small rural communities. They abandoned the approach of engaging with sustainability educators, opting instead to develop a community survey to engage community members and identify their needs. They also incorporated a strengths-based approach into the model which involved acknowledging and building on individuals and organisations' existing experience, skills, passions, and activities. The approach adopted by CSU involved the following steps:

1. Community organisations workshop – Workshops were held with members of local organisations working in the sustainability space. The purpose of the workshop was to develop a community survey, plan the community forum and to encourage attendees to recruit community members to attend the forum.
2. Community survey – Community surveys were developed to understand the existing assets, activities, issues, and interests of community members.
3. Community forum – Forums were held where attending community members and organisations were presented with the results of the surveys which revealed local issues, opportunities and places that matter to the community. Attendees were also given the

opportunity to network, learn from each other, and share their visions for local places and what they were passionate about. OST was then used to help participants develop new project ideas and form coalitions to implement these ideas.

4. Seed funding – Some project leaders applied for and received seed funding to cover part of the cost of delivering their projects.
5. Project support – Project groups were provided with the support they require to successfully deliver their projects.

Illawarra

Unlike the other regions, which targeted the whole community, the focus of Our Place Illawarra was on the local CALD community. It also received substantially less funding, and no seed funding. Green Connect adopted the survey used by CSU to identify their community's needs and interests and added a unique step of interviewing interested community members to further explore interests and barriers to involvement. Unlike the other regions, seed funding was not offered to Illawarra participants due to budget restrictions. The approach adopted by Green Connect involved the following five steps:

1. Community surveys - CALD community members were surveyed about their environmental awareness, behaviours, interest in participating in Our Place and barriers to participation
2. Community interviews - CALD community members who expressed interest in participating were interviewed about local environmental concerns, what, why and how people would like to participate in environmental projects, and the support needed to be involved
3. Community forum - A forum of local interested organisations and community members was held to flesh out the project ideas that were developed in steps one and two
4. Project support - The organisations and individuals interested in leading and participating in projects were supported to implement their projects
5. Training - CALD community members were provided with training to build community capacity in maintaining and protecting the local environment.

1.2. Purpose and scope of the evaluation

This report documents the findings of an externally conducted evaluation of the Our Place Regional Initiative. The main purpose of the evaluation was to understand which elements of the Initiative were effective and in which contexts. Due to resource constraints, there is a need for OEH to shift from being the lead funding body for programs to OEH cooperating with partner organisations to help them establish initiatives that are self-sustaining. The Our Place Regional Initiative is one of the first OEH initiatives to adopt this new approach and it is hoped that the lessons learned through this evaluation will help inform and improve Our Place and future OEH programs.

1.3. Methodology

The evaluation involved five phases:

1. Planning phase
2. Data collection
3. Data analysis and synthesis
4. Recommendations
5. Reporting and learning

Planning phase

This phase included an inception meeting, a preliminary document review, a project planning workshop with OEH staff to develop an overarching evaluation plan, and evaluation planning meetings with regional partners in each of the four locations to develop region-specific evaluation plans that nested under the overarching evaluation plan.

The overarching evaluation plan included four key evaluation questions (KEQs). KEQs are carefully crafted and focused questions that guide the direction of the evaluation and inform the methods used, the data collected, the synthesis of results into findings and the structure of final reports. The KEQs and sub-KEQs are outlined below.

1. What were the outcomes (positive and negative, expected and unexpected) of the different regional projects and how did they contribute towards OEH goals?
 - To what extent and how well were communities engaged through the regional projects?
 - What outcomes were achieved as a direct result of the engagement?
 - What were the outcomes of projects that were initiated by the forums?
 - To what extent did regional projects contribute towards the targeted NSW 2021 goals?
2. How appropriate and effective were the different regional approaches, and which aspects are worth replicating?
 - What approaches were used in different regions and what was the underpinning theory of change?
 - What aspects of the program approach worked best for which stakeholders and why? What didn't work in specific contexts and why?
 - How sustainable are these outcomes likely to be into the future without additional support?
 - How do the approaches compare with best practice?
3. How does Our Place Regional Initiative fit within the broader suite of Trust funding programs – including the synergies and overlaps?
4. How well were the different aspects of the program managed by OEH, and what areas could be strengthened?
 - How effective was program governance?
 - How effective was the facilitation and program support?
 - How well were partners managed?
 - How should the small project grant applications be assessed and how can they best be administered?

Data collection

The data collection phase involved two steps – a desktop review and primary data collection.

Desktop review

All existing relevant project data and reference materials for each of the four regions and for the program as a whole were reviewed. A full list of all the documents reviewed is provided in Appendix 1: Documents reviewed.

Primary data collection

A total of 34 people were interviewed. Primary Data collection consisted of:

- Eight semi-structured interviews with key informants at the initiative level including four with OEH staff, three with best practice informants, and one with Environmental Trust staff (See Appendix 2: Interview guides).
- Seven interviews with key informants at the regional level – this included five interviews with regional partner staff and two interviews with sustainability educators. Due to difficulties contacting Green Connect staff, they chose to respond to the interview questions via email. Interviews with Hunter and Western Sydney were held during the planning meetings to reduce the time burden on these individuals.
- Nineteen semi-structured interviews with community members (6 x Western Sydney and 13 x Riverina) about their experience of the forums, surveys and community projects.
- Non-participant observations at the Our Place Riverina Launch and the Illawarra community forum.

Data analysis

The qualitative and quantitative data was analysed by collection tool. The results were then synthesised into preliminary findings against the KEQs using a results chart for each region (see Appendix 3: Results Charts) and an evidence matrix for the program as a whole.

Findings and recommendations

A findings and recommendations workshop was held with OEH and CSU staff on the November 27th. This workshop followed the 'Evaluation Summit' technique which is a participatory approach to the analysis of data and the development of recommendations. Participants discussed and analysed the draft evaluation findings and project stories (see Appendix 5: Project Stories). The workshop culminated in participants collaborating with the evaluators to develop recommendations for future programs.

1.4. Limitations

There were limitations to the methodology which should be noted. It was not possible to interview participants from Hunter or Illawarra – in Hunter the regional partner had disengaged from the process and could not be contacted and in Illawarra the regional partner did not supply contact details for participants. A lot of time had passed between the conclusion of Our Place Western Sydney and conducting the interviews with participants. Consequently some of the interviewees

from Western Sydney had difficulty commenting on their experience and achievements in detail. This limited the richness of the data that could be obtained from these participants.

It was not possible to involve all the regional partners in the summit workshop due to conflicting commitments. This meant the findings could not be confirmed with all regional partners.

2. Findings of the evaluation

This section of the report provides the findings against the four key evaluation questions. Supporting evidence for the findings is provided in the results charts (see Appendix 3: Results Charts).

What were the outcomes of the different regional projects and how did they contribute towards OEH goals?

Although the number of community members directly engaged by regional partners was less than expected, expectations were met in terms of the total reach via indirect means (funded community projects and unfunded spin-off projects), as well as reaching individuals who do not normally engage in sustainability action. There is evidence of the initiative contributing to three of the four relevant NSW 2021 goals (23, 24 and 32) but limited evidence of contribution to Goal 22 ('To protect our natural environment'). The following sections describe in more detail the extent to which communities were engaged through the regional projects, the outcomes that occurred as a result of this engagement and the contribution of these outcomes to the NSW 2021 goals.

To what extent and how well were communities engaged through the regional projects?

Although the extent of *direct* community involvement in the Initiative was lower than expected, the regional partners did succeed in reaching beyond the usual suspects in most communities. Direct engagement with communities was achieved through a number of different mechanisms including surveys, forums, a launch event and further training.

Surveys

The community surveys were successful in reaching a large number of community members from a variety of backgrounds. Across the two regions where they were administered, a total of 299 community members responded to the survey (216 in Riverina and 83 in Illawarra).

Forums

Regional partners promoted the community forums in several ways, including:

- encouraging sustainability educators who attended meetings with the regional partners to promote the forum to community members²
- promoting the community forums directly through their connections in communities
- using all affordable traditional media channels; and

² Attendance at the sustainability educator/community organisation meetings was low, reaching a total of 87 sustainability educators/community organisation staff – an average of 8.7 people per meeting. The main reasons for this low turnout were that many staff from these organisations were time poor and overloaded, they felt it had all be done before and/or they couldn't see how they or their organisation would benefit. The exception was in Riverina where extensive engagement and the promise of sharing the results of the community survey with organisations engendered slightly higher attendance (an average of 14.3 attendees per meeting).

- including an invitation to attend a forum at the end of the community survey (in Riverina and Illawarra)

Ten community forums were held across the four regions. Attendance was low across the regions with a total of 138 community members attending the community forums – an average of 13.8 per forum. The reasons for this low attendance were different in each community and included: regional partners and/or sustainability educators lacking connections with community members and not having the time and resources required to meet face-to-face and build the relationships required to entice people to attend; small-town politics; absence of community spirit; the tyranny of distance; anti-green conservative cultures; difficulty explaining the purpose of the forums to people due to keeping the agenda so broad; community members feeling they were already overcommitted; community members feeling they were too busy surviving day-to-day to engage; cynicism about academia and sustainability; and scheduling the forums during work hours.

Despite the low attendance at community forums, of those community participants who did attend, many of them were not the ‘usual suspects’ – many had never been involved in sustainability initiatives before. The attendees were from a diverse set of backgrounds and represented a cross-section of the community.

It is worth noting that the regional partner in Illawarra aimed to reach newly arrived migrants and worked with a significantly different demographic than the other regions – this required a different approach. Here the intent was to engage targeted community members through an accessible survey and interviews with 25 community members who were particularly interested in being involved. The forum aimed to connect and motivate environmental educators and agencies to take action around the issue raised through the survey. In this context, the forum was not intended to attract CALD community members. The forum worked well in building alliances and 17 agency participants attended. This modified approach was taken as it was acknowledged that newly arrived migrants lack the required confidence and skills to lead projects and language barriers mean that forums are not the ideal mechanism for engagement.

Launches and training.

Further engagement activities were conducted in two of the regions which were better attended than the forums. A launch event was held in Albury which attracted 60 community members; and in Illawarra 66 CALD community members participated in training in maintaining and protecting their local environment.

What outcomes were achieved as a direct result of the engagement?

Many positive outcomes occurred for individual participants and organisations involved in the engagement process. For individuals, trust and a sense of community were built between community members, and between community members and participating organisations. Eleven (11) of the 20 participating community members interviewed reported that new connections had been established or existing connections had been strengthened between individuals. These new connections helped community members see issues from a variety of perspectives, avoid duplication of efforts, learn from each other's experiences, identify ways of helping each other and identify opportunities for collaboration. A good example is that the newly migrated Bhutanese community developed friendships with other people in the community and continue to integrate into the community through their involvement in a community garden.

Half of the community members interviewed said the engagement provided them with the opportunity to learn more about what other community members and sustainability organisations are doing in their communities:

I got more knowledge about what other people are doing and how I can help them. For example there is a lady who came to the forum who grows fruit and all her excess fruit she brings into town and swaps and shares it – I didn't realise she did this. And I thought I could help her with this work. And there was another lady keen on restoring bushwalks and I had known her for a while but didn't know she was passionate about it and I thought I could help her out with that. And I didn't realise the community transport was in such a bad way – there wasn't the volunteers to get the elderly around. I think I will volunteer and drive the bus. I think I will get a lot of satisfaction out of it. R-CP-12

As indicated by the above quote, the new knowledge about community members and organisations led to five of these individuals volunteering at one of the organisations they learned about at the forum. One of these volunteer positions subsequently turned into a full-time paid position.

A third of participants interviewed experienced a reduced sense of isolation and increased solidarity as a result of meeting people from their community who were also passionate about the environment. This was thought to be particularly valuable in rural communities that are overtly anti-green which led people to mistakenly believe that they were alone in caring about the environment:

I didn't realise there were so many people who had similar views. In my café I see a lot of wastage and narrow mindedness and this brings you down and you feel that you are the only one doing this and no one else cares. So I felt less alone – there are people out there that do feel the same way and from that you can build something with those people. R-CP-12

Participants also learned new things as a direct result of their engagement. Two Riverina participants reported they knew more about their local environment and sustainability as a result of hearing about the survey results. Sixty-six Illawarra participants reported gaining new professional skills and increasing their capacity to maintain and protect their environment as a result of training they received through their Our Place involvement. Two participants also reported gaining increased confidence in themselves and what they have to offer as a result of their participation.

There were also outcomes for participating organisations. Relationships were built between organisations including councils, universities, state government departments, local businesses and community organisations such as Men's Sheds, Landcare, and Country Women's Associations. In Riverina, organisations attending the forums gained new knowledge about the public's awareness and interest in their activities through the survey results. This has helped these organisations more effectively reach out to community members to get them involved in their organisation.

The regional partners also benefited from the engagement. CSU commenced a new project with the Department of Education which will see them build on and capitalise on the relationships they built in the communities during Our Place. The information gained from the surveys and interviewees informed Green Connect's development through understanding the CALD community's interests and needs. Green Connect also confirmed what barriers are currently preventing CALD community members from engaging with their organisation. This has helped Green Connect build meaningful jobs and build community capacity and professional skills.

There were also outcomes for OEH. The professional development needs identified in the Western Sydney sustainability educator forums informed OEH’s development of a “travelling roadshow” which took professional development opportunities to sustainability educators in the Western Sydney area. Staff in the Riverina regional OEH office built stronger relationships with community members and local organisations which they have since used for other programs.

In summary, positive outcomes were achieved for participating community members and local organisations, regional partners and OEH.

What were the outcomes of projects that were initiated by the forums?

The projects that emerged from the forums resulted in several outcomes and reached just under 3,500 community members and helped project participants gain new knowledge, skills and awareness. However, there is little evidence of these projects achieving environmental outcomes at this stage.

Thirty projects emerged from the community forums. Of these, 17 received funding and 13 proceeded without funding. Of the 17 projects that received seed-funding, eight were successfully delivered. Of these eight projects, four continue to deliver outcomes and four were one-off events. The remainder were either abandoned, have not been delivered as yet or the status is unknown.

Table 2. The current status of funded projects across all four regions

| Status of funded projects across all four regions | Number of projects |
|--|--------------------|
| Project is not continuing | 6 |
| <i>Project was abandoned</i> | 2 |
| <i>Project was a one off event with no spin-off projects emerging as yet</i> | 4 |
| Project is continuing | 4 |
| <i>Continuing in its current form</i> | 1 |
| <i>Continuing and has expanded into other projects</i> | 3 |
| Project has not been delivered as yet | 4 |
| <i>Project implementation has been delayed</i> | 1 |
| <i>Project has hit a roadblock that hasn't been overcome as yet</i> | 3 |
| Unknown | 3 |

Funded projects

Several outcomes were observed as a result of the eight funded projects that were successfully delivered. Across all regions, projects recruited the assistance of community volunteers. In the Riverina region alone, community volunteers donated just over one thousand hours to the projects. There were also direct benefits to project leaders as a result of their involvement.

Project leaders:

- Gained new knowledge and skills (e.g. project management, event management; communications; and community engagement) (6/11 project leaders interviewed)
- Developed new relationships with organisations working in the sustainability space (e.g. local councils, OEH regional staff, CSIRO, universities and Landcare; CSIRO) (6/11 project leaders interviewed)
- Received validation of their work and concerns (1/11 project leaders interviewed)

- Experienced increased self-confidence and a willingness to discuss sustainability publicly in communities not overtly supportive of sustainability (2/11 project leaders interviewed)

The projects had a wide reach into the community. Two of the projects received local media coverage and the project activities exposed 3,492 community members³ to sustainability information, products, resources, activities and organisations. Several of the projects fostered a sense of community and belonging to place in community members reached by the project which research has shown leads to environmental stewardship.

Two of the projects leveraged additional financial support to continue their work and one of the projects raised \$2000 for a local charity. Three of the projects expanded into new spin-off projects. Project leaders reported the projects and the outcomes they precipitated would either not have occurred without Our Place or would have taken much longer to occur.

The stories of three projects that were selected by summit workshop attendees as best representing the objectives of the Initiative are included over the page (the projects that were not selected are included in Appendix 5: Project Stories).

Project example 1 was selected because it had a broad reach, brought a community together and increased awareness of sustainability issues in the populous of a conservative isolated town.

Project example 2 was selected because it is an example of what a small amount of funding given to a pre-existing community project can achieve.

Project example 3 was selected because it illustrates the positive impact being involved in projects has on project leaders.

Unfunded projects

Of the 13 projects that were initiated without funding, 11 are in the early stages of implementation and two were delivered and have concluded. Outcomes of these projects include: the leveraging of a total of \$230,000 in funding to resource the delivery of the projects; a reduction in rubbish in a riparian area; newly arrived migrants developed relationships with other community members and are feeling more empowered individually and collectively; and 45 school teachers learned more about sustainability education.

While not all projects were successful, overall it can be concluded that, when considered as a set, the outcomes from the successful community projects yielded a good return given the small level of investment by OEH.

³ This figure is based on estimates provided by project leaders during interviews and could not be independently verified.

Project 1. Simply Greater Future Fair and Holbrook Community Markets

Aim: To host a sustainability fair that promotes awareness and collaboration amongst Holbrook residents on the themes of sustainable living and protecting the natural environment, in partnership with the Holbrook Community Markets and CSU.

Applicant: Holbrook Community Markets Committee & Sustainability Fair Steering Group (A group of residents who formed at the Holbrook Our Place Forum).

Funding received: \$7350

Activities & Outcomes: Around 200 volunteer hours went into preparing and delivering the Fair. Landcare, OEH, the local council, Questacon, CSU and the National Museum had educational stalls at the fair in addition to local sustainable businesses. There was also a swap and share of locally grown fruits and vegetables. Questacon put on a sustainability educational show and the National Museum displayed “Winny” the dinosaur (picture below) which was very popular with children. Landcare took 24 people out on a bushwalk in a local national park and taught them about the local environment and raised awareness about a threatened tree species. Approximately 1000 people attended the fair in a town with a population of 1400 people. The town is relatively isolated and there is anecdotal evidence that the fair exposed these residents to new sustainability ideas and opportunities. The fair received coverage in two local papers and attendees have been sharing what they experienced with those who weren’t able to attend.



The steering group members experienced multiple benefits from their involvement:

‘For me I gained a lot more confidence as far as organising things and meeting with people and being able to say what I felt. I felt I like there are people out there who are like minded and I could carry out something like this again without feeling judged.’

‘I didn’t know John or Jane [from CSU] before the project and I met Dieuwer from OEH and someone from Landcare and I am now confident to contact them if necessary. I learned more about sustainability – how much electricity appliances and lights use which has helped me reduce electricity costs, as well as how much water my toilet uses.’

Project 2. Climate Impacts and Adaptations Citizen Science Project

Aim: To enhance an existing climate impacts citizen science database. Eighteen months earlier a database has been developed to record citizens observations about the impacts extreme weather events such as heatwaves were having on plants and animals in Albury-Wodonga and surrounds. Funding from Our Place would be used to increase the pool of citizen scientists, create an online impacts survey, incorporate data on adaptation measures and publicise findings online.

Applicant: Wodonga Albury Towards Climate Health (WATCH)

Funding received: \$2000

Activities & Outcomes: Before receiving the funding, WATCH had an offline database for recording the effects of heatwaves and warmwaves on plants and animals (mainly crops and livestock), as identified by 40 citizen scientists. Their observations were primarily obtained during phone conversations between the citizen scientists and the project leader. Although this yielded qualitatively rich data, it was a time-consuming process. The funding enabled the project leader to recruit a larger pool of citizen scientists and develop an online impacts survey and database. 102 residents were recruited, all of whom will be sent a link to the online survey during the next extreme weather event. In the process of researching other existing databases and seeking more citizen scientists, the project leader informed around 600 people about the project including: residents, farmers, members of Landcare, staff at the Institute of Land, Water and Society (CSU) and researchers at ANU, Melbourne University, CSIRO and Monash. Research by the project team indicated that the WATCH database is the only one of its kind in Australia and that little data is being collected on impacts of climate change on regional Australia. It is too early to determine what the impact of this project will be, but the project leader is confident that the identification and collation of local impacts of extreme weather events will lead to increased engagement with climate change.

'Some people I have spoken to learned about the local impacts of climate change thanks to the database – if it hadn't been for our articles in the paper, they wouldn't have known how heatwaves had affected local production of fruit and vegetables.' - Project Leader

The database also shares stories of adaptation which the project leader believes will lead to increased resilience.

'For instance something I learned is that a local producer throws sheets over her smaller lemon trees to help them survive heat waves. I will share this sort of information through the database on the website.' – Project Leader

As a result of the project, the project leader found out about ClimateWatch Trails – a national initiative encouraging citizens to document observations of local species during walks through botanic gardens. The project leader is now in discussions with Albury Council about establishing one in their local botanic garden.

The project leader felt receiving the funding gave the project credibility:

'When I was recruiting citizen scientists for the climate impacts database, I'd mention the project funding and that immediately boosted its credibility.' - Project leader

Project 3. Our Community is Connecting – Tree Board

Aim: To educate the community about sustainability through educational installations in public spaces.

Applicant: Community resident & Parramatta City Council

Funding received: \$1500

Activities & Outcomes: Council regulations prohibited permanent education installations on public land. The approach was modified into a mobile art education installation made of recycled PVC piping that could be erected at markets and in schools. The project leader engaged a local artist to build the piping installation, a local graphic designer to develop educational posters and 30 local primary school children to decorate the installation. Before the children painted the installation they were taught about sustainability ideas and encouraged to paint about what sustainability meant to them. The 'Tree Board' was displayed at Parramatta Council's Australia Day celebration at Parramatta Park next to Parramatta council's stall and Sydney Permaculture West's stall. Thousands of local residents interacted with the installation during the day and the project leader received very positive feedback:

'We had an evaluation of the installation at the Australia Day event and everyone wrote how positive they thought it was. It got people thinking about their creative sides. There were some people who made comments that they could do something similar themselves and there were teachers there who came up to the stand who said they would love one in their preschool to engage their kids.'



The project leader has benefited personally from her involvement in the project:

'I have made some treasured friendships. For my family it was not just about doing the project it was being creative, getting information out there and being part of a community. Even though it was a lot of work there was a lot of laughter, fun, and learning for me and my child. I have learned a huge amount from the project'

To what extent did regional projects contribute towards the targeted NSW 2021 goals?

There are four NSW 2021 goals which the Initiative was intended to contribute to – Goals 22, 23, 24 and 32.

There is evidence of the initiative contributing to Goals 23, 24 and 32 of the NSW 2021 goals but limited evidence of contribution to Goal 22 ('To protect our natural environment').

Goal 23 is to 'increase opportunities for people to look after their own neighbourhoods and environments'. The Initiative provided 138 NSW community members with the opportunity to develop their own projects that would strengthen their local neighbourhood and environment. Seventeen of these individuals received funding and support to implement their projects and 13 projects commenced without funding. Several of these projects provided community members outside the project team with the opportunity to look after their own environment. For example, one project connected neighbours together using an e-group and helped them help each other to live more sustainably, and another project is sharing climate change adaptation stories between community members through an online register. Additionally there is evidence of community members gaining new knowledge, skills and awareness (e.g. project management, event management, how to maintain and protect their local environment, and what other individuals and organisations are doing in their community) which is likely to help them seize more opportunities to look after their local areas in the future.

Goal 24 is to 'make it easier for people to be involved in their communities'. There is evidence of the Initiative reducing participants' sense of isolation from their community as well as building trust, social capital and a sense of community between participating community members and between community members and participating local organisations. The Initiative provided participating community organisations with knowledge about community members' interests, passions and awareness which has helped them recruit volunteers. There is evidence of several people volunteering in community organisations as a result of participating in the Initiative. Additionally, the Initiative has helped 20 Bhutanese migrants integrate into the Albury community by involving them in a community garden.

Goal 32 is to 'involve the community in decision making on government policy, services and projects'. The Initiative involved 138 NSW community members and 87 representatives of community organisations in deciding on what projects they wanted to design and implement in their community. This is a clear contribution to Goal 32.

Goal 22 is to 'protect our natural environment'. There is limited evidence of achievement of this goal at this point in time. This is likely due to the design of the community projects which sought to share knowledge and information with other community members rather than directly acting on the environment. Only four projects were designed to act directly on the local environment. All four were unfunded spin-off projects (e.g. countering the decline of Australian Barn Owls, restoring riparian zones, and protecting native bees) and there is limited evidence of achievement of outcomes at this stage, with the exception of one project which has resulted in a reduction in the amount of rubbish left by the community in a riparian area.

Conclusions: Achievement of outcomes

Although the number of community members who participated in the Initiative was less than expected, the Initiative succeeded in involving people other than the 'usual suspects' and the reach of the projects they developed was significant considering the size of the investment.

Several positive outcomes occurred for participating community members and organisations as well as regional partners and OEH. These outcomes made clear contributions to three of the four relevant NSW 2021 goals (23, 34, and 32). Due to the nature of the design of the projects, at this stage there is limited evidence of contribution to Goal 22 ('protect our natural environment').

How appropriate and effective were the different regional approaches, and which aspects are worth replicating?

Overall the approach adopted by the Initiative was appropriate and effective. The following sections provide further detail on the aspects of the approach that worked and didn't work as well as the appropriateness of the approach in terms of its alignment with best practice community engagement.

What aspects of the program approach worked best for which stakeholders and why? What didn't work in specific contexts and why?

Each aspect of the approach is discussed sequentially and a recommendation is made for the continuation or otherwise of each aspect in future iterations of Our Place.

Sustainability educator meetings

The approach of relying on sustainability educators to recruit community members appeared to work reasonably well in Western Sydney but failed in Hunter. Educators in the Hunter region were too busy and/or disinterested and didn't end up attending community workshops. The approach was only successful in communities where sustainability educators had strong and numerous connections with local groups and individuals or where there were groups and individuals who were themselves well-connected that educators could tap into.

The approach was modified in Riverina by broadening it to include all sustainability organisations (not just those with an education role) and using the meeting to develop the community survey. This ensured strong engagement from organisations throughout the process as they were keen to find out the results of the survey. The sustainability educator approach was dropped in Illawarra.

Recommendation: Do not rely on the sustainability educator meetings as a community participant recruitment approach.

Investigate Target Community (Surveys/Interviews)

As mentioned above, the community surveys used in Riverina and Illawarra were an effective way to attract sustainability organisations to the process. In some contexts the surveys were effective in reaching out to community members who had not been engaged in sustainability before. This strategy worked where traditional media could be harnessed to distribute the survey and when the forums were promoted via the survey and contact details obtained.

Presenting the results of the research to the community and asking for their assistance in interpreting the results helped get participants in the frame of mind to talk about the kinds of projects they would like to develop.

Recommendation: Use an investigative approach (such as surveys and interviews) to identify community needs, interests and assets; prior to formal engagement focused on developing project ideas.

Community Forums

Participants appreciated that the focus of the community forums was broad and allowed them to have their say on what should be done in their community. They found this empowering and it gave them a sense of ownership over the process. They also appreciated being given the opportunity to network with passionate people with similar interests, ideas and opinions. However the method-driven approach of requiring partners to use open space technology (OST) in the forums created issues in some communities. Some people did not attend because they were unwilling to offer four hours of their time and OST was not suitable for use in communities with a high proportion of people who have language or literacy barriers such as CALD communities.

Recommendation: Continue to use forums to facilitate community members to design projects aligned with community needs, interests and assets but remove the compulsory OST component from the approach.

Seed funding

Seed funding was an effective motivator in Western Sydney, Hunter and Riverina to keep community members engaged in the process. It demonstrated the Initiative's commitment to producing projects that would deliver concrete outcomes for the community and avoided the perception that the Initiative was just a "talk-fest". It also enabled the initiative to achieve more with less. Seed funding is an attractive proposition for community members and small organisations but it was not actively promoted to potential participants which meant less people attended than otherwise might have if it was promoted.

Recommendation: Offer easy-to-access seed funding to community projects and actively promote its availability to the community to drive increased participation.

Launch

The Launch held in Riverina provided a good opportunity for participants to solidify networks formed at the forums and hear about what other projects had achieved. This opportunity was not afforded to participants in other regions and feedback from participants indicates that they would have appreciated more chances to meet up with other participants so they could leverage off each others' skills, knowledge and networks.

Recommendation: Provide more opportunities for participants to meet with other project leaders so they can leverage off each others' skills, knowledge and networks.

Extra workshops

Interviewees thought the evaluation and open space training workshops offered to regional partner staff, community organisation staff and community members did not add much of value to approach.

Recommendation: Drop the provision of evaluation and OST training workshops

How sustainable are the outcomes likely to be without additional support?

Looking across the four regions, it appears unlikely that outcomes will continue in any significant way without ongoing support. Of the eight funded projects that were successfully delivered, only four are continuing to deliver outcomes. While there are 11 unfunded projects that are continuing, it is too early to tell how far they will progress. Additionally, most of these are in Western Sydney where the regional partner is associated with a UNRCE that has the interest and capacity to continue supporting the work as well as access to the funding required to do so. This is not the case in Hunter where interest in supporting the work waned once the OEH funding concluded. Informants feel that regional partners require ongoing funding to be able to continue to provide the level of support needed to ensure the outcomes are sustained and to be able to extend the initiative into new interested communities.

Recommendation: Provide regional partners with sufficient ongoing funding or additional support from a regional facilitator/broker to be able to continue to provide the level of support needed and to be able to extend the initiative into new interested communities.

Informants stressed that sustainable outcomes will only be achieved if strong relationships have been developed between community members as well as with organisations. They were concerned that two half-day forums was not enough time for these relationships to form and that ongoing opportunities for participants to meet should be provided.

How do the approaches compare with best practice and other programs

On the whole, the approaches adopted in the four regions were well aligned with the best practice approach to community engagement in sustainability. According to key informants, best practice community engagement in sustainability involves:

- seeking to include the whole community in identifying how they feel their community's needs can be best met and how identified problems can be best resolved
- facilitating community members to design programs to address these needs and problems
- supporting community members to deliver these programs autonomously
- focusing on local delivery and connecting community members with each other
- tapping into existing networks and pre-existing community strengths and activities

The only exception was that there was a feeling among some regional partners that not enough autonomy was given to project leaders to set their projects' direction. The direction of some

projects were modified by regional partners on the advice of OEH to ensure viability and value for money.

The Our Place approach also compares favourably with other programs that seek to engage communities in sustainability action. According to interviewees, the strengths of Our Place in comparison to other programs are that the Initiative:

- Sought to engage beyond the ‘usual suspects’ who are normally involved in sustainability action to people and small groups who were passionate about the environment but who hadn’t previously taken public action.
- Took a ‘bottom-up approach’ instead of a ‘top-down approach’ by keeping the agenda/area of focus broad and encouraging community members to set the agenda and decide what they wanted to do in their communities.
- Extended beyond the standard approach of providing community members with education to supporting community action, networking and mobilisation.
- Avoided adopting a deficit approach (e.g. behaviour change) which would have turned community members off and instead adopted a strengths approach that acknowledged, respected and added value to community members’ existing knowledge, expertise and activities.
- Made the process of accessing small amounts of funding easier than in standard grants programs which made it more accessible for everyday community members.
- Adopted a flexible model that could be tailored to different regions and communities which allowed it to maintain a local focus and use the most appropriate approach for a particular region.

Recommendation: Seek to engage the wider community and involve people who have never been involved in sustainability action before. This requires offering incentives, leveraging regional partners’ and community organisations’ existing networks in the community, developing a clear message about the intent and process of the program and using influential champions to spread the message.

Recommendation: Avoid using a rigid method-driven approach. Keep the approach flexible so that it can be tailored to different regions and communities. For Our Place consider adopting a tailored community engagement process based on the general phases specified in Appendix 6.

Recommendation: Adopt a strengths-based approach that acknowledges, respects and adds value to community members’ existing knowledge, expertise, networks and activities.

Recommendation: Use a ‘bottom up’ community driven co-creation approach to facilitate community members to design projects aligned with the community’s needs, interests and assets as identified through the investigative approach.

Interviewees also noted a few weaknesses of the Initiative in comparison to other programs which should be addressed. They stated that insufficient time was allotted to planning the community projects. Allotting more time to planning would ensure the projects are feasible and

appropriately scoped and resourced prior to implementation which would increase the likelihood of success.

Recommendation: Allot sufficient time to project planning to ensure the projects are feasible and appropriately scoped and resourced.

Additionally interviewees noted that the flip side of encouraging community members to drive the projects is that the success of the Initiative hinges on the capability and availability of the community members to drive the projects. If project leaders lack the necessary skills and experience to implement a project, are not able to dedicate the time required and/or are unsuccessful in finding sufficient volunteers to assist, the projects will not deliver outcomes.

Individuals who lack the required skills and experience need access to ongoing support. Interviewees were concerned that the Initiative did not provide project leaders with adequate support and felt a connection to a broader state-wide central support structure would have been helpful. This would have enabled them to network and seek support from other participants in their region and state through conferences, discussion groups and support forums.

Recommendation: Boost support to project leaders by connecting them to relevant resources and networks (capacity building).

Finally, interviewees noted that community-driven projects can take a long time to produce outcomes. This is particularly the case with projects that involve Indigenous communities which are likely to involve a lengthy consultation process.

Recommendation: Provide flexibility to ensure that community projects that will take longer to implement are given sufficient time to deliver their project.

Conclusions about the Our Place Model

The approach to engaging with communities adopted by the Initiative was well aligned with best practice (as discussed previously) and compared favourably with the approaches taken by other OEH and government programs more broadly. The Initiative broke new ground and was innovative in its attempts to engage with hard to reach community members and empowered them to develop and implement their own projects. Given that the Initiative was operating in uncharted territory, and provided very modest amounts of seed-funding, we need to be careful about how we judge its success. A parallel can be found in how one might judge a venture capitalism investment – here an investor may fund ten projects with the expectation that at least one will succeed – this success alone will cover the cost of the nine failures and more. As stated in KEQ 1, of the 17 projects that were funded through Our Place, eight delivered outcomes and four are continuing to do so. In addition, 13 unfunded spin-off projects emerged, some of which were implemented and have delivered outcomes. This is a strong start for the Initiative and a good basis for improvement and learning.

Recommendation: Create a clearer narrative for the Initiative. Given that this is a complex initiative, it is crucial to develop a clear narrative around how it works and how it contributes to OEH goals, and aligns with other programs.

Moving forward there are several elements of the approach that are worth replicating in future Our Place iterations and other OEH programs, some elements that should be improved, and some elements that should be dropped. Future iterations of Our Place and OEH programs should *continue* to:

- adopt a flexible approach so that it can be tailored to different regions and communities
- adopt a strengths-based approach that acknowledges, respects and adds value to community members' existing knowledge, expertise, networks and activities
- engage beyond the usual suspects
- use an investigative approach (such as surveys and interviews) to identify community needs, interests and assets
- use a 'bottom-up' community driven co-creation approach to facilitate community members to design projects aligned with community needs, interests and assets offer easy-to-access seed funding to community projects but promote its availability to the community more actively to drive increased participation

Future iterations of Our Place and OEH programs should *increase*:

- the amount of time devoted to project planning to ensure community projects are feasible, appropriately scoped and resourced prior to implementation
- the amount of ongoing support to community project leaders including more opportunities for participants to meet with other project leaders so they can leverage off each others skills, knowledge and networks (e.g. establish a state-wide support structure)
- the flexibility of project deadlines to ensure that community projects that will take longer to implement are given sufficient time to deliver their project

Future iterations of Our Place and OEH programs should *drop*:

- the compulsory OST component from the approach
- the provision of evaluation and OST training workshops
- the use of sustainability educator forums as the main recruitment approach

How does Our Place fit within the broader suite of Environmental Trust funded programs- including synergies and overlaps?

There does not currently appear to be any significant duplication between the Our Place Regional Initiative and other Environmental Trust funded programs and there are clear opportunities for synergies.

There are several key differences between the Our Place grants and the Environmental Trust's contestable grants. The Our Place grants are intended to be used as seed funding, they are not issue-focused, the application process is simple and fast, and there flexibility around the way projects are delivered. In contrast, the Trust's contestable grants provide full funding, are issue-focused (e.g. Environmental Restoration) and the application process is much more involved. The broad focus and flexibility around delivery allows the Our Place grants to fund a much broader and more innovative set of projects than the contestable grants. Additionally, the simple application process and provision of seed funding allows Our Place grants to act as a spring-board to enable new individuals and organisations to access funding who wouldn't be able to access contestable grant funding.

There is the possibility that some activities delivered by Our Place grant recipients and Contestable grants recipients (particularly Environmental Restoration and Community Gardens grants recipients) could overlap. However, this could be managed through the steering committee process, sharing lists of planned and current projects, and the exclusion of any projects that are already receiving funding from the Trust or any other body. It is also possible that the Our Place grants could overlap with a new grant stream currently being developed by the Environmental Trust. This new “proof of concept” grant will allow groups to access small amounts of money to trial new ideas. This should be investigated for potential future overlap.

Currently the Trust-funded OEH Sustainability Programs (which includes Our Place) are delivered independently and are not part of a cohesive strategy. This means that community members who would like to access several of the programs must access each program separately. Community awareness of and access to the OEH sustainability programs could be improved by better integrating the Initiative and other OEH programs.

Recommendation: Integrate the Initiative and other OEH sustainability programs. This could be achieved by linking the Initiative into the strategy for Sustainable Communities and by using Our Place as an access point that provides a means of exposing the community to all of OEH’s Sustainability Programs’ offerings.

How well managed were the different aspects of the program by OEH, and what areas could be strengthened?

Given the complexities of managing an emergent program delivered by remotely located partners and the organisational change that was occurring at OEH throughout the life of the Initiative, OEH staff managed the Initiative well. The following sections provide further detail on four aspects of the management of the Initiative – program governance, facilitation and support of project leaders, management of partners and assessment and administration of the seed funding.

How effective was program governance?

On the whole, the governance arrangements as set out in the collaboration agreements between OEH and the regional partners appear to have been effective, with the exception of the amount of time and money allocated to providing ongoing support to community project leaders. Under collaboration agreements, the Regional Partners were obliged to “provide assistance to community educators to work further on identified local issues in the Region for 2-3 months after community forums are conducted (e.g. via phone advice).” This was not included as a “Method”, “Key Task” or “Activity” in the agreement. It was only mentioned once towards the end of the agreement and there was no payment associated with the obligation. The final payment was contingent on delivery of the final report, while support was expected to be provided for at least a month after this date. It is unclear how regional partners were expected to resource this activity.

The under-resourcing for providing ongoing support caused issues in Hunter, Riverina and Western Sydney. In Western Sydney, UWS leaned heavily on local councils to provide project support without adequately consulting with councils about the extent of their involvement prior to engagement. In Riverina, CSU went over and above what was funded because there was a risk that if they didn’t provide the level of support community members needed, the hard-earned relationships and trust in the community would be eroded and the projects would not deliver the

desired outcomes. In Hunter, the regional partner did not provide ongoing support to projects because they lacked the required resources.

Recommendation: Be clear with partners and brokers about the scope and depth of ongoing support that should be provided to projects and ensure this activity is adequately resourced.

How effective was the facilitation and program support?

On the whole, facilitation was highly effective but program support was not effective in most regions due to inadequate funding being provided for this activity.

Facilitation

Facilitation of the meetings and forums by Regional Partners was effective in Western Sydney, Riverina. All participants who were interviewed from these regions felt the forums were positive experiences and all participants with the exception of one thought they could get their ideas across and that their ideas were listened to. Insufficient evidence was available for the Hunter and Illawarra regions.

Support

As noted in KEQ 2, the success of the Initiative depends on the capability and availability of the community members driving the projects. Community members often lack the skills, experience and capacity to deliver projects. As a result they require a lot of ongoing support in areas such as project management, planning, applying for funding and recruiting volunteers to implement their projects successfully. The amount of funding provided to regional partners was insufficient for the amount of time required to adequately support project leaders. Additionally, the level of experience in delivering community projects varied across the four regional partners. Consequently, the success of the regional partners in providing ongoing effective support varied across the four regions.

Hunter Wetlands Centre did not provide support to the projects that emerged from the community forums. The program manager was overloaded with other work and the funding available for providing support was not sufficient for her to prioritise it.

UWS were not able to personally provide the level of support some of the project leaders needed. However, UWS were able to assist project leaders by connecting them with other individuals (e.g. university students) or organisations who could help them, particularly local councils. They relied heavily on local councils who are very experienced in community project delivery to plug the gap in support. This was a source of tension with some council staff, who were already quite busy with their work and felt they were not sufficiently consulted on this prior to their involvement.

CSU invested a lot of time and effort into providing ongoing support to participants and project leaders reported feeling they received strong support as required. They did so because they wanted to maintain their reputation in the community and they knew without their support the projects would fall over. However they had trouble providing the level of support required to projects located in remote towns (e.g. Deniliquin) which necessitated long travel times.

Green Connect was unable to resource a staff member to provide support to participants on an ongoing basis. As with Hunter, the funding provided was not sufficient enough for them to prioritise this on an ongoing basis.

In summary, the funding provided to the regional partners to deliver ongoing support to project leaders was inadequate. This resulted in Green Connect and Hunter not prioritising this activity and UWS outsourcing some of the support provision to councils which put pressure on council staff. It is possible that this will limit the long-term sustainability of the outcomes achieved by the community projects.

How well were partners managed?

On the whole, OEH managed the regional partners well. The few issues that emerged were a result of the emergent nature of the Initiative and the challenge of anticipating whether a regional partner would be suitable and effective.

Selecting appropriate regional partners was a major challenge for OEH staff. An ideal Our Place regional partner has experience in project management, extensive connections with local communities in their region, the ability to engage with these communities and an interest in and the capacity to provide ongoing support to community members. It was not always possible to anticipate whether an organisation possessed these qualities before they were contracted.

Hunter Wetlands Centre had project management experience but lacked community connections, the capacity to provide ongoing support to projects, and the ability to engage with communities (other than in Newcastle). Illawarra had the community connections but lacked the capacity to provide ongoing support. Both CSU and UWS are universities connected to UNRCEs which are in turn well connected to communities, have experience engaging these communities and have experience delivering sustainability projects. Both partners appeared to tick all the boxes; however at UWS the academic staff, not the UNRCE staff, were driving the project. At CSU the staff driving the project were UNRCE staff, who consider themselves to be activists first and academics second. These are subtle differences which were hard for OEH staff to anticipate before contracting the partners.

Recommendation: Supplement the regional partner approach with a dedicated regional facilitator/broker who could work with multiple small local community organisations.

Once they were contracted, management of the regional partners by OEH was largely positive, particularly in light of the emergent nature of the program and the fact that OEH went through an extensive period of organisational change throughout the time the Initiative was rolled out. Positive and ongoing relationships were developed with Green Connect and CSU. Hunter Wetlands Centre and OEH had a positive relationship as well; however due to a lack of resources, Hunter Wetlands Centre disengaged from the process before they fulfilled their funding requirement of providing a final report. The relationship with UWS was also positive to begin with but did not remain so. UWS staff felt like OEH excluded them from ongoing involvement in the Initiative and they felt disappointed that they were not given sufficient credit for their contribution to the development of the Our Place approach.

The two regional partners who continued their relationship with OEH (Riverina and Illawarra) beyond the contract period felt OEH staff were good communicators who were open to frank

conversations when required. They felt OEH staff were willing and open to the project being a learning experience and had a genuine desire to engage the community and empower them through the program. Riverina and Illawarra regional partner staff felt OEH staff respected their local knowledge and the importance of regional partners building positive relationships with their communities and the need to avoid anything that could jeopardise these relationships. Additionally there were times when OEH made themselves available to step in to support in a program management capacity.

Recommendation: OEH staff should maintain frequent and high quality formal and informal communication with regional partners.

The only negative comment about the management of the regional partners (other than UWS' concerns outlined above) was that, as a result of the program being developed in an iterative manner, it was difficult for regional partners to be clear with community members about aspects of the process that hadn't been decided on. In some instances this led to an erosion of trust with participants and some participants leaving the program.

How should the small project grant applications be assessed and how can they best be administered?

This question is broken into two sections, the first of which looks at how seed funding applications should be assessed and the second looks at how seed-funding should be administered.

Assessment of grant applications

On the advice of the Environmental Trust, the application process was modelled on the smallest Trust program - Eco-schools. The assessments were conducted against set criteria by a review panel which included regional partner staff, OEH staff and local council staff. This is well aligned with the advice of the Environmental Trust that the assessment process includes people who know whether the projects are viable and good value for money.

However, CSU program managers thought this traditional assessment process contradicted the intention of Our Place which was for the community to determine what they wanted to do. They believed that by scrutinising applications for viability and value for money OEH was sending mixed messages to the community – “we want you to come up with ideas but we will tell you which ones you can do”. It was reported that this resulted in at least one project pulling out of the process.

It should be noted that there is a trade-off between the importance of empowering community members to lead initiatives, and the need for Government to put some boundaries around what fits into their funding window. While this tension needs to be acknowledged and managed in any future programs, it should be noted that OEH made it clear at the outset that there were criteria around what activities would be funded and what wouldn't. There was also space for community projects to proceed without funding (which several did). Nonetheless, this tension will exist in any initiative that seeks to encourage community members to develop their own projects. The criteria needs to be made clear up front as was done in this case, as well perhaps providing mechanisms to link community projects with other more aligned sources of funding.

Recommendation: In assessing the grant applications it is important to balance the need to respect the desires and intentions of community applicants (community self-determination) and the need to ensure the projects are viable and demonstrate value for money.

Administration of grants

One of the main aims of Our Place is to engage people who were not engaged previously. Many of these people do not have experience preparing grant applications and delivering on their requirements. It is therefore important that the application process is not overly onerous. To this end, the grant application process was kept as simple as possible. As a result of this, applicants and regional partners found the process straightforward, easy and quick. However this came with a cost.

There was a lack of clarity around what was expected of the project leaders in terms of deliverables and outcomes. For example, there was no requirement to develop a budget - merely a requirement to provide an estimate of how much time the project would take to deliver. Consequently the Project leaders were left uncertain about what they were required to do with the money. There was also a lack of clarity around who would own the intellectual property of anything developed with the funding. Additionally, because the process was so quick, some applicants felt that they didn't have enough time to adequately reflect on their capacity to deliver the proposed project.

Recommendation: Ensure the boundaries and scope around community projects are made clear to community members before they engage in the process. Clarify the non-negotiables as well as the criteria for successful seed funding applications upfront.

The level of planning and reporting required of grantees should be commensurate with the level of funding. These are very small grants but at a minimum each project should have a project plan that sets out what will be done and what will be delivered, a reporting mechanism to test if what was intended to be delivered actually was, and payments linked to performance. It is also important that a process exists to allow for variations to these requirements if needed. It is also important to ensure that participants receive the support they require to be able to deliver on their requirements.

Recommendation: All seed funding recipients should have a project plan that sets out what will be done by when and submit simple reports that document delivery of intended activities and outputs as well as outcomes. Payments should be linked to delivery of activities or outputs. A process should exist that allows for variations to these requirements if needed.

Conclusions around the management of the Initiative

In light of the complexities of managing an emergent program delivered by remotely located partners and the organisational change that was occurring at OEH throughout the life of the Initiative, OEH staff managed the Initiative well. Facilitation of the process by the regional partners was effective in general; however the under-resourcing of regional partners for the provision of ongoing support to community project leaders caused issues for regional partners,

project leaders and local councils which may ultimately impact on the sustainability of the outcomes. Finally, the seed funding process was managed well with applicants and regional partners finding the process straightforward, easy and quick; however there was a lack of clarity around what was expected of the project leaders in terms of deliverables and outcomes.

3. Conclusions and recommendations

Although the number of community members who participated in the Initiative state-wide was small, the reach of the 30 community-delivered projects that emerged through the process was significant – exposing 3,500 people to sustainability related information, products, resources, activities and organisations. The Initiative also managed to reach beyond the usual suspects to those who aren't normally engaged in sustainability.

The outcomes achieved through the Initiative made clear contributions to three of the four relevant NSW 2021 goals (23⁴, 24⁵, and 32⁶). Participating community members have been involved in government decision making (Goal 32) and been given the opportunity to look after their local neighbourhoods and environment (Goal 23). As a result of their participation they: built relationships with other community members and participating organisations; experienced a reduced sense of isolation; gained increased confidence; received validation of their work and concerns; and gained new knowledge and skills. These outcomes make it easier for individuals to be more involved in their communities (Goal 24). There is limited evidence of environmental outcomes occurring as a result of the Initiative (Goal 22⁷). However, this may be due to the fact that, for many of the projects, insufficient time has passed for environmental outcomes to occur. Additionally many of the projects did not aim to explicitly and directly achieve environmental outcomes.

The innovative approach adopted by the Initiative was well aligned with best practice approaches to engaging community members in sustainability and compared favourably with the approaches taken by other OEH programs and government programs more broadly. As with any new program operating in uncharted territory, there were elements of the approach that were effective and elements that should be dropped or improved on; however, on the whole it was a strong start and a good basis for improvement and learning. One notable exception was the absence of a means to provide community projects with sufficient ongoing support.

There are no significant duplications between the Initiative and other Environmental Trust funded programs and there are clear opportunities for synergies. In particular there is an opportunity for the OEH Sustainability Programs (of which the Initiative is one) to be more interconnected to make it easier for community members to access the different programs.

OEH staff managed the Initiative well. Selecting appropriate regional partners was a major challenge for OEH staff. It was difficult for staff to anticipate whether an organisation possessed the required experience, capacity, community connections and commitment to ongoing involvement before they were contracted. Despite this, OEH staff developed positive and effective relationships with regional partners and these relationships have continued with two of the four partners since the conclusion of the contracts. The seed funding process was managed well with applicants and regional partners finding the process straightforward, easy and quick. Unfortunately the speed and ease of the process came with a cost - there was a lack of clarity around what was expected of the project leaders in terms of deliverables and outcomes. Facilitation of the process by the regional partners was effective; however the under-resourcing

⁴ Goal 23: 'increase opportunities for people to look after their own neighbourhoods and environments'

⁵ Goal 24: 'make it easier for people to be involved in their communities'

⁶ Goal 32: 'involve the community in decision making on government policy, services and projects'

⁷ Goal 22: 'protect our natural environment'

of regional partners for the provision of ongoing support may ultimately impact on the sustainability of the outcomes.

The following recommendations have been developed in light of these findings:

1. **Retain and build on the Our Place model in future iterations.** When designing the approach of future iterations of the Initiative, the following principles should be adopted. These principles build on the successes, as well as the learnings from the Our Place program:
 - **Go beyond the usual suspects.** Seek to engage the wider community and involve people who have never been involved in sustainability action before. This requires offering incentives, leveraging regional partners' and community organisations' existing networks in the community, developing a clear message about the intent and process of the program and using influential champions to spread the message.
 - **Strengths-based.** Adopt a strengths-based approach that acknowledges, respects and adds value to community members' existing knowledge, expertise, networks and activities.
 - **Tailored and flexible.** Use an investigative approach (such as surveys and interviews) to identify community needs, interests and assets prior to discussing project ideas. Avoid using a rigid method-driven approach; keep the approach flexible so that it can be tailored to the different context. Consider adopting a tailored community engagement process based on the general phases specified in Appendix 6.
 - **Community driven.** Use a 'bottom up' community driven co-creation approach to facilitate community members to design projects aligned with the community's needs, interests and assets as identified through the investigative approach.
 - **Seed funding.** Offer easy-to-access seed funding to community projects and actively promote its availability to the community to drive increased participation.
 - **Flexible timeframes.** Provide sufficient flexibility to ensure that community projects that will take longer to implement are given sufficient time to deliver their project.
2. **Strengthen the follow up support for community-led projects.** Provide ongoing support to community project leaders including more opportunities for participants to meet with other project leaders so they can leverage each other's skills, knowledge and networks (e.g. establish a state-wide peer support structure).
3. **Supplement the regional partner approach with a dedicated regional facilitator/broker** who could work with multiple small local community organisations. Be clear with partners/facilitators/brokers on the expectations of the provision of ongoing support to projects and ensure this activity is adequately resourced. OEH staff should continue to maintain frequent and high quality formal and informal communication with regional partners.
4. **Strengthen the project application process:**
 - Ensure sufficient time is devoted to project planning to ensure community projects are feasible, appropriately scoped and resourced prior to implementation.
 - All seed funding recipients should have a project plan that sets out what will be done and what will be delivered and by when, a simple reporting mechanism to test if what was intended to be delivered and achieved actually was, and payments linked to delivery of activities or outputs.

- Include a process to allow for variations to these requirements if needed.
 - Ensure the boundaries and scope and criteria for eligibility for seed funding are made clear to community members before they engage in the process.
5. **Reconsider the approach to funding community projects.** Given the small amount of money provided to community project leaders through seed funding, it is important to either refine or manage expectations of what can be achieved by the projects or increase the amount of funding provided. Investigate the introduction of two tiers of funding - small funding for small projects and bigger funding for bigger projects that can be accessed once projects demonstrate that their small project has been successful. Projects that receive funding and deliver successful projects should be encouraged to graduate to Environmental Trust funding.
 6. **Create a clear narrative for the Initiative.** Given that this is a complex initiative, it is crucial to develop a clear narrative around how it works, how it contributes to OEH goals, and how it aligns with other programs.
 7. **Integrate the Initiative and other OEH sustainability programs.** This could be achieved by linking the Initiative into the strategy for Sustainable Communities and by using Our Place as an access point/hub/node that provides a means of exposing the community to all of OEH's Sustainability Programs' offerings.

Appendix 1: Documents reviewed

| Title | Author | Date |
|---|--------------------------------|------------------|
| Technical Brief for Evaluation of the Our Place Program | OEH | June 2014 |
| OEH Corporate Plan 2014-2017 | OEH | 2013 |
| Collaboration agreement between OEH and Charles Sturt University | OEH | April 2013 |
| Deed of agreement between OEH and Port Kembla Community Project – Green Connect | OEH | April 2014 |
| NSW 2021: A plan to make NSW number one | NSW Gov | Sept 2011 |
| Our Place Evaluation framework | Nexus | July 2013 |
| Our Place Hunter Region Stage 1 Project Report | Hunter Wetlands Centre and UWS | July 2013 |
| Our Place Power Point Presentation | OEH | November 2013 |
| Our Place Western Sydney Stage 1 Project Report | UWS | April 2013 |
| Our Place Western Sydney Stage 2 Project Report | UWS | August 2013 |
| Mamre Project Case Study | UWS | August 2013 |
| Bass Fishers Case Study | UWS | August 2013 |
| Evaluation Plan for Our Place Illawarra | OEH and Green Connect | June 2014 |
| Green Connect Progress Report (May) | Green Connect | May 2014 |
| Green Connect Research Status Report | Green Connect | June 2014 |
| Green Connect Research Report (August) | Green Connect | August 2014 |
| Green Connect Community Questionnaire | OEH and Green Connect | May 2014 |
| Our Place Illawarra Work Plan | OEH and Green Connect | May 2014 |
| Our Place Illawarra Work Plan Table | OEH and Green Connect | May 2014 |
| Our Place Community Survey Preliminary Results | CSU | March 2014 |
| Email updates to OEH from CSU | CSU | March – May 2014 |
| Our Place Riverina Progress Report | CSU | November 2014 |
| Our Place Community Project Summary | CSU | July 2014 |
| Karen Paroissien’s Notes on Our Place Riverina | OEH | July 2014 |
| Environmental Trust Submission for Funding 2014/15 | OEH | 2014 |
| Our Place Expenditure | OEH | 2014 |
| Green Connect Monitoring Data | Green Connect | December 2014 |
| Green Connect Progress Report (October) | Green Connect | October 2014 |
| Final Report – Illawarra | Green Connect | December 2014 |

Appendix 2: Interview guides

Semi-structured interview guide for OEH program managers and OEH regional staff

| Question | Prompts |
|--|--|
| 1. Can you tell me a little about you and how you were involved in the Our Place Initiative? | |
| 2. Can you tell me about your understanding of the approach that was taken by this program? | |
| 3. How does the approach compare with best practice approaches to facilitating the engagement of community members in environmental sustainability? | |
| 4. How does it compare with other initiatives in the area that seek to facilitate the engagement of community members in environmental sustainability? | |
| 5. Are you aware of any positive or negative outcomes that happened as a result of the project? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which aspects of the project contributed to these outcomes? • What makes these outcomes important? |
| 6. How sustainable are these outcomes likely to be into the future without additional support? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • |
| 7. How does Our Place Regional Initiative fit within the broader suite of Trust funding programs – including the synergies and overlaps? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What other programs fit within the broader suite of Trust funding (we may need to know this) • Which ones could Our Place contribute towards? • Are there any duplications |
| 8. Which aspects of the Our Place models or others you know about might be suitable to replicate into the future? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any references for this? |
| 9. How well was the initiative managed by OEH? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How well were the partners managed? • What worked well? • What could have been improved? |
| 10. How well were communities engaged through the initiative? | |
| 11. How effectively did the regional partners support and facilitate community members through the Our Place process? | |
| 12. How should the small project grant applications be assessed and how can they best be administered? | |

Semi-structured interview guide for community project leaders and members

| Question | Prompts |
|---|---|
| 1. Can you tell me a little about you and how were you involved in the Our Place project? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is your role at work? / in the community? • Which forums did you attend? |
| 2. What prompted you to participate? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How did you find out about it? • Have you been to a forum like this before? |
| 3. How did you experience the forum? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Were you able to convey your ideas? • Which aspects did you enjoy? • Which aspects were challenging? |
| 4. Did anything come out of the forum for you? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did you learn about your local environment? • Did you learn about any new opportunities or join any networks/groups? • Did you follow up on any contacts afterwards? • Did you initiate a project? |
| 5. If you initiated or joined a project: Please tell the story of what you did/ are doing in your project and who was/is involved. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where did the idea come from • Who was involved in setting it up? • Did you apply for a grant? And what was the outcome? • Did you have any other form of support? • Who else was involved/ participated? • Any idea how many hours volunteers contributed? • Who came along to the event? Who has become involved? • How many people might this project reach in the end? |
| 6. What have been the results of the project so far, for you, for others or for the environment? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have any other things been catalysed by your involvement? • What have been the outcomes for you, personally? |
| 7. What role did the forum (and the grant) play in bringing about these results and changes? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did you receive any other support? • Would you have done this anyway? |
| 8. What are the key things you have learned so far as a result of participating in Our Place and conducting your project? | |
| 9. OEH are keen to learn what aspects of the Our Place Program should be replicated or improved. So thinking back over the whole journey | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What did you appreciate most about the Our Places project • And what do you think could have been improved about the Our Places project |
| 10. If you received a grant – how did the application process go? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What worked? • What didn't work? |

Semi-structured interview guide for best practice informants

| Question | Prompts |
|--|--|
| 1. Can you tell me a little about you and how were you involved in the Our Place project? | |
| 2. Can you tell me about your understanding of the approach that was taken by this program | |
| 3. How does the approach compare with best practice approaches to facilitating the engagement of community members in environmental sustainability? | |
| 4. How does it compare with other initiatives in the area that seek to facilitate the engagement of community members in environmental sustainability? | |
| 5. Which aspects of the Our Place models or others you know about might be suitable to replicate into the future? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any references for this? |

Semi-structured interview guide for informants commenting on fit with Environmental Trust programs

| Question | Prompts |
|--|--|
| 1. Can you tell me a little about you and how you were involved in the Our Place project? | |
| 2. How does Our Place Regional Initiative fit within the broader suite of Trust funding programs – including the synergies and overlaps? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What other programs fit within the broader suite of Trust funding (we may need to know this) • Which ones could Our Place contribute towards? • Are there any duplications |
| 3. How should the small project grant applications be assessed? | |
| 4. How can the small project grant applications best be administered? | |
| 5. Do you have any other comments to make about the Our Place program? | |

Semi-structured interview guide for regional level key informants

| Question | Prompts |
|--|--|
| 1. Can you tell me a little about you and how were you involved in Our Place? | |
| 2. Can you tell me about your understanding of the approach that was taken by this initiative? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • |
| 3. How does it compare with other initiatives in the area that seek to facilitate the engagement | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What elements of the approach worked well? |

| | |
|--|---|
| of community members in environmental sustainability? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What elements of the approach did not work well? |
| 4. Are you aware of any positive or negative outcomes that happened as a result of the Our Place initiative? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which aspects of the project contributed to these outcomes? • What makes these outcomes important? |
| 5. How sustainable are these outcomes likely to be into the future without additional support? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • |
| 6. Which aspects of the Our Places model or others you know about might be suitable to replicate into the future? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • |
| 7. How well was Our Place managed by OEH and by [Regional Partner]? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What worked well? • What could have been improved? |
| 8. How well do you feel the community was engaged by OEH and [Regional Partner]? | |
| 9. How effectively did the regional partners support and facilitate community members through the Our Place process? | |
| Thank you for your time. | |

Semi-structured interview guide for regional partners

| Question | Prompts |
|--|---|
| 1. Can you tell me a little about you and how you were involved in the Our Place Initiative? | |
| 2. Can you tell me about your understanding of the approach that was taken by this program? | |
| 3. How does the approach compare with best practice approaches to facilitating the engagement of community members in environmental sustainability? | |
| 4. How does it compare with other initiatives in the area that seek to facilitate the engagement of community members in environmental sustainability? | |
| 5. Are you aware of any positive or negative outcomes that happened as a result of the project? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which aspects of the project contributed to these outcomes? • What makes these outcomes important? |
| 6. How sustainable are these outcomes likely to be into the future without additional support? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • |
| 7. Which aspects of the Our Place models or others you know about might be suitable to replicate into the future? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any references for this? |
| 8. How well was the initiative managed by OEH? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How well were the partners managed? • What worked well? • What could have been improved? |

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>9. How well were communities engaged through the initiative?</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some attendees, particularly in Albury felt it was the usual suspects who attended. Was this the case and if so, how would you reach a wider audience if you did it again? |
| <p>10. How effectively do you feel you supported and facilitated community members through the Our Place process?</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any examples? |
| <p>11. If you had your time again, what would you do differently?</p> | |

Appendix 3: Results Charts

The numbers beside each line of evidence correspond to an evidence source listed in the evidence index (see Appendix 4: Evidence Index)

Western Sydney

| Outcomes | Findings | Evidence |
|--|--|---|
| Engagement of the community | UWS successfully delivered three focus groups which were well attended by sustainability educators who identified many successful strategies for engaging community members. The program managers then successfully delivered three community forums which were also well attended by enthusiastic community members from diverse backgrounds and some sustainability educators. UWS had difficulty engaging with community members who weren't already interested in sustainability. This was particularly the case in places where there was cynicism towards academia and/or the environment movement or where people were too busy surviving day to day e.g. Penrith. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OEH recruited sustainability and environment educators, who were asked to respond with an expression of interest stating their contact details, the LGA in which their work was located and a paragraph explaining their community engagement roles and practices. [1] • Three initial focus groups were held, across three LGAs including Outer- (Hawkesbury-Nepean and the Blue Mountains), Mid- (Penrith, Blacktown and The Hills) and Inner- Western Sydney (Auburn, Holroyd, and Parramatta). A total of 25 sustainability educators attended the focus groups and participants recorded a total of 76 responses when discussing successful strategies for engaging community members in environmental and sustainability activities.[1] • From these three focus groups, some participants were sufficiently engaged to attend three further forums/workshops which were held to identify community place priorities. Across the three forums, 67 participants attended, identifying 115 places. [2] • Engagement in Penrith failed because of the local community's lack of interest in or connection to sustainability. [3] • More broadly the Western Sydney program managers felt they did not succeed in engaging people who weren't already interested in sustainability. [3] • One interviewee felt there was some cynicism in certain parts of the community about academia and the environment which impacted on their ability to engage. Additionally certain parts of the community were too busy surviving day to day to engage with Our Place. [4] • Three of the seven forum attendees interviewed felt the forums were well attended by enthusiastic individuals. Three interviewees appreciated the diverse backgrounds of the attendees which enabled them to meet people and organisations they normally wouldn't interact with.[4] |
| Outcomes achieved as a direct result of the engagement | As a result of participating in the forums attendees became more aware of what organisations and individuals were doing in their community. This led to a few attendees gaining volunteer and paid positions at organisations. The forums also helped form new networks between people and organisations in local communities. Seven environmental projects emerged as a direct result of the community forums and received seed-funding. An unintended outcome that occurred as a result of the engagement was that the strategies for engaging community members developed in the focus groups informed a new OEH program that provided professional development opportunities to sustainability educators in Western Sydney. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our Place Western Sydney resulted in seven locally-led environmental projects which received funding [5] • Five projects were developed as a result of the forums that did not require seed funding. These were all collaborations between local sustainability organisations and UWS. [2] • The challenges, barriers and professional development needs identified in the forums held with sustainability educators in Stage 1 informed OEH's development of a "travelling roadshow" which took professional development opportunities to sustainability educators in the Western Sydney area. [3] • Five of the seven attendees interviewed felt they had learned more about what organisations and individuals are doing in their community. As a result, two of the attendees have volunteered their time at organisations they found out about at the forums, one of whom has received a paid position at the organisation as a result. [4] • Four interviewees said the forums had created new networks between people and organisations involved in sustainability in the local community which inspired them, helped them see issues from a variety of perspectives, avoid duplication of efforts, learn from each other's experiences, and identify ways of helping each other. [4] |
| Outcomes of projects initiated by the forums | Of the seven projects that emerged as a direct result of the forums, five projects progressed. Of these, four completed their intended activities and one completed a revised version of their intended activity. Two of the seven projects originally proposed did not progress and did not receive funding. Of the five projects that progressed, positive outcomes were observed in four projects. These included: strengthening relationships between community members from diverse backgrounds who would normally not have interacted; project teams gaining new knowledge, skills and self-confidence; new relationships forming between community members and the local council; the receipt of in-kind or financial support from the local council; public attendance at events coordinated through the project; increased public knowledge about sustainability; volunteers donating their time to the project; local media coverage of the project; and raising | <p>Seed-Funded Project Activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Florabella Pass Bushwalking Track Community Day Event" did not go ahead and the project leader did not claim the funding.[7] • "From Ideas Market to Marketable Ideas Grant Sourcing Project" developed several project proposals that were submitted to funding bodies but no funding was received and the idea was abandoned.[7] • "Simply Living Demonstration Festival" did not occur due to the bush fires that occurred in the proposed site of the festival at the time when the festival was scheduled to occur. The project was revised and the team recently put on a plant sale using seedlings they had grown with all proceeds going to the Mayoral Relief Fund established to support people who lost their homes in the Blue Mountains bushfires.[7] • "Emu Green Riparian Regeneration" project distributed brochures and erected signs to raise community awareness about the regeneration and the importance of keeping the site free of rubbish and hard waste, and a bush regeneration group joined the project team in the care of the riparian zone.[2] • "Mamre Farm Seed Bank Project" purchased the required equipment and set up a seed bank and recruited a team of volunteers who donated their time to building the seed bank.[2] • "Our Community is Connecting" project built an art/education installation with local designers and involved 30 local school children in decorating it with paintings of what sustainability means to them. The project leader spoke with the school children about sustainability. The installation was erected at Paramatta Council's Australia Day celebration which was attended by "thousands" of local residents". The project team is currently creating a booklet that contains activities for children to follow to learn about sustainability through the installation.[2 & 4] |

money for a local charity. **Error! Reference source not found.** at the end of this table contains details on the number of interviewees who reported observing these outcomes.

Seven new projects emerged as spin-offs from the original projects or as a result of connections formed between organisations at the forums. These projects did not receive seed funding and were all collaborations between local sustainability organisations, UWS and UNRCE. Three of the projects received a total of \$230,000 in funding from other government organisations. The activities undertaken in these projects included: monitoring of bird species in wetlands, installation of owl nesting boxes, installation of native bee hotels, engaging community members in reducing litter in riparian zone, restoring riparian zones and setting up a sustainability collaborative learning space for students. There is no evidence available to the evaluators of outcomes for six of the spin-off projects. The Riparian Rubbish project has resulted in a significant reduction in rubbish in the Emu Riparian area.

- “Connecting through Cooking Demonstrations” project held cooking demonstrations at two community gardens in Holroyd and Parramatta to promote healthy food, sustainable lifestyles and connections with the community.[2]

Seed-Funded Project Outcomes

- Several of the projects involved collaborations between very different groups of people who would never have normally collaborated. For example, the Community Garden Cooking Workshop project was led by a community volunteer who was joined by a Chinese soil scientist, an Indian restaurant owner and sustainability education officers from two local councils.[2]
- One of the five interviewees who had been involved in delivering a project (Emu green Riparian Regeneration) said their project had no outcomes and this was due to difficulty engaging the community sufficiently to access volunteers. The remaining interviewees observed outcomes. These are outlined in the figure below.[4]

Spin-off project activities

- “Love Your Lagoons” - received \$150K to implement the project across 3 LGAs. There are now 10 schools and 300 children involved in this program which seeks to foster school children’s interest in caring for their local environment by involving them in hands-on wetlands projects.[6]
- Priority Conservation Wetlands Monitoring – this project was set up to conduct monthly monitoring of bird species in three priority conservation wetlands on the UWS campus covering a total of 30 hectares. These wetlands are sites of global bird conservation importance. UWS have committed to the project for 10 years. Cumberland Bird Observers Club members are conducting monthly monitoring and the results are compiled in a database for longitudinal analysis. To date they have documented 73 bird species in the wetlands. [6]
- Barn Owl Nesting Study on Richmond Lowlands – to counter the decline in the population of Australian Barn Owls the Cumberland Bird Observers Club have installed three nesting boxes at the UWS Riverfarm. The UWS Office of Sustainability funded the box construction and installation. UWS wildlife study students monitor the site to determine if there is a reduction in feral pigeon population due to the owls presence. There are plans to install more boxes at another site in collaboration with a new partner, NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service. [2]
- UWS Social Engagement Leadership Program (SELP) –The SELP program is focused on developing UWS students’ employable competencies. Small teams of domestic and international UWS students engage voluntarily on projects of social and community value. As a result of the forum Mamre House is a community partner in SELP and students have assisted them with research tasks to improve Mamre House’s seed banking knowledge. [2]
- Bee Aware of your Native Bees program - As a result of meeting at a community forum, Transition Parramatta and Mamre House have teamed up to implement the Bee Aware of your Native Bees program which has received \$58K in funding from the Environmental Trust to implement the program. Five bee hotels will be installed across NSW in August and five information seminars were run in the month of June. [6]
- The Riparian Rubbish project has resulted in community members visiting the area taking more responsibility for their rubbish which has led to a significant reduction in rubbish in the Emu Riparian area.
- Fish @ the Hawkesbury Riverfarm project has received \$22K in funding from DPI to create more fish by restoring important riparian zones that protect the river from land based activities and provide food, shade and shelter for native fish and other aquatic life in the system. The project is also redeveloping the Riverfarm as a collaborative learning space for sustainability for all students from kindergarten to university.[6]



Figure 1 Outcomes observed by interviewees and the number who observed them

Hunter

| Activities/Outcomes | Findings | Evidence |
|---------------------|--|--|
| Engaging with | Sustainability educator forums were delivered in three sites and community forums were delivered | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustainability educator forums were held in three sites: Newcastle (10 participants), Scone/Upper Hunter (3 participants) and Lake Macquarie (6 participants).[18] |

| | | |
|--|--|---|
| communities | in two sites. With the exception of Newcastle, attendance at the sustainability educator forums and the community forums was very low – forcing two planned community forums to be cancelled. The reason for the poor turnout was a lack of established connections with members of these communities. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Government organisations were easier to engage than community and volunteer-run organisations such as Landcare. The program manager believed this was likely due to these organisations being time poor and overloaded.[19] Existing networks, local newspaper ads, word of mouth, and mail outs to an email list generated through other projects were used to engage with potential community forum attendees. Community forums were held in two sites: Newcastle (13 participants) and Port Stephens (8 participants).[18] Forums were also planned for Singleton/Upper Hunter and Lake Macquarie but these did not go forward due to a lack of sufficient participants. [19] The reason for the poor turnout in Port Stephens and the cancellation of the Singleton forum was that Hunter Wetlands didn't have many connections with these local communities. Lake Macquarie was cancelled because a similar process was already being implemented by the local council. [19] |
| Outcomes achieved as a direct result of the engagement | Hunter Wetlands terminated their involvement in the evaluation so it was not possible to speak with them or participants about outcomes. It is known that three funded and one unfunded projects proceeded as a result of the engagement. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Five projects were proposed at the two community forums but only three projects received funding and were implemented (Best practice environmental education; King Street revitalisation project; Food for thought – getting gardens into preschools). The other two projects fell over due to disagreement on the direction of the project and a communication breakdown between project members.[19] An additional project (Mayfield School kitchen garden and bush regeneration tour) subsequently emerged from the Newcastle community forum. This project did not receive seed funding.[19] |
| Outcomes of projects initiated by the forums | As stated above, it was not possible to speak with project leaders about their projects so very little information is available about project outcomes. There is evidence of school teachers and university students in training to become teachers learning about sustainability/environmental education. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Best Practice environmental education project has taken university students to the Bungwahl public school edible garden and taught them best practice environmental education. Relationships have been built between educators and community organisations as well as between Newcastle University and Bungwahl Public School.[19] The King Street revitalisation project has developed a long-term plan and are investigating ways to get more funding and volunteer support. No outcomes have occurred. [19] No further information is available on the outcomes of the “Food for thought” project.[19] 45 teachers from the region participated in the Mayfield School tour and learned about using kitchen gardens and bush regeneration for sustainability education[19] |

Riverina

| Findings | Evidence | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|--|------------------|---------------------------------|------------------|------------------------------|----------|----|----|---|------------|---|----|---|---------------------------|----|----|----|-------|----|-----|----|
| <p>Engaging with communities</p> <p>Educator forums, Community surveys and Community forums were successfully delivered in Holbrook, Deniliquin, Albury CBD and Lavington. In addition to this, an OST training workshop, a planning and evaluation workshop, and a launch event were delivered in Albury.</p> <p>Despite extensive phone calls to all community organisations, using all affordable promotional channels available and reaching 216 people with the survey, attendance at both educator and community forums was poor across all sites (43 and 33 attendees respectively).</p> <p>Explanations for this poor attendance were: small-town politics, absence of community spirit, the tyranny of distance, anti-green conservative cultures, difficulty explaining the purpose of the forums to people due to keeping the agenda so broad, and the fact that community members are already overcommitted. However, those who did attend the forums in Holbrook and Deniliquin hadn't been involved in sustainability before. This was not the case in Albury (particularly at the CBD forums) where attendees were predominantly the “usual suspects”. This was due to the prohibitive cost of promoting the forums through traditional media in Albury, which forced CSU to rely on channels used by people already involved in sustainability.</p> <p>A diverse cross-section of the community was engaged across all sites, with the exception of men. All of the projects and the majority of survey respondents were completed by women. This was especially the case in Holbrook where men were reluctant to be overtly involved because of the anti-environmental rhetoric that is tied up with traditional notions of masculinity.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> CSU contacted every community organisation, council, primary school, kindergarten and community group in each of the four sites selected (Holbrook, Deniliquin, Albury CBD and Lavington) by phone and invited them to the educators' forum.[10] An educators' forum was held in each of the four sites and community surveys were developed. The educators' forums were poorly attended reaching a total of 43 educators across all sites. (See Table 3 below for a breakdown by site).[12] Community members were engaged through a community survey that was distributed via different channels in the three different sites including local media, Ecoportal, letter drop and public noticeboards. Response rates were reasonable reaching a total of 216 community members (see Table 3 for a breakdown by site).[12] Community forums were delivered in each of the four sites and were poorly attended reaching a total of 33 community members across all sites (see Table 3 below for breakdown by site) [12] <p>Table 3. Attendance at forums and survey response rates</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Site</th> <th>Attendees at Educators' Meeting</th> <th>Survey responses</th> <th>Attendees at Community Forum</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Holbrook</td> <td>15</td> <td>56</td> <td>6</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Deniliquin</td> <td>8</td> <td>75</td> <td>5</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Albury (CBD and Laverton)</td> <td>20</td> <td>85</td> <td>22</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Total</td> <td>43</td> <td>216</td> <td>33</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The explanations given by CSU staff and participants for the poor turnout at forums were: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> People are already overcommitted so to ask people to sacrifice four hours for the workshops was too much to sacrifice Small town politics – forceful personalities can put others off attending An absence of community spirit in Holbrook and difficulty involving community members in anything other than traditional community activities such as football (and the forum was run on a Saturday when the football was on). The distance required to travel to attend the Deniliquin forums would have put people off An anti-green conservative culture that predominates in Holbrook and Deniliquin – people don't want to do things for fear of being labelled a greenie. The vouchers and seed funding were not publicised sufficiently – most people didn't know about them until they got there The fact that the agenda was kept so broad made it difficult to promote the intention of the forums to people.[10,11] Although turnout was low at forums, the majority of people who attended in Holbrook and Deniliquin had never been involved in sustainability initiatives before. [10] This was not the case in Albury where it was largely people who were already heavily involved in sustainability that attended the community forums (this was particularly the case at the forum held in the CBD).[10,11] According to the CSU program managers this was largely due to traditional media being cost prohibitive in Albury which restricted promotional efforts to | Site | Attendees at Educators' Meeting | Survey responses | Attendees at Community Forum | Holbrook | 15 | 56 | 6 | Deniliquin | 8 | 75 | 5 | Albury (CBD and Laverton) | 20 | 85 | 22 | Total | 43 | 216 | 33 |
| Site | Attendees at Educators' Meeting | Survey responses | Attendees at Community Forum | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Holbrook | 15 | 56 | 6 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Deniliquin | 8 | 75 | 5 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Albury (CBD and Laverton) | 20 | 85 | 22 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Total | 43 | 216 | 33 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

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| | | <p>affordable channels such as Ecoportal and Albury Council's email list which target people already involved in sustainability. In contrast in Holbrook the local media was prepared to print anything they received from CSU and in Deniliquin the paper was happy to print an ad promoting the survey for much less than the Albury paper charged.[10]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A diverse cross-section of the community attended. Population groups engaged with through the project included newly arrived refugees, older people, young people, students, indigenous residents, pensioners, business owners, and low-income earners.[11,12] • CSU were not as successful in engaging men as women – the survey responses were largely from women and women ran all of the projects. This was especially the case in Holbrook where conversations have revealed that men were reluctant to be involved because of the anti-environmental rhetoric that is tied up with traditional notions of masculinity.[10] • In addition to the forums and surveys, CSU also ran a launch event for Our Place Riverina that was attended by 60 people. They also hosted an Open Space Technology training workshop which was attended by 20 participants and local stakeholders and a Program logic planning and evaluation workshop for the project team and general community which was attended by 9 participants.[12] |
| <p>Outcomes achieved as a direct result of the engagement</p> | <p>There were many positive changes for participants as a result of the engagement. These included: the building of trust, social capital and sense of community between participants; a reduced sense of isolation (due to the realisation that the anti-green sentiment in their community was not as widespread as they thought); gaining increased self-confidence and empowerment to take action; learning new things about the environment and sustainability; learning new things about what community members and environmental organisations are doing; and participants taking up opportunities to volunteer at environmental organisations.</p> <p>There were also several organisational outcomes. Several community organisations gained knowledge about how to more effectively reach community members. Relationships were built or strengthened between local organisations and CSU has commenced a new project with the Department of Education, which will see them use and build on the relationships they built in the communities through Our Place. Finally, nine projects emerged from the forums (seven funded and two unfunded), six of which have been successfully implemented, two of which have been delayed and one could not proceed.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trust, social capital and a sense of community were built between community members. Seven of the thirteen participants interviewed reported that new connections were established and existing connections were strengthened between individuals. This opened up opportunities to collaborate. A good example is that the newly migrated Bhutanese community have developed friendships with other people in the community and continue to integrate into the community through their involvement in a community garden.[10, 11, 12] • Seven of the thirteen participants interviewed reported feeling a reduced sense of isolation and increased solidarity as a result of meeting people from their community who were also passionate about the environment. The communities are overtly anti-green which led people to mistakenly believe that they were alone in caring about the environment. The survey results further debunked this myth. [10,11] • Five of the thirteen participants interviewed felt they had learned new things about community members and local environmental organisations and what they are doing. In particular, three participants who attended representing a community organisation gained new knowledge about the public's awareness and interest in their activities through the survey results. This has helped these organisations more effectively reach out to community members to get them involved in their organisation.[10, 11, 12] • Three participants are now volunteering with community environmental organisations as a result of attending the forum and one person is being interviewed for a job as a horticulturalist, which will be a new career direction for her. [11, 12] • Two of the thirteen participants interviewed learned new things about the local environment and sustainability.[11] • Two of the thirteen participants have gained increased confidence in themselves and what they have to offer.[10,11] • Participants are empowered to take action and cultural support is now available to facilitate this. [10,11] • Relationships were built between local organisations including CSU, Murray Darling Association, Country Womens' Associations, Landcare, Mens Sheds, local councils, and Holbrook Community Markets. The connection with Albury City Council has led to the expansion of Albury City Council's Sustainability Living Day into a Sustainability Living Week.[10] • CSU has begun a new project with the Department of Education which will see them use the relationships they built in the communities during Our Place.[13] • Seven projects were provided with \$20,000 in seed funding. Of these seven, five were successfully delivered, one has been delayed by lengthy community consultations with the Aboriginal community and one could not proceed due to challenges convincing a critical partner to participate.[11] • Two unfunded spinoff projects emerged from the forums: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Twenty Bhutanese migrants are being supported to develop a social enterprise that will enable them to sell the food they grow at the CSU community gardens. ○ A participant in Albury is coordinating the establishment of a community garden at Mirabeena Community Centre.[11] |

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| <p>Outcomes of projects initiated by the forums</p> | <p>Community volunteers donated just over one thousand hours to the projects. The projects have exposed an estimated 1904 community members to sustainability information, products, resources, activities and organisations. Due to the relative isolation of the communities many of these community members would not have been exposed to these things before.</p> <p>Several outcomes have occurred for project leaders including: new skills; learning about sustainability and the environment; strengthened connections with community members and sustainability organisations; validation of their work and concerns and confidence to discuss sustainability publicly in communities not supportive of sustainability; and increased awareness of the structural and political problems facing their community and an ability to develop creative approaches to resolving them.</p> <p>Several of the projects have fostered a sense of community and belonging to place in community members reached by the project which research has shown leads to environmental stewardship.</p> <p>Opportunities for further collaborative projects have emerged from the projects. Project leaders feel the projects and the outcomes they led to would either not have happened without Our Place or would have taken much longer to occur.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community volunteers have donated just over one thousand hours to these projects and the projects have exposed an estimated 1904 community members to sustainability information, products, resources, activities and organisations. Due to the relative isolation of the communities many of these community members would not have been exposed to these things before. [11] • Several outcomes occurred for project leaders: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ New skills in project management, event management, managing the media, and community engagement (3/6 participants interviewed) [10,11] ○ Learned more about sustainability and the environment [10] ○ Strengthened new and existing relationships between them and sustainability organisations (e.g. local councils, OEH, CSIRO, Landcare, and community groups) (3/6 participants interviewed) [11] ○ Learned more about other community members which made them feel more connected to them (1/6 participants interviewed) [11] ○ Confidence in talking about sustainability publicly in conservative communities without fear of judgement (1/6 participants interviewed) [11] ○ The funding validated and gave legitimacy to the concerns and work of community members who prioritise sustainability in local cultures that are not supportive of sustainability (1/6 participants interviewed)[10, 11] ○ Increased awareness of the structural and political problems their community faces and can perceive these problems from a bigger perspective and develop more creative approaches to resolving them.[10] • Several projects have fostered a sense of community and belonging to place in community members reached by the projects' activities.[10] • The projects have led to more opportunities for further collaborative projects (e.g. WATCH and Albury Council's Climate Watch Trail).[11] • Of the six project leaders who commented, three felt the projects and the outcomes they led to would not have happened without Our Place. Two said the projects would have happened eventually but Our Place sped the process up by providing the motivation and resources required to implement them.[11] |
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Illawarra

| Activities/Outcomes | Findings | Evidence |
|--|---|--|
| Engaging with communities | Despite receiving a good response to the CALD, community survey, only one CALD community member attended the forum. Attendees were comprised entirely of community sector employees. The only face-to-face engagement that occurred with community members was interviews with 25 CALD community members and the provision of training in maintaining and protecting the local environment to 65 community members. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A survey was developed based on the survey compiled by CSU to identify CALD community members' interest in participating, barriers to participating and environmental issues of concern. 83 individuals from a wide variety of ethnic backgrounds responded to the survey. 17 different languages were identified as the main language spoken by respondents.[14] • Based on the results of the survey, 25 CALD community members who showed the most interest in participation in the program were interviewed to deepen the engagement and to better understand what types of projects people would like to participate in, and why and how people would like to participate.[14] • The forum was advertised to 25 local community organisations via email and where no response was received, follow up phone calls were made. Community members were invited through the survey and the interview process.[17] • A forum was held in Port Kembla and was attended by 17 people (excluding OEH, Green Connect, and Clear Horizon staff). Only one CALD community member attended. The remainder of attendees were community organisations. • Training was provided to CALD community members based on their interests to build community capacity in maintaining and protecting the local environment. 15 community members completed a Certificate II in Horticulture coupled with Skills for Education and Employment training. 50 community members completed waste training and one community member participated in a Sustainability Leadership Development Program.[16] |
| Outcomes achieved as a direct result of the engagement | Limited evidence is available of outcomes achieved as a result of the engagement. Four projects emerged from the forum but none are being led by CALD community members. New networks have formed between 19 local organisations to drive the four proposed projects forward. Green Connect has been able to align their work with their new understanding of CALD community interests and barriers to engagement. 66 CALD community members have increased capacity in maintaining and protecting the local environment. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The program has not concluded and it was not possible to interview program participants so limited evidence was available on outcomes and all comes from one source (the program managers). • Four projects emerged from the forum with people willing to lead them. Due to insufficient budget, no seed-funding was offered to these projects. None of the projects are being led by community members – they are all being led by community organisations.[16] • New networks to drive projects forward have been established.[16] • Partnerships have been formed between 19 organisations including OEH, Green Connect, Uni of Wollongong, Office of Communities. Local councils, and several community organisations. • The information gained from the surveys and interviewees have informed Green Connect's development along the lines of greatest CALD community interest and need. Green Connect also learned what barriers are currently preventing CALD community members from engaging with them. This has helped Green Connect build meaningful jobs and build community capacity and professional skills.[16] • As a result of the training provided, 66 CALD community members have developed professionally and increased their capacity to maintaining and protecting the local environment.[16] |
| Outcomes of projects initiated by the forums | Only one project has delivered some outcomes at this stage. This project has increased the involvement of CALD community members in growing culturally appropriate food which has resulted in individual and collective empowerment. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The current status of the four projects is: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Green Job Creation & Pathways: A Wollongong Collective Impact Network has been established and comprises fifteen individuals from local council, University of Wollongong, NSW Office of Communities and several local community organisations. The aim is to create socially and environmentally beneficial jobs and employment pathways for disadvantaged community members. The Network submitted a joint application for funding of the model but were |

The four projects have reached a total of 63 individuals including 13 CALD community members.

unsuccessful. The Network intends to continue to meet to discuss the problem and potential solutions and seek to involve more organisations.

- Recycling in Community Organisations: The aim is to introduce good waste systems and practices in community organisations that work with CALD groups. A pilot site has been selected and a waste audit has been booked.
 - Connecting University of Wollongong with community projects: The aim is to develop links/partnerships between UOW and community sustainability projects. A working group has been established, scoping has been conducted, and the UOW is committed to providing research support to community organisations.
 - Growing culturally appropriate food: The aim is to establish sites where CALD community members can grow their own food. Green Connect held a working bee at their urban farm which was attended by 13 CALD community members who started to plan the site for growing. Green Connect also established a partnership with Multicultural Communities Council of Illawarra (MCCI) who are starting a garden and have consulted with the Afghan community on design of the site as a result of meeting with them. MCCI have recently applied for funding for their garden.[17]
- The four projects have reached or engaged with a total of 63 individuals including 13 CALD community members.[17]
 - It is too early to determine whether any of the four projects will achieve their intended outcomes.[16]
 - An outcome of the Culturally Appropriate Food Project is that there has been increased involvement of CALD community members in growing culturally appropriate food which has resulted in individual and collective empowerment.[16]
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Appendix 4: Evidence Index

| Number | Data source | Description |
|--------|---|--|
| 1 | Western Sydney Stage 1 Project Report | A report on progress completed mid-way through Our Place delivery |
| 2 | Western Sydney Stage 2 Project Report | A report on progress completed at the conclusion of Our Place delivery |
| 3 | Planning meeting with UWS | Notes from the evaluation planning meeting held with UWS program staff |
| 4 | Interviews with Western Sydney participants | Interviews with Western Sydney Our Place participants |
| 5 | Environmental Trust Submission | OEH submission to the Environmental Trust for funding for Our Place |
| 6 | Ripple map | A diagram produced by Jen Dollin from UWS illustrating the ripple effect of Our Place beyond the forums and initial projects |
| 7 | Email correspondence with UWS | Emails received from UWS program staff |
| 8 | Collaboration agreements | Four collaboration agreements signed by OEH and Regional Partners |
| 9 | Interview with strategic level key informants | Transcript from interviews with strategic level key informants |
| 10 | Interview with Riverina Regional Partners | Transcript from interviews with members of the Regional Partner program team |
| 11 | Interview with Riverina program participants | Transcript from interviews with Our Place Riverina program participants |
| 12 | Riverina Progress Report | Progress report produced by CSU |
| 13 | Planning meeting with CSU | Transcript from meeting between CSU and Clear Horizon to plan the evaluation |
| 14 | Research status report (August) | Report on the progress of research into CALD community |
| 15 | Observations from forum | Clear Horizon's observations from the Port Kembla Green Connect forum in Illawarra |
| 16 | Interview with Illawarra Regional Partner | Transcript from an interview with Green Connect team |
| 17 | Illawarra Final Report | Final progress report for the Illawarra region |
| 18 | Our Place Hunter Stage 1 Report | Report on progress at the conclusion of Stage 1 of the project |
| 19 | Planning meeting with Hunter Wetlands staff | Transcript from the planning meeting with Hunter Wetlands program staff |
| 20 | Summit workshop | Transcript from the summit workshop attended by OEH and CSU staff |

Appendix 5: Project Stories

Simply Greater Future Fair and Holbrook Community Markets

Aim: To host a sustainability fair that promotes awareness and collaboration amongst Holbrook residents on the themes of sustainable living and protecting the natural environment, in partnership with the Holbrook Community Markets and CSU.

Applicant: Holbrook Community Markets Committee & Sustainability Fair Steering Group (A group of residents who formed at the Holbrook Our Place Forum).

Funding received: \$7350

Activities & Outcomes: Around 200 volunteer hours went into preparing and delivering the Fair. Landcare, OEH, the local council, Questacon, CSU and the National Museum had educational stalls at the fair in addition to local sustainable businesses. There was also a swap and share of locally grown fruits and vegetables. Questacon put on a sustainability educational show and the National Museum displayed “Winnie” the dinosaur (picture below) which was very popular with children. Landcare took 24 people out on a bushwalk in a local national park and taught them about the local environment and raised awareness about a threatened tree species. Approximately 1000 people attended the fair in a town with a population of 1400 people. The town is relatively isolated and there is anecdotal evidence that the fair exposed these residents to new sustainability ideas and opportunities. The fair received coverage in two local papers and attendees have been sharing what they experienced with those who weren’t able to attend.



The steering group members experienced multiple benefits from their involvement:

‘For me I gained a lot more confidence as far as organising things and meeting with people and being able to say what I felt. I felt I like there are people out there who are like minded and I could carry out something like this again without feeling judged.’ -

‘I didn’t know John or Jane [from CSU] before the project and I met Dieuwer from OEH and someone from Landcare and I am now confident to contact them if necessary. I learned more about sustainability – how much electricity appliances and lights use which has helped me reduce electricity costs, as well as how much water my toilet uses.’

A small nearby town, Tarcutta has approached the steering group to deliver the fair in their town. They see the fair as an opportunity to revitalise the community. This project has provided proof of concept to the local council as well as a template that other communities can use. Additionally, Questacon and Australian Museum have used the Fair as justification for more outreach funding.

Deniliquin Community Gardens Project

Aim: To improve the safety, accessibility, and knowledge of community gardening for people with disabilities, by creating appropriate paths and drive-in options.

Applicant: Deniliquin Community Garden Inc

Funding received: \$4700

Activities & Outcomes: The outcomes are unknown. It was not possible to speak with the project leaders

Albury Neighbourhood e-group

Aim: To trial the establishment of two online communities (i.e. e-lists) in Felltimber Estate and West Albury that support sharing and social connectedness and thereby facilitate sustainable community practices such as giving away produce or items no longer needed, carpooling, community clean-ups, etc.

Applicant: Two residents

Funding received: \$2000

Activities & Outcomes: Letters were dropped at all houses in the neighbourhoods within one kilometre of the project leaders' homes inviting people to attend an afternoon tea to learn about the e-list. 60 people attended the tea in Felltimber (145 houses were letter-boxed) and 40 attended in West Albury (of 134 houses). Forty-five people have signed up to the Felltimber e-list and 15 in West Albury, which has now gone live. The community response has been positive. About two emails a week are sent out to the Felltimber e-list on topics such as giveaways, lost and found pets, garage sales recommended local tradespersons and bushfire updates. The project leader feels the group is building a sense community and belonging which she hopes will lead to more sustainable behaviour:

'I feel more connected to my neighbourhood as a result of the e-list and get the impression others do too. I hope this heightened sense of belonging will ultimately lead to better earth stewardship within our community. There is literature that suggests you need a sense of belonging before you can take care of where you live. I also believe in "being the change you want to see in the world". If people from my neighbourhood see me riding my bike for transport and know me from the e-list, they may remember my friendly gestures like giving away limes, and hopefully won't think my pro-environmental behaviours are so radical. I'm hoping they will consider riding their bikes or sharing their produce too.'

Restorative Indigenous Garden

Aim: To restore neglected/degraded seasonal water way and surrounding remnant native woodland to a 'native to area' indigenous bush and wetland habitat, bush food and medicine garden to share knowledge and produce to the wider community.

Applicant: Woomera Aboriginal Corporation/Koori Kindermanna Preschool

Funding received: \$5000

Activities & Outcomes: The intention to restore the water way and woodland adjacent to the Preschool has been abandoned, however the project leader still intends to create a bush food and medicine garden. The project has experienced severe delays due to the amount of time required to have the discussions with the Aboriginal community needed to move forward and the difficulty in getting community members sufficiently interested and enthused to get involved in the short time-frame available.

'The issue with working in the community is not rushing things through – people don't want to hurry – they want to do this in their own time but mainstream society has linear timeframes.' -Project leader

The deadline for completion of the project has been extended until April, however the project leader is still concerned that it may not be delivered in that timeframe.

'Even though we have been given the reprieve it feels like pressure – I have to drive this and I have to get others to be enthusiastic about this. I have to charge my batteries so that I can be ready to make it happen. Unless I am passionate about it won't happen. If it gets too hard it will fall by the wayside.' – Project leader

Discussions have been had with the head of the Horticulture Department of the local TAFE, a staff member from a local aboriginal exercise program, and the adjacent preschool. Partnerships have been established and it is expected that approximately seven aboriginal horticulture students, 20 exercise program attendees, and 30 preschool kids will be involved in creating the garden.

Backyard Habitat Club Project

Aim: To scope partner interest (e.g. Council, LLS, CSU) and existing models for the establishment of a Backyard Habitat Club that encourages Albury residents to value and support Australian native plants and local wildlife/biodiversity in their own backyards.

Applicant: Resident

Funding received: \$2000

Activities & Outcomes: The project leader has completed the scoping of existing models of Australian and International backyard habitat programs and is preparing a report on her findings to submit to CSU. She has had difficulty gaining partner interest in her project and does not have the capacity to take the project any further.

'The biggest issue for me is how busy I am. When you are a volunteer and you work part time and you have a family you can easily over extend yourself – so when one of those elements blow out you are under pressure. And unfortunately that's what's happened.' – Project leader

She feels that council would be the most appropriate organisation to take the project forward but they do not appear to be interested.

'The message I have received through Council is that they have already created some Backyard Habitat fact sheets of their own – but they haven't listened to what the whole project is about – they are just ticking the box, "yes we've done that".' – Project leader

She feels the best way to progress the project would be for CSU to read her scoping report, decide on the best approach for Albury and use their influence to advise council on the best way for them to move forward.

Climate Impacts and Adaptations Citizen Science Project

Aim: To enhance an existing climate impacts citizen science database. Eighteen months earlier a database has been developed to record citizens observations about the impacts extreme weather events such as heatwaves were having on plants and animals in Albury-Wodonga and surrounds. Funding from Our Place would be used to increase the pool of citizen scientists, create an online impacts survey, incorporate data on adaptation measures and publicise findings online.

Applicant: Wodonga Albury Towards Climate Health (WATCH)

Funding received: \$2000

Activities & Outcomes: Before receiving the funding, WATCH had an offline database for recording the effects of heatwaves and warmwaves on plants and animals (mainly crops and livestock), as identified by 40 citizen scientists. Their observations were primarily obtained during phone conversations between the citizen scientists and the project leader. Although this yielded qualitatively rich data, it was a time-consuming process. The funding enabled the project leader to recruit a larger pool of citizen scientists and develop an online impacts survey and database. 102 residents were recruited, all of whom will be sent a link to the online survey during the next extreme weather event. In the process of researching other existing databases and seeking more citizen scientists, the project leader informed around 600 people about the project including: residents, farmers, members of Landcare, staff at the Institute of Land, Water and Society (CSU) and researchers at ANU, Melbourne University, CSIRO and Monash. Research by the project team indicated that the WATCH database is the only one of its kind in Australia and that little data is being collected on impacts of climate change on regional Australia. It is too early to determine what the impact of this project will be, but the project leader is confident that the identification and collation of local impacts of extreme weather events will lead to increased engagement with climate change.

'Some people I have spoken to learned about the local impacts of climate change thanks to the database – if it hadn't been for our articles in the paper, they wouldn't have known how heatwaves had affected local production of fruit and vegetables.' - Project Leader

The database also shares stories of adaptation which the project leader believes will lead to increased resilience.

'For instance something I learned is that a local producer throws sheets over her smaller lemon trees to help them survive heat waves. I will share this sort of information through the database on the website.' – Project Leader

As a result of the project, the project leader found out about ClimateWatch Trails – a national initiative encouraging citizens to document observations of local species during walks through botanic gardens. The project leader is now in discussions with Albury Council about establishing one in their local botanic garden.

The project leader felt receiving the funding gave the project credibility:

'When I was recruiting citizen scientists for the climate impacts database, I'd mention the project funding and that immediately boosted its credibility.' - Project leader

Community Recycling Project

Aim: To host an event that builds a network of residents and professionals to promote and assist the re-establishment of recycling facilities in the Deniliquin community in partnership with local council, thereby reducing waste and landfill problems.

Applicant: Residents

Funding received: \$1800

Activities & Outcomes: The local council was not willing to consider the proposal and the funding amount was insufficient to support two busy community members to set up a recycling program without the support of council. The community members have been put in contact with larger rural communities that have managed to side step council and get a recycling program going; however it is unsure whether anything will come of this.

From Ideas Market to Marketable Ideas – GWS Grant Sourcing Project

Aim: To source funding opportunities for joint projects between Hawkesbury Harvest, Hawkesbury Earthcare and Hawkesbury Environment Network.

Applicant: Hawkesbury Harvest, Hawkesbury Earthcare, Hawkesbury Environment Network

Funding received: No trust funding received - \$3000 worth of in kind support provided by UWS

Activities & Outcomes: Several project proposals were developed and submitted to funding bodies but no further funding was received and the project was abandoned.

Simply Living Demonstration Festival - 'Ensuring that the wisdom is not lost'

Aim: To provide re-skilling workshops in simple living skills such as composting, worm farming, gardening, preserving, cheese making.

Applicant: Community residents

Funding received: \$2300

Activities & Outcomes: The festival was cancelled due to the 2013 Blue Mountains bushfires that coincided with the planned date for the festival. The momentum was lost and the project leader found it difficult to maintain volunteers' engagement in assisting to help plan it for a new date. There were also issues caused by different agendas in the group:

'The problem with community action is that you have to have someone who will drive it. And no matter how passionate people are, it would seem for the volunteers is all about getting something out of it for themselves. People want to feel like they are part of something and that they are contributing. But when you have different agendas trying to drive a project – if those agendas are not aligned with the purpose it will fracture the group. - Project leader

The project leader decided to scale back the project and put on something a small committee could deliver without pressured assistance from a larger group of volunteers. This developed into a discounted plant sale which incorporated planting and composting demonstrations. The event was advertised locally and promoted through an editorial in the local gazette. Around 500 people attended from both the local area and from as far away as Sydney. All of the plants sold raising approximately \$2000 for the bushfire relief fund.



'There was a great sense of achievement. Many people said "when is the next one" and they said that is a shame it was a one off because they would support it every couple of months. One attendee who provides volunteer support at the Villawood detention centre came by and bought a large quantity of mixed seedlings that were taken back to the detention centre for the asylum seekers to grow. It gives me a sense of hope to know that people suffering in that centre will be able to nurture those seedlings.' – Project leader

Emu Green Riparian Regeneration

Aim: To get residents involved in the care of the riparian zone on the banks of the Nepean River in Emu Plains through bush regeneration, cleaning of rubbish and preventing dumping of hard waste.

Applicant: Bass Sydney Fishing Club, Penrith City Council

Funding received: \$1500

Activities & Outcomes: Members of a local fishing club, Bass Sydney Fishing Club have printed and distributed fliers and erected signs about the bush regeneration activities and the importance of not dumping rubbish hard waste with the aim of increasing resident awareness and attracting volunteers. A bush regeneration group has joined the Club in the care of the riparian zone and a few local residents participated in a planting day. The project has struggled to achieve its aim of engaging the local community in ongoing involvement in the regeneration activities:

'It hasn't gone very well so far. It seems like the local residents are not that interested in lending a hand – some of them walk down and comment on what a good job we're doing

Mamre Plains Seed Bank Project

Aim: To develop a seed bank for Greater Western Sydney that offers information, seed cleaning equipment and seed storage for a variety of seeds of heritage edible food plants and to offer community access to seeds they may not otherwise be able to source.

Applicant: Mamre House, Liverpool Migrant Resource Centre and Sydney South West Area Health Services

Funding received: \$1500

Activities & Outcomes: Seed sieves were purchased and a volunteer seed saving group was established. UWS students involved in the SELP program assisted with research and provided the group with information about effective seed banking. Six volunteers attend once a month and spend three hours cleaning and harvesting seeds. A fridge is now stocked with seeds in it and volunteers have learned new skills and furthered pre existing skills as a result of their participation. The coordinator of the project began the role in a volunteer capacity and has since been given a paid position at Mamre House as a result of her involvement.

The project has generated a spin off project. The project leader is in conversations with the local council about an arts-based cultural event based around seed saving and sharing with the aim of engaging the community and growers further and encouraging the use of the seed bank by the community. The council has applied for funding for the project and the event is planned for next year.

'Being a not for profit we [Mamre House] are under-resourced and this was really useful to give us a bunch of knowledge that we didn't have before. Anyone who grows plants can save seed. But having the money to buy the equipment and also getting the research from the SELP people made it happen. We could have done it with out Our Place but it certainly has made it easier.' - Project leader

Our Community is Connecting – Tree Board

Aim: To educate the community about sustainability through educational installations in public spaces.

Applicant: Community resident & Parramatta City Council

Funding received: \$1500

Activities & Outcomes: Council regulations prohibited permanent education installations on public land. The approach was modified into a mobile art education installation made of recycled PVC piping that could be erected at markets and in schools. The project leader engaged a local artist to build the piping installation, a local graphic designer to develop educational posters and 30 local primary school children to decorate the installation. Before the children painted the installation they were taught about sustainability ideas and encouraged to paint about what sustainability meant to them. The 'Tree Board' was displayed at Parramatta Council's Australia Day celebration at Parramatta Park next to Parramatta council's stall and Sydney Permaculture West's stall. Thousands of local residents interacted with the installation during the day and the project leader received very positive feedback:

'We had an evaluation of the installation at the Australia Day event and everyone wrote how positive they thought it was. It got people thinking about their creative sides. There were some people who made comments that they could do something similar themselves and there were teachers there who came up to the stand who said they would love one in their preschool to engage their kids.'



The project leader has benefited personally from her involvement in the project:

'I have made some treasured friendships. For my family it was not just about doing the project it was being creative, getting information out there and being part of a community. Even though it was a lot of work there was a lot of laughter, fun, and learning for me and my child. I have learned a huge amount from the project'

The project leader has received \$1000 in further funding from Parramatta Council to create a booklet that complements the Tree Board and contains activities that teaches kids about sustainability. This booklet is being trialled at Burnside Primary School. The project leader has considered creating new installations for other schools but she has insufficient time and money to do so and would need an organisation to champion and resource it.

Maintenance and restoration of the Florabella Pass Bushwalking Track

Aim: To host a community day event to raise awareness and start restoration of the track to improve track quality and encourage recreational use of the track.

Applicant: Friends of Florabella Pass, Blue Mountains Bushcare Network and Blue Mountains Council

Funding received: None

Outcomes: None - the event did not occur and it was not possible to contact the project leader to determine the reason.

Connecting through Cooking Demonstrations

Aim: To hold cooking demonstrations at community gardens in Holroyd and Parramatta to promote healthy food, sustainable lifestyles and connections within the community.

Applicant: Community residents, Transition Parramatta, Ginger Indian Restaurant, Holroyd City Council, Parramatta City Council

Funding received: \$3000

Activities & Outcomes: The project leader leveraged in-kind resources from Parramatta Council to print fliers about the two demonstrations which were distributed to community members. Volunteers invested around 50 hours of their time into the project. The demonstrations were held and well attended by the local community, including some CALD community members. Attendees learned about healthy and sustainable cooking. Some of the people who attended have ended up working together on other place-based sustainability projects. Connections have been formed between local businesses and the community. The project leader has grown in confidence and felt empowered and inspired by the project experience:

'The results for me were that it gave me more confidence. I felt 'I can do this!', I took it on like a project manager. It was very empowering and inspiring, I felt then 'I can do more!' - I could apply for more grants. I have been facilitating for a while but I wanted to move into managing community-based projects - to actually run activities for the community. And now I know I can'.

Appendix 6: Open model for Our Place Regional Initiative

*Links to more funding, support with evaluation, overcoming barriers, administration and links to other organisations

