NSW GOVERNMENT Office of Environment & Heritage

An open, transparent and accessible OEH

Case studies showing public involvement in NSW Government decision-making

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Photos:

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Page 3: Everlasting Swamp State Conservation Area; Lawrence Orel/OEH

Published by:

Office of Environment and Heritage
59 Goulburn Street, Sydney NSW 2000
PO Box A290, Sydney South NSW 1232
Phone: +61 2 9995 5000 (switchboard)
Phone: 131 555 (environment information and publications requests)
Phone: 1300 361 967 (national parks, general environmental enquiries, and publications requests)
Fax: +61 2 9995 5999
TTY users: phone 133 677, then ask for 131 555
Speak and listen users: phone 1300 555 727, then ask for 131 555
Email: info@environment.nsw.gov.au
Website: www.environment.nsw.gov.au
Report pollution and environmental incidents
Environment Line: 131 555 (NSW only)
or info@environment.nsw.gov.au
See also www.environment.nsw.gov.au

ISBN 978-1-76039-433-2
OEH 2016/0445
December 2016

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Open OEH is an Open Government initiative driven by the NSW Government ICT (Information and Communications Technology) Strategy.

Open Government is a set of guiding principles that seek to increase the transparency of government decision-making, facilitate closer engagement with the public on policy development, and ensure collaboration with communities and industry on service delivery. These principles support the goals and actions of Open OEH.

Through the Open OEH program, a group of 30 Office of Environment and Heritage (OEH) staff were selected to undertake community engagement training by using the open government principles. Known as ‘Open OEH Pioneers’, group members provided advice and guidance to others on how they applied Open OEH goals in their own work-based projects.

The following case studies show how goals 1, 2, and 3 were applied in the implementation of four projects.

James Bibby and his team used the Open OEH goals to build a customer-centric focus.

Case study 1
BioNet: Making scientific data more open and accessible to everyone

As the trusted source of biodiversity data for New South Wales, BioNet is a valuable resource for communities, businesses and government agencies. BioNet aims to provide up-to-date and accurate information so that we can make the best decisions in maintaining and enhancing our state's biodiversity. One particular challenge for users of BioNet was how to integrate the data it holds into their own software applications. The BioNet team engaged with users, explored ways to better share information, and made substantial improvements.

The task

In alignment with Open OEH, BioNet needed to facilitate greater access to information, promote dialogue about the scientific data available, and deliver content in a more user-friendly format. It needed to enable end-users to make innovative use of OEH's data assets.

How we did it

As an Open OEH Pioneer, James Bibby understood the value of the initiative, having written Open OEH goals in the project brief from the outset. These goals became fundamental parts of the project, and James used them to build a customer-centric focus and an evaluative framework based on open data outcomes available freely to the public.

Meeting Open OEH Goal 1: Increase transparency and access to information, services and people

Minimising the cost and complexity of integrating data for stakeholders was key to improving access to biodiversity information. This required careful consideration of end-users' needs so that we could design a service for users to decide how, when and where they would work with the data. The project required OEH to find a way to share openly over 13 million records going back to the 1770s. To make the information more transparent and accessible, OEH Open Pioneer James Bibby saw the opportunity for OEH to adopt open standards for biodiversity data assets by using the Open Data Protocol (OData). OData is a global software standard for open data. It reduces the cost barrier for users by helping them to integrate biodiversity data directly into their own systems.

Meeting Open OEH Goal 2: Engage in greater collaboration, participation and conversation

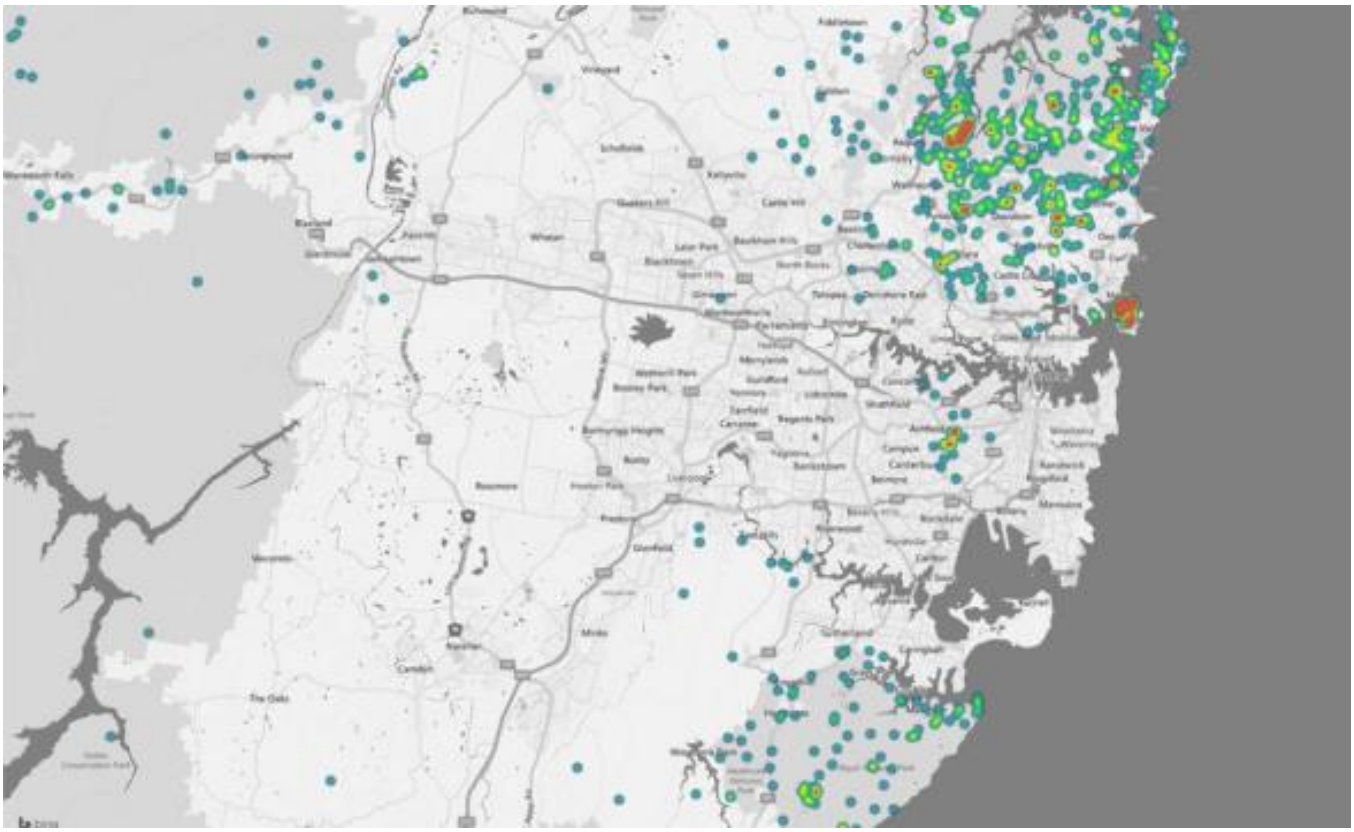
Without an internal Customer Relationship Management system, it was difficult to identify end-users and understand their needs. The first step was to reach out to registered BioNet users and engage with them to document their use of the BioNet database in order to prioritise which data to share first. This open consultation was vital to make sure that the data shared would be both comprehensive and useful to all current users before the opportunities for potential future users were considered.

Dean Egan, NPWS Project Officer, and James Bibby, Senior Scientist, review a heat map of animal sightings in the Everlasting Swamp National Park, NSW's newest National Park. Photo: J Robertson

Meeting Open OEH Goal 3: Deliver content that people want, to where they are, in the way they need it

The wide range of users and their diverse expectations made it difficult to define an approach that would make content available in a user-friendly format. The work led to the creation of a standardised Open Application Program Interface (API) that allows IT (information technology) developers to integrate data with existing or new applications and uses. Users can create new 'apps' (applications), and they can explore different ways of innovating and of addressing specific stakeholder needs not currently available in the BioNet Atlas of NSW Wildlife web application. For example, *Gaia Guide*, a not-for-profit initiative, is using the data in BioNet to compile custom field guides for National Parks in New South Wales. The field guides can be downloaded to mobile phones and used when exploring national parks.

Another example is *Lotsearch*, a service for land developers that provides up-to-date data on threatened species sightings and a reporting service to help streamline the environmental assessment process in planning. Both examples demonstrate how open data initiatives drive efficiencies and can support small business innovation while informing environmental decisions.



BioNet heat map of all bandicoot sightings in Sydney and surrounds

Outcomes

Good

- BioNet data can be transparently integrated into decision-making systems, ensuring that decisions are made by using the most up-to-date data available.
- Development of the BioNet Open API shows OEH's commitment to open government and open innovation.

Unexpected

- End-users showed interest in using Microsoft Excel to extract and display data from the Open API.

Challenges

Challenges included:

- promoting and driving awareness of the Open API to inspire small business to use data in new and creative ways.

Lessons learned

- Investing time and effort to make a case for the adoption of standards is important to ensure the delivery of good-quality service.
- It's vital to think from the end-user's perspective at the inception of a project in order to provide better service. It's equally important to continue work with end-users and consult as projects progress to make sure that planned and future data releases meet the end-user's needs.

Open OEH Pioneer Polly Mitchell and her team used the Open OEH goals to develop the AdaptNSW website.

Case study 2
AdaptNSW: Open access to climate change information

AdaptNSW is the NSW Government climate change information portal. It was developed for use by regional decision-makers, impact assessment researchers and the broader NSW community. The portal provides a one-stop shop for information on climate change in New South Wales. It presents a range of research, data, tools and resources, including the NSW and ACT Regional Climate Model (NARCliM) projections, NSW Adaptation Research Hub projects, Integrated Regional Vulnerability Assessment reports and links to valuable education resources. Since its launch in December 2014, AdaptNSW has become an authoritative source of knowledge and produces high-resolution climate projections for New South Wales that empower communities to make informed decisions about their futures.

The task

The task was to develop the AdaptNSW website. This was made possible through the NARCliM research partnership between the NSW and ACT governments and the Climate Change Research Centre at the University of NSW. The AdaptNSW and NARCliM project teams are committed to applying open government principles to provide greater access to information; promote dialogue about what climate change data are available or can be made available in future; and deliver content in a user-friendly format that will increase user groups' engagement with climate change projections.

How we did it

Open OEH Pioneer Polly Mitchell was the Project Manager for the AdaptNSW website. In developing the website her team used the following Open OEH goals.

Meeting Open OEH Goal 1: Engage in greater collaboration, participation and conversation

The genesis of AdaptNSW was driven by the needs of end-users. Partnerships with stakeholders were developed for collaboration with OEH staff from the inception of the project. They included joint funding partnerships between NSW and ACT agencies, the identification of dedicated knowledge brokers who could communicate across disciplines, and extensive internal and external engagement to co-design the delivery of data and information content and format. Teams across OEH agreed on roles, had clear delivery schedules and understood their resource requirements. End-users are continually engaged to make sure that the AdaptNSW portal remains flexible and adaptive to the changing priorities of users.

Meeting Open OEH Goal 2: Increase transparency and access to information, services and people

To provide open access to information there must be confidence in the information: in other words, we need a robust quality assurance and quality control process. Because the datasets generated in the NARCliM project were very large (2 petabytes, or 2 million gigabytes), we needed a new IT solution to facilitate external access. Multiple areas across OEH had the responsibility to plan and develop the IT solution. The diversity of the input meant that we needed continuous and productive engagement to communicate, innovate and provide dedicated resources. The team developed quality assurance protocols and tests, as well as a strategic communication and engagement plan. It also created a customer support service on the website, and it provided a data access tool to help more sophisticated users to cut and slice the datasets more extensively. For other users not familiar with modelling data, the team created an online mapping visualisation tool to access synthesised climate change projections. It provided downloadable access to maps and data, along with methodologies for documenting data generation.

Meeting Open OEH Goal 3: Deliver content that people want, to where they are, in the way they need it

An ongoing process was set up to understand what end-users wanted, how they used the information, and where they needed it. The process helped to broker communication between scientists and end-users. Knowledge brokers were able to translate the world-leading science into usable products as a result of the ongoing review of end-users' needs. The end-users were profiled into different tiers of data and accessibility needs. The information on the website was then tailored to satisfy a range of users, from sophisticated data users to decision-makers needing simple but highly synthesised information.

Outcomes

Good

- AdaptNSW is now a recognised best-practice platform for information products on climate change in New South Wales.
- It is designed to reach a wide target group.
- User-friendly synthesised products such as videos, reports, maps and data meet various end-users' needs.

Unexpected

- A high level of commitment was needed across partners to deliver innovative ways to build the platform.

Challenges

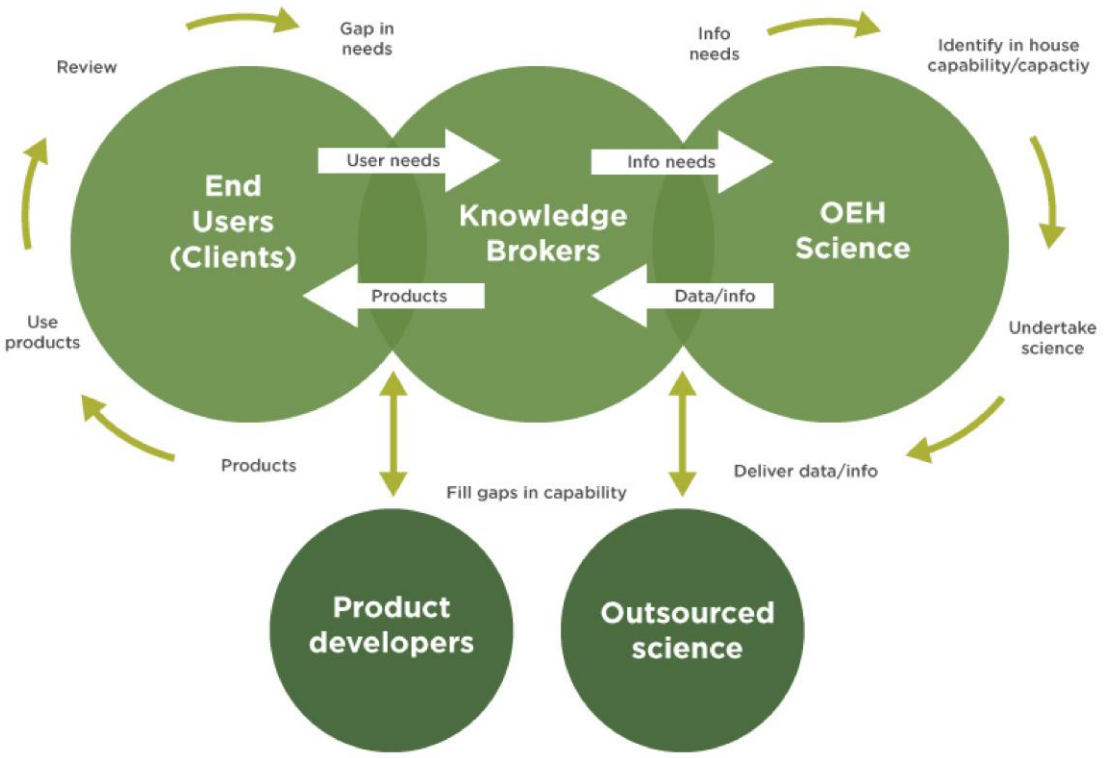
Challenges included:

- management and quality control of a large quantity of information with accuracy using new IT systems
- using a common language across partners
- maintaining continuous feedback loops.

Lessons learned

- In building an authoritative source of information, it's vital to allow enough time to set up rigorous quality assurance processes to ensure confidence in data accuracy.
- Delivering scientific information in user-friendly styles and formats requires a culture shift for a science-based organisation such as OEH. There must be clear communication among scientists, knowledge brokers and stakeholders to produce rigorous information that meets end-users' needs.
- We learned how to gain commitment across partners so as to maintain accurate scientific information in user-friendly formats. We also learned how to continue ongoing engagement with end-users to communicate the benefits of AdaptNSW.

The process used to meet OEH end-user data and information needs and to produce AdaptNSW.



As part of Our Place, OEH helped with the Afghan Friendship Garden project in Wollongong. The project was delivered through the Multicultural Communities Council of Illawarra.
Photo: S Liber/OEH

Case study 3
Action Matters: Multicultural communities caring for their local environments

The Our Place Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) Program is a place-based community engagement program helping CALD communities to get involved in initiatives to care for their local environments. OEH provides grants and mentoring to help engage community members in relevant and meaningful environmental initiatives. The program was funded by the Environmental Trust.

The task

Creating partnerships with community organisations helps us to achieve our strategic goal of sharing the care of our environment and enables local communities to design and deliver innovative sustainability initiatives. Co-design of Our Place with the help of community partners for greater impact was a key task.

How we did it

Open OEH Pioneer Rupa Nair, a member of the Sustainable Communities team, was the Project Manager for the Our Place CALD Program.

The program was co-designed with locally embedded organisations from across the NSW local government and CALD community sectors.

In 2015, the program partnered with six CALD organisations across two regions (Greater Western Sydney and the Illawarra):

- Bankstown Youth Development Service
- Ethnic Communities Council NSW
- Liverpool Migrant Resource Centre
- Multicultural Communities Council of Illawarra Inc.
- SydWest Multicultural Services Inc.
- NSW Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors.

'The program yielded meaningful engagement and inspired CALD participants to make tangible differences to the environment'. **Project Partner**

An estimated 3150 community members participated in the different project activities, and the program reached a further 13,300 CALD community members via family and friends of those who participated in the six projects. All of the project leaders reported that their projects had led participants to make new connections and feel more engaged in their communities.

Meeting Open OEH Goal 1: Increase transparency and access to information, services and people

This year, the program wrapped up with a Summit Workshop. The workshop brought together all of the partner organisations, independent evaluators and OEH project leaders to validate the insights captured throughout the program and define what aspects had worked well or not so well. The findings will be used to improve or expand CALD community projects. The Summit Workshop also aimed to give participants the chance to celebrate their efforts and share information on the program's performance. A final report will be published and made available on the OEH website.

OEH supported Sydwest Multicultural Services Inc. to deliver recycling workshops to a local Blacktown Sikh community group.
Photo: S Davey/OEH

Meeting Open OEH Goal 2: Engage in greater collaboration, participation and conversation

Our Place was designed with a partnership and strengths-based approach. The kick-off workshop helped gather input from participants to design a community development program that met the needs of CALD residents – and the community organisations working with them – to look after their local environments. Once the program had started, each partner was encouraged, in turn, to co-design projects with their communities for their communities; this included consultation to identify issues and projects that had community energy, support and commitment. Projects were then led by each community.

Meeting Open OEH Goal 3: Deliver content that people want, to where they are, in the way they need it

The program used the OEH online engagement forum, Engagement HQ software, to encourage ongoing information sharing and networking and to build on face-to-face sessions. Partners were consulted and guided on how to use the online forum, but the tool was not used by participants. The feedback was that it was yet another tool that our stakeholders didn't have time to use and didn't really need. Consequently, the team changed its approach and is now exploring what content communities want and through which channels.

Outcomes

Good

- Co-design of the program delivered effective and long-lasting sustainable practices.
- The collaborative design model resulted in a broad reach, with an estimated 13,300 community members connected through activities facilitated by the six project partners.

- Each co-design project brought together the different (and sometimes divergent) needs of each partner but also helped to find common ground and develop common objectives.

Unexpected

- Stakeholders didn't use the online forum (Engagement HQ), as it offered them few benefits.
- Participants found that using a value-based approach to tailor sustainability actions to different cultural values created strong personal connections with the environment for them.

Challenges

Challenges included:

- developing a program that met everyone's needs. It was key to use an adaptive management approach, which was reactive and flexible.
- the need to give communities enough incubation time and resources to be actively involved, as members often had other, pressing, priorities
- the time needed for strong partnerships to develop, and the need for commitment from each partner to share scarce time and resources.

Lessons learned

- Working with intermediaries such as CALD community organisations was key to achieving a broad reach and sustainable, high-impact projects that were relevant locally to each partner group.
- When targeting a multicultural community it was essential for projects to align with specific cultural values.
- Time was important. Enough lead time needed to be allocated to build genuine trust between government and the community.
- Digital engagement platforms were not always useful. Check the value of specific platforms to the group before embedding platforms in projects.

Overlooking the Wallabadah Nature Reserve, Ranger Rachel-Ann Wilcher and local landholder Geoff Nankeviel discuss the impact of wild dogs on the area. Photo: R Ali/OEH

Case study 4 NPWS–community collaboration for managing wild dogs in the Upper Hunter

A collaborative approach to wild dog management in the Upper Hunter was initiated by National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) Area Manager Peta Norris and her team in 2014 to help manage the negative impact of wild dog populations on agriculture and native species. To figure out how better to manage wild dogs across the landscape, they needed to collaborate with landholders and other stakeholders, as wild dog management is as much about people as it is about wild dogs. But first they needed to understand what collaboration really means and how it could be done well.

The task

Throughout New South Wales, industry, community and government share serious concerns about wild dog attacks on livestock and about the detrimental impact of wild dogs on native species. These concerns have led to landholders, industry groups, residents, politicians, government agencies and the local media weighing in on how best to manage wild dogs. From a state government perspective:

- NSW government agencies realise that wild dogs are a complex issue, as there are economic, environmental and social impacts that need a coordinated and strategic approach involving all stakeholders. For a variety of complex reasons, it has been hard to apply this approach consistently.
- the law recognises that wild dogs, including dingoes, can cause substantial agricultural losses and have significant devastating impacts on native species. Wild dogs are a declared pest under the *Local Land Services Act 2013* and are subject to the Wild Dog Pest Control Order.
- NPWS has an obligation to control wild dogs under the Pest Control Order. This includes minimising the risk of wild dogs causing damage, while allowing for the conservation of dingoes in national parks and reserves listed under Schedule 2 of the Pest Control Order. Preparation of a wild dog management plan addresses both the control of wild dogs and the conservation of dingoes.

How we did it

Peta Norris is an Open OEH Pioneer located in the Upper Hunter. She understood that the management of wild dogs is a contentious and emotive subject, and that this makes it tricky to work out the best way of getting stakeholders on board. One upfront challenge was widespread cynicism about how wild dogs were being managed across the region, particularly in national parks. This initially made people cautious and hesitant at the prospect of a new approach. It was also clear for Peta and her team that they needed to develop a shared understanding of what they were trying to achieve and how they were going to get there.

The team arranged a 1-day collaboration workshop for 21 NPWS staff and 5 Hunter Local Land Services (LLS) staff. Participants learned what it means to collaborate and what benefits come from it. The workshop generated ideas around collaborative information gathering and community knowledge sharing, including informal community gatherings, deeper engagement with wild dog associations, and a partnership between the NPWS and Hunter LLS.

With a clearer notion of how to achieve the desired outcomes, the team aimed to foster continuous and effective collaboration with people in the community to manage wild dogs across the local landscape. Their continued vision is for all interested parties to actively participate in each phase of the decision-making so that collective resources are continuously focused on where they are needed most. Specific examples of the ongoing collaborative approach to wild dog management in the Upper Hunter include:

- At **Wallabadah Nature Reserve**, the team worked with neighbours to implement and monitor a wild dog control program on horseback in inaccessible terrain. Neighbours enlisted as volunteers to help with control programs in the reserve and to provide their horses for use by NPWS staff. The NPWS continues to provide planning, reporting and operational support to the program.
- At **Camerons Gorge Nature Reserve** the team worked with neighbours to monitor wild dog activity in the area and to stay connected with regular surveys. Information from the surveys continues to be used in ground actions, allowing proactive management of dog issues by all stakeholders.
- Another outcome has been the appearance of a NPWS Pest Management Officer on SBS2 TV's The Feed alongside farmers and trappers working to manage the impacts of wild dogs in the Upper Hunter. See *The Feed,* Wild Dogs, 10 August 2015 on YouTube.

Outcomes

Good

- Positive changes in the NPWS's relationships with reserve neighbours, wild dog associations and Hunter LLS colleagues became obvious as cynicism came to be replaced by optimism.
- The community began to promote NPWS's contribution to wild dog management through its networks and local media.
- Resources and information are being shared more freely across the region as everyone continues to think of new ways to collaborate and improve outcomes for all.

Unexpected

- Wild dog management is as much about people as it is about wild dogs. Workshops improved the collective understanding of collaboration within the team, and individuals now apply collaborative principles to other aspects of their work.

Challenges

Challenges included:

- difficulty reaching common ground to work towards a shared purpose.

Lessons learned

- Trust is key and relationships are critical.
- Time spent listening and sharing is just as valuable as time spent doing. The saying ‘going slow to go fast’ is at the root of successful collaborative participation.
- Leading change requires shared understanding, consistency and reliability.