

Review of the LVI Landcare Professionals Forum 2017

The Forum was built around what Landcare professionals wanted to talk about, brought in the expertise of Landcare professionals, and tested formats for peer-to-peer learning. A week after the Forum, we asked people what they had taken home that was valuable for them.

Having time to share with peers

I found it valuable to catch up with other professionals & share experiences & learn from each other in a fairly informal setting.

Peer conversations, something that Landcare professionals rarely have. We work in isolation.

Great just to meet everyone. I realised that we all feel it is quite an isolating role at times even though you are dealing with people a lot of the time. So these gathering are quite important.

Great to meet or get to know better fellow Landcare workers and have everyone's email for future reference.

The connections I made will be a continuing source of ideas and wisdom available down the track. On that basis alone, the two days were productive use of time.

The event was incredibly humbling and exciting at the same time - so many amazing people with so much experience and passion! I loved just chatting with everyone and sharing experiences.

A sense of solidarity with the other LLFs

New ideas on specific topics

[of the Temperament types presented by Cam Nicholson] Farmers are in the left hand box and so is my Chair and Treasurer. I am in the right hand box. I just need to suck it up and do it their way if we are going to work effectively.

I got a lot out of Cam's talk - realising that the same approach won't work for all people.

I learnt a lot in the mapping segment on Thurs am. Made some new contacts to follow up on & share ideas on new technologies that can be used in Landcare .

I attended the GIS session and learned a lot.

There is a huge variation in landcare facilitators' employment situations and job roles ... session highlighted the good and bad bits of the role.

New ideas about how to work in communities

[of Kerstie Lee's session] Think about delivering topics of general interest and seeing who turns up/ rather than the other way around – waiting for groups to tell us what they are interested in.

A grouping of individuals based more on common areas of interest seems to spawn more interest, energy and collaborative effort between landholders.

The message for me was to support the community in what they are wanting to achieve rather than trying to direct it all! This was particularly apparent from Libby Riches talk.

Organising the event

The venue worked well, and the catering was "above expectations". When asked what would have made the Forum better, some would have like to have gone to each of the "how to" sessions, which ran in parallel. There were suggestions on the timing: starting earlier on the first

day, or even the previous evening, finishing at lunch on the second day to make travelling home easier for those that have to go a long distance, and go through Melbourne.

The agenda was developed around what Landcare professionals themselves wanted to talk about and offered to share. Eliciting this took three rounds of email and three drafts of the program as it developed, over 4 months. I followed up possible contributors suggested by others and talked with those who said they wanted to contribute to settle on their topic. Along with arranging the venue and catering, this took around 60 hours.

Testing formats for peer-to-peer learning

Presentation sessions with multiple presenters providing different perspectives on a theme. This format worked well because a) the focus of each session was relevant to professionals, b) the perspectives in each session were different, with a mix of theory, first-hand experience and practice-based wisdom, c) the presentations were short and sharp.

"How-to" sessions where individuals shared their knowledge on a specific subject. These worked because participants had nominated the subjects, and because the presenters had first-hand experience of the Landcare job and could relate their material to the work situation.

"Knowledge harvest" sessions to gather knowledge on an issue. The format was simple enough for each group to facilitate itself. The use of a list allowed ideas to keep accumulating, and the focus on appreciating what worked or needed to work meant the groups did not get sidetracked into complaining about difficulties.

"Conversations that can't wait." Focused conversations on the evening of day 1 were organised around matters participants raised for discussion in the Forum, and generated intense discussion for an hour. One person said that setting up these conversations cut across the conversations that had already broken out during dinner. That's true, and the pay-off was discussion on explicit issues of shared interest.

Loomio website. Participants were invite to post their interests around three of the Forum topics before the event, and continue discussion after the Forum. Five people posted before the event, and three people after. More looked at what others had posted, but I can't tell how many. There aren't enough people using the site to make an on-going conversation viable.

CLEA offer to support on-going peer learning projects. I presented five alternate ways participants could support their on-going learning, and offered CLEA support, if professionals proposed what and how they wanted to work on this. I had one person wanting to team up with other facilitators on a shared Question Without An Easy Answer, and three facilitators in adjacent proposing support for peer learning between the three of them. I'm working out the specifics with these two expressions of Interest.

The big conclusions

Landcare professionals get a lot out of getting together to talk about their work, but they need someone to create the setting and shape up the agenda with them.

Formats that allow people to share their own experience and draw learning from it are valuable and easy to use in a Forum setting.

On-going peer learning has to be designed around the small number of people interested, and publicised to other professionals so they start to imagine this for themselves.

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