



Key principles for effective communication

Effective communication is essential for delivering a clear message to your audience. Communication within your Landcare group is essential to keep members informed on what's happening. It also encourages group harmony and consensus.

This Landcare note looks at ways of keeping people aware, informed and involved.

What is communication?

Communication is the exchange of feelings, ideas and information. It can be a simple exchange, or a key message, or a way of influencing and persuading.

Communication includes a wide range of methods including face-to-face conversations, writing/reading a newsletter, addressing or listening at a meeting, transmitting 'body language' and messages or views people get from personal behaviour.

Not only is it the foundation of our interaction as humans but it is essential for any form of cooperative activity and a way to bring about change and to find new ways of doing things.

Effective communication is about delivering a clear message to your intended audience. For a Landcare group, there are three elements:

- The commitment of your members to transmit and receive information
- The communication skills available within the group (discussion, listening and facilitation) and,
- Your group's ability to enable communication to happen (see Landcare Note 6.1: Effective Communication in Your Group).

What defines a good communicator?

A good communicator is someone who can translate ideas into words and actions, build credibility and trust with people, is good at listening and asking questions.

Such a person also has the ability to package and present ideas in an engaging way and can motivate their audience to using those ideas.

How to do it

There are a number of important principles in effective communication that can help you. They are:

Know your audience

People differ in the way they speak, listen and understand because they have different interests, skills and reactions. It is important to appreciate that when you are planning your communications.

Be clear about what you are communicating and what you want to achieve

Sometimes communication is just for entertainment but it may also be about passing on information that is critical for personal safety. It is important to be clear on what are you trying to say and why?

Keep the subject clear - and the message too

Complex, tedious or boring messages are not easily expressed or understood. Make sure your message is simple, concise and relevant – and don't rush the exchange.

Match your style and approach to the skills and interests of your audience

If you tailor your style and approach to the people you are talking to, you will get the message across more effectively. Consider the way you will get their attention. Can you make your message entertaining, should it be handled in a formal or informal way, and what type of language should be used.



Landcare Notes

Facilitate feedback - and learn from it

The more feedback you get, the more effective you will be. Learn to ask people what they thought of the communication and be willing to make some changes to improve your approach.

Respect builds communication

Messages move better when *the people passing them on have credibility*. Ethical behaviour and responsible leadership *improve your effectiveness*.

Comfort is crucial

If people aren't comfortable, they can't concentrate. Physical comfort, distractions, health, and any emotional reaction to your approach will have an impact on the effectiveness of your communication.

Using the principles

These principles are about effective communication generally, so are quite broad. Depending on the messages you need to get across, you should also read other Landcare Notes: 8.1 Effective Leadership; 6.1 Effective Communication in Your Group; 6.4 Raising the Group Profile; 6.5 Working with the Media, and; 6.6 How to Market Your Group Successfully for information on your particular purpose.

There are five categories of communication which you should consider as subjects for applying the principles:

1. Social interaction and relationship – here, communication is used to build relations, trust and inter-dependence.
2. Disseminating essential information – in this case, communication ensures key information is received by those who need it- legal obligations to be met or if personal safety depends on it.
3. Learning – much of your activities will be about learning better ways of doing things.

4. Promoting new ideas –testing and challenging current ways of doing things and seeing if you can improve them.
5. Influencing and persuading - the ability to influence and persuade others of the value of your approaches and techniques

Ways of communicating

The most basic tools of communication are discussion, visual presentations and written documents.

Discussion is the foundation of communication and is the easiest solution when all the participants are in a small area, when you need to debate something, get feedback on it and reach an agreement, and when there might need to be some persuasion.

Visual presentations are most beneficial if you need to show rather than tell and the message and its associated ideas work better in visual form.

Written documents are best if the recipient needs to refer back to the information, if records need to be kept and if there is a step-by-step procedure involved. It's also a handy method when there are a lot of people involved who are spread over a long distance, and if you have limited resources to cover your communication

Further references

Victorian Landcare Gateway:
www.landcarevic.org.au

Landcare Coordinator in your region – contact your CMA or nearest DPI office

Related Landcare Notes

This Landcare Note is one of a series. These notes provide an excellent guide for the ongoing operation of your group.

Landcare Note 6.1: Effective Communication in Your Group

Landcare Note 6.4: Raising the Group Profile

Landcare Note 6.5: Working with the Media



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Landcare Note 6.2

Landcare Note 6.6: How to Market Your Group Successfully

Landcare Note 8.1: Effective Leadership

Acknowledgements

Bronte Payne: Landcare Note (2001) - Effective Group Communication

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