



Landcare Notes

Project management

A well managed project is more likely to get the best results and can adapt to changing circumstances and seasonal events.

Good project management shows your group can plan projects well and operate effectively with the resources (materials, funds, labour) available. This track record provides credibility within the group and for outsiders so future projects will be looked upon more favourably.

What project management is

Project management is using a plan to help you keep track of every element of your project so you get the results you want and can identify problems as they arise. It is recommended that you refer to Landcare Note 5.3: Developing a Landcare Project if you do not already have a plan for your project. Once you have a plan you can look at this next topic of managing the project.

To manage a project well you need to:

- Establish the timelines, funding available, materials and labour needs, legal requirements and technical considerations
- Understand what interest and support you have from the group, departmental advisers and other community members and their availability to help
- Manage the finances so the project comes in within budget
- Manage people so they continue to be happy with the project
- Maintain good communication with everyone involved
- Keep track of all activities within the project

- Make decisions to continue, or change direction, if circumstances change throughout the project implementation.

How to do it

There are a range of skills (and time) needed to do the job well. In larger organisations, staff who are skilled in project management often work as a team to oversee various projects. For most of your projects, a team approach will also work well. Consider setting up a small committee of interested members (with a designated leader) to manage the project.

Before you start the project, you must check if you need any special certifications or approvals. This should have been done when the project was being developed, so if you find you don't have the permission you need, or the appropriate skills in your group you should look at resolving these issues as soon as is possible. It is important to be confident your project is achievable (see Landcare Note 7.6: Permits and Permissions in Victoria).

Managing materials and equipment

You need to ensure everything that's needed is available when it's needed. Mark the critical times you will require specific materials and machinery in your timeline and check on their availability. You can then set your own deadlines for ordering or arranging your resources.

Check with the person/organisation you are hiring/borrowing your equipment and machinery from to ensure you meet the rules, and make sure you have a suitably experienced person to operate it (see Landcare Note 7.5: Personal Safety).

Some groups buy materials in bulk, with the extra being used for future projects. Where specific materials are needed (e.g. indigenous seed) you will need to plan well in advance with the appropriate supplier.



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Managing the finances

The process for recording all in-comings (government grants, sponsorship, donations, fund-raising) and all out-goings (expenses, reimbursements) is probably best set up by the person who will be responsible for reporting on the finances, and the coordinator of the project.

This process can be simplified by using a manual cash book, computer spreadsheet or computer accounting program – or a combination of tools. Regardless of the system you should try to record each transaction as it happens to make things easier to keep track of and limit the chance of overspending. You should also keep track of when your costs are under budget and discuss any issues regularly with your group and any external parties that are relevant.

Keep a separate folder for each project with the relevant receipts and invoices to make the reporting process simpler. Make sure you know your GST status as this could affect some transactions (see Landcare Notes: 7.1 Keeping Records; 4.4 Budgeting; 4.5 GST and ABN).

Managing the people

The best way to ensure the project runs as smoothly as possible is to keep everyone regularly informed.

Draw up a clear plan that lists the separate actions and their timing. This will help to delegate the tasks and share the workload between members and contractors. Note dates and times when members or contractors are needed (and notify them ahead of time) so there are no surprises.

A regular report back to the group on how things are going and requests for help or advice when needed is an important part of good project management. It could be a simple five-minute report at the regular committee meeting that will help maintain everyone's interest and support.

Reporting regularly to the people who are providing you with funds and resources shows you value the support, you are acting responsibly and gives others confidence that the group is managing the project well.

Keep your community informed through signage, press releases and field days, remembering that group activities are good social events that bring people together, and others will be interested in what you are doing.

Remember to acknowledge and celebrate what is being achieved, especially the often-unsung efforts that go into managing a project (see Landcare Notes: 8.4 Beating 'Burn-out'; 9.4 Celebration and Recognition).

Managing the timelines

Many projects you will be involved in deal must take into account the seasonal conditions – the right time to plant or harvest, to carry out weed and rabbit control and to construct erosion control structures and other earthworks.

Bear these conditions in mind so you buy your materials and plan your activities well in advance of the best time to start but have flexibility for possible delays because of changes in the conditions.

Sometimes you should consider the possibility of postponing or cancelling all or parts of your project if conditions will limit your chances of success. Be open to alternative arrangements when things don't go according to plan, and discuss the issues with others before making a decision.

Managing the technical aspects

Be clear on what materials and practices are best suited to your local area and seek advice from experienced locals and departmental advisers.

Find out what has worked in similar projects and what the critical elements of that success were and get advice on suitable alternatives if the materials and equipment you need are not available or too expensive.



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Managing legal, government and funding requirements

There may be legal and other requirements that need to be met so your project can get started and proceed safely and effectively. These should have been resolved before the project began. You will need to know what these obligations are, and ensure you account for this in your day-to-day running of the project (see Landcare Note 7.4: Risk Management: Why Worry?).

There are also guidelines, procedures and criteria to meet if you are using funds from a source such as a government grant or sponsorship, so make sure you check with the relevant organisation for their requirements. For example you may have agreed to use the logo of the supporting organisation in any promotional material.

Monitoring, evaluation and reporting

You need to be meticulous about monitoring and reporting on your project to give an accurate picture of how resources are being used and what the outputs are (refer to Landcare Note 5.5: Monitoring and Evaluating Group Activities to find out what this is).

Any costs associated with this aspect of the project should be built into the budget. Remember that you can include volunteer time which can be shown as an 'in kind' labour cost as part of the total project budget. There may be other minor costs (such as photographic film), or you may require an expert assessment (evaluation or audit) at the end of the project.

For example, taking 'before' and 'after' photos at a project site gives you a visual record of what has been done. You must take all the photos at the same point before you start, while the work is happening and after it is finished. This is called establishing 'photo points', and is a great simple and cost effective tool to show change at a site over time.

Keep a record of what group members and other volunteers do in terms of the project and

activities (i.e. working days, field days, visits by various groups). This is part of reporting about your project and your group, and it helps to show members and the community what your project involved.

Key tools

There are several 'tools' that can help you with project management, including computer spreadsheets to record materials and finances. Site maps and plans (see Landcare Note 5.4: Project Site Planning and Management) are also handy and they should be kept together, along with aerial photos and area maps that are used on the project.

If you are working on a number of sites, keep a separate folder for each site with all the relevant material. You might need to check that the landholder involved knows what records to keep and how to keep track.

If your project involves a number of sites, you could standardise your project forms so that all members are calculating the project sites in a consistent way. Include materials needed, dates and types of planned activities, labour (or list of members) involved, and associated costs.

Further references

Victorian Landcare Gateway:
www.landcarevic.org.au

Landcare coordinators and grants officers in your region – contact your CMA or nearest DPI office.

National Landcare Program Evaluation Coordinators (1997) – *Setting Up For Success – A Guide for Designing, Managing and Evaluating Projects:*
<http://catalogue.nla.gov.au/Record/2713703>

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 Notes

Landcare Note 4.4: Budgeting

Landcare Note 4.5: GST and ABN

Landcare Note 5.4: Project Site Planning and Management

Landcare Note 5.5: Monitoring and Evaluating Group Activities

Landcare Note 7.1: Keeping Records

Landcare Note 7.4: Risk Management: Why Worry?

Landcare Note 7.5: Personal Safety

Landcare Note 7.6: Permits and Permissions in Victoria.

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Compiled by the Port Phillip and Westernport Catchment Management Authority's Landcare Support Team

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