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Implementing on-ground change

Experience with the Devolved Grants scheme of the Mount Lofty Ranges Catchment Program

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Natural resource management is important in the Mount Lofty Ranges behind Adelaide. The ranges feature one of the highest rainfall areas in South Australia, fertile soils, unique flora and fauna and extensive primary production. The area also supplies most of Adelaide's water and attracts rural lifestyle, urban development, tourism and recreation.

Phase II of the Mount Lofty Ranges Catchment Program (MLRCP) operated from 1998 to 2001 (Phase III will follow). It aims to enhance sustainable natural resource management, with community and government working together, maintaining and improving an environmentally, economically and socially diverse region.

The objectives of the Program are:

- planning to set priorities;
- on-ground action (groups and individuals);
- integrated action in natural resource management;
- community awareness and understanding;
- developing and promoting best practice; and,
- proactively attracting investment with partners.

From the editor

Feedback on the last edition was positive. Thanks to those who wrote in with suggestions. This edition signals a return to more traditional extension stories, but look for more topics from "outside the square" in future editions. In particular, we're keen to see some stories on marketing extension.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Phase II accelerated on-ground action. Technical and community assessment processes determined priorities for on-ground works to ensure that resources were invested in key locations to address significant issues. On-ground outputs were achieved through the continued provision of devolved community grants, together with the introduction of devolved funding for groups to undertake major on-ground works.

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DATECLAIMER: AGM

APEN Annual General Meeting NRE Institute, Tatura, Victoria, on Friday November 8, 2002. The AGM will be preceded by a joint AAAC-APEN professional development activity.

IN THIS ISSUE

Planning for innovation p4

Theo Nabben explains how innovation and uncertainty can be reconciled with firm project goals.

APEN strategic plan p7

APEN NE Treasurer Greg Cock outlines how your National Executive plans to do business.

APEN contacts p8

Where to contact your local APEN representative. Also story guidelines for the next edition of ExtensionNet.

APEN is pleased to acknowledge the support of:



DAIRY RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION



Horticulture Australia

Darren Schmidt

Devolved grants is a process whereby the Commonwealth Government passes on some financial responsibility for project approvals and administration to regional organisations.

DIFFUSION OF INNOVATIONS

APEN name change

Some preliminary stats on the name change faxback you received with your last newsletter, where "1" was "Don't change it!" and 9 was "Change it now!" 5 is neutral. Average so far: 5.1

Scores	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
No.	12	2	12	2	17	3	8	6	12

It's not too late to send in your faxback form.

Another online journal

The venerable *Journal of Extension (JOE)* has a companion on the web. It's the *Journal of Agricultural Education and Extension* and you can find it at <http://www.bib.wau.nl/ejae/>. Abstracts are free to download from 1996 to the present, but free full text versions are only available until 1996. Fees apply for more recent articles.

JOE online update

Speaking of *JOE*, the June edition carries a good number of articles relevant to Australian/Pacific extension. Read about international extension, community engagement, evaluation, rural-urban relationships and more. Go to www.joe.org/.

Devolved Grants ... cont'd from page 1

Devolved grants were offered by the MLRCP at two levels: major on-ground works (up to \$150,000 per project, offered annually) and community involvement grants (up to \$10,000 per project offered quarterly). These were intended to achieve major on-ground change and to encourage the community to participate in projects and activities that would:

- enhance and protect the quality of surface and ground water;
- ensure sustainable use and management of water resources;
- protect and enhance biodiversity;
- provide for the sustainable management of land and the protection of soil; and,
- increase community understanding of natural resource management.

While MLRCP had some experience in small community grants during Phase I of the Program (1993-97), major on-ground works were new to Phase II. Management and administration evolved over time, including publicity, database management, application processes, technical assessment, Board of Management appraisal and approval, preparation of financial agreements, payments, monitoring, report assessment and final evaluation.

For major on-ground works, the process was even more complex as the potential project moved through stages of expressions of interest, refinement based on technical advice and detailed project plans. Two custom-built data management systems were developed: one for the MLRCP to administer all aspects of major on-ground works; the other for groups undertaking projects to manage the funds, individual landholder involvement and reporting requirements. In addition, a special group of MLRCP staff provided support and linkages to community groups who were implementing the works.

In a typical year, about \$150,000 of Natural Heritage Trust funds were allocated to about 20 groups for community involvement grants and \$1 million to about 15 groups for major on-ground works. These investments were more than matched by contributions from the community, local and State Governments. Over the three years and nine months of the MLRCP Phase II, this total investment from the community and three levels of government was close to \$9.5 million.

What did we learn?

Through the process of administering this scheme, we developed many systems and procedures, collectively called the *Ingredients of Success* (see diagram opposite). Much of this was learned in the more challenging major on-ground works scheme. Each and everyone of these components was necessary to make the scheme successful. Some of these revolve around reliable sources of **funding** and other contributions, such as:

- Natural Heritage Trust funds (of about \$2 million a year);
- matching contributions (State/Local Government and community); and,
- incentive packages for on-ground works (to encourage landholders to undertake the required priorities).

Others revolve around **priorities and partners**, particularly priority natural resource management issues and multiple and diverse partners (for funding, technical advice, in-kind support etc).

The scheme could not operate without a **community** ready and willing to take on major or minor projects, so the ingredients include:

- community groups and/or landholders in the key areas;
- indigenous (local) knowledge of land, climate, weeds etc;
- support from Landcare officers and others where there are significant environmental issues, but no existing community group to lead the process;
- 'insider' information on the social environment (eg recognising key community leaders, or how to resolve potential conflict within a group);
- general group support, eg providing information, referral to training and technical expertise and advice on planning and coordination of activities and projects;
- access to relevant and timely technical advice to landholders or the group.

There needed to be open, transparent and equitable systems for the groups to obtain funding

- effective publicity and communication;
- an open application process (eg expressions of interest, detailed project plans etc);
- technical assessment of applications, and providing feedback;
- Board of Management assessment and approval.

The MLRCP needed to establish its own administration processes and reporting structures, so the ingredients include:

- database management systems (electronic and hard copy);
- custom-built data management system for administration, tracking and reporting.

In addition, the group needed to be supported in the ongoing management of the project and the funds and associated reporting:

- financial and project agreement with groups;
- payment schedule to groups, linked to reporting (for large projects this tended to be 50% 'up-front', 40% at the half-way point on provision of a progress report and 10% on completion, including a final report);
- site visits and inspections of on-ground works at appropriate times.

Almost all large projects needed additional human resources to implement them, so ingredients include:

- funding of project/implementation officers for most larger projects (to coordinate landholders, technical advice, implementation, reporting etc);
- development of custom-built data management system for groups to use;
- the development of Voluntary Land Management Agreements with landholders.

And the whole process needed to be flexible, so that ingredients include:

- the invaluable team of about 15 individuals from the MLRCP, various State agencies and community groups who acted as the link between each major on-ground works project and the MLRCP;
- ongoing review of processes, procedures and linkages;
- monitoring, 'trouble shooting' and final evaluation.

So what?

Delivering major and complex programs for on-ground change in natural resource management presents considerable challenges, in the complex chain from Commonwealth Government to individual landholder and landholder groups. To a large extent, meeting these challenges relied on the willingness of everyone involved to be flexible, positive, and to work together to devise credible, practical and cost-effective solutions. In other words, the most valuable asset is the human resources of the region and a willingness to invest in people in order to achieve effective on-ground change. ENR

Western Australia

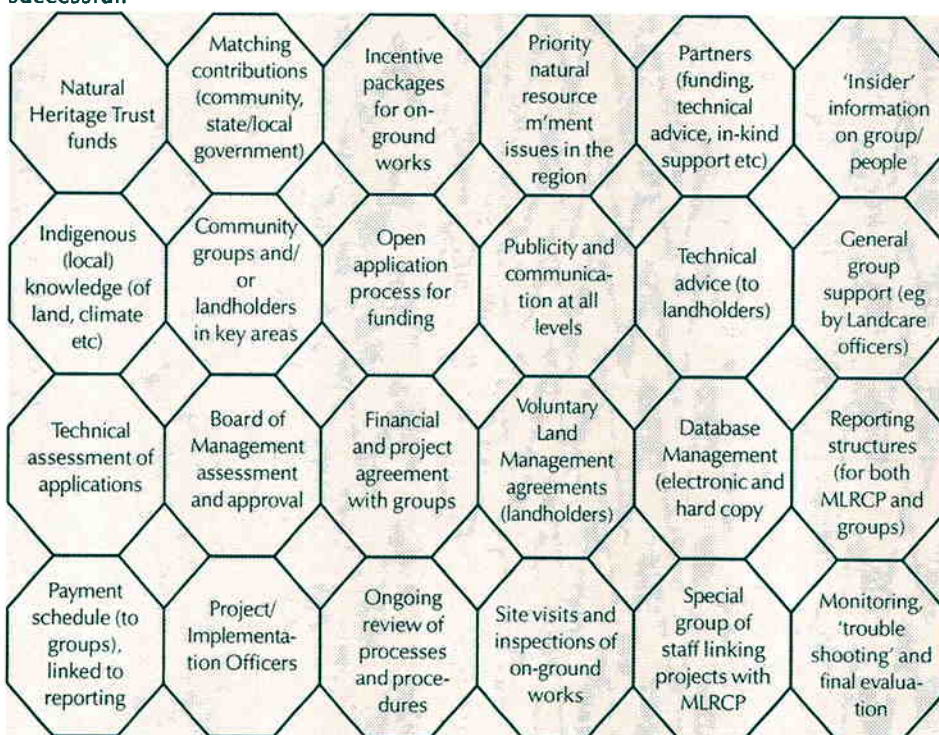
The folk in WA are busy! By the time you read this, WA Chapter will have run their second writing workshop (the first was in late May) which covered research, structure, style, editing and using images. In addition, Uni of Qld's Tony Kelly launched a three pronged workshop adventure in Perth and Kalgoorlie focusing on integrated community development, community development frameworks and community building through heads, hearts and hands.

National accreditation scheme

In March, a joint AAAC/APEN workshop funded by RIRDC was conducted in Canberra to explore the possibility of establishing a national accreditation scheme for workers in natural resources, agriculture and related sectors.

John James and Jon Warren attended, and Jon is on the steering committee to progress the initiative further.

Ingredients for success in devolved grants: a honeycomb of variables. As Jill says: "Each and everyone of these components was necessary to make the scheme successful."



ICEBREAKERS

Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experience of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, vision cleared, ambition inspired, and success achieved.

.... Helen Keller