

101 SECRETS

for a Successful Environmental Volunteer Group

Suggestions from participants
of the 2009 Community Forum



The Sydney Metropolitan Catchment Management Authority (CMA) is a regional body established by the NSW Government to co-ordinate the management of natural resources across the Sydney metropolitan region. The CMA is committed to encouraging community involvement in on-ground work to rehabilitate and protect Sydney's valuable natural areas.

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Front cover (left): Judy Christie, Sydney Metropolitan CMA
Front cover (right): Margaret Reidy, Carters Creek Bushcare group
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About this booklet

Throughout the Sydney metropolitan region, there are thousands of environmental volunteers doing Bushcare, bush regeneration, tree planting, fauna and flora monitoring, water quality monitoring and community nursery work. Many volunteers also spend time writing grant applications, seeking sponsorship and extra support to assist the work being done on the ground.

Each of these environmental volunteer groups is made up of a wonderful mix of different personalities, skills and interests. Although there may be differences all share the common goals of restoring the natural environment and a desire to make a difference in their local community.

Environmental volunteer groups also face the challenges of engaging new volunteers, keeping existing volunteers interested and coming back month after month, and (hopefully) year after year, whilst also ensuring that the group's work achieves positive results for the environment.

How do volunteer groups stay focused and enthused? How can groups attract support from the local community and promote the important work that is being done in Sydney's natural areas?

In 2009, the Sydney Metropolitan Catchment Management Authority held a Community Forum which was attended by over 100 committed environmental volunteers from across Sydney. At the Forum, Megan Tattersall from the Australian Government's Caring for our Country program facilitated a group discussion with the experts, the volunteers themselves, who were asked to ponder this question...

"What is your secret ingredient for a successful volunteer group?"

The responses from the volunteers are summarised in this booklet as a resource for all environmental volunteer groups, especially those working in Sydney.





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NAME _____
NO. _____
101 SECRETS

Make it fun

Friendships and social interaction help keep a volunteer group together and encourage people to keep showing up.

"I think it is important to make it fun and enjoyable. People don't want it to be too hard and demanding." John

"...the thought of meeting friends gets you up and out." Jan

Stop for a break at each work day. Make it a proper break for morning or afternoon tea and give everyone a chance to rest, have a cuppa and a chat.

"Have morning tea half way through the work day. Provision of hot water is essential." Raema

"Have a special tea break when it is someone's birthday or something else is celebrated." Dora

Take turns and bring some good food to share around.

Have a street party or dinner every so often and include other neighbours and family members.

"Like minds and kindred spirits create a friendly atmosphere." Margaret



"A good morning tea."
Andy

Make each other feel valued

People volunteer their time for many different reasons. But everybody likes to be appreciated for his or her contribution.

"Welcome volunteers by name when they come along. Make each person feel special and valued (including the leaders and organisers)." Chris

Find out if there is a particular reason for people wanting to be involved.

"Value individual skills, input and differences." Roberta

Make new people welcome.

"I have found a great diversity of people among the volunteers and have had the opportunity to cultivate friendships with them. We can see more about Australia." Orlando

Regularly acknowledge peoples' efforts and contributions.

"Thank volunteers." Paula

Respect the time that people give.

"Accepting that volunteers sometimes need to take time out and then will return to the group at a later date when circumstances permit. No recriminations." Judi



"Allow everyone to feel valued and find his or her own niche."
Leigh

Share knowledge and build skills

Each volunteer group is made up of a unique mix of personalities, interests and skills. We can learn a lot from each other and by trying new things.

"Discover people's level of skill so each person is contributing at their best and sharing their skill." Anon

"Match a volunteer with the particular interest of that volunteer." Sandy

Encourage each other to keep learning and sharing information.

"Introduce one new weed and one new native at the tea break." Jonathan

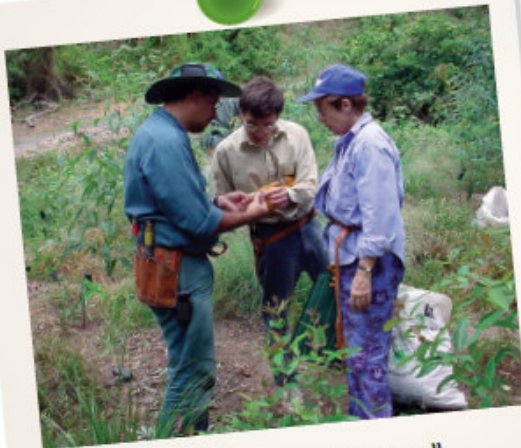
"Build a file of the site including fact sheets about the native plants and weeds on the site." Geoff & Lesley

Give each other the opportunity to do a variety of tasks.

"A variety of opportunities to cater for skills and interests." Judy

"Keep everybody moving, changing and have various activities at each work day." Linda

"Provide ongoing interest, education, guest speakers, birdwatching etc." Roberta



"Ongoing on the job training."
Jacqui

Have good communication

Clear and regular communication helps to ensure everyone is kept up to date and knows what's happening.

"Keep volunteers informed about council/ national park activities especially in regards to their site." Warren

Ensure at least one person in the group keeps regular communication with the council/ land manager.

Create a regular newsletter to keep everyone informed (existing as well as potential volunteers).

Send out reminders (by email, letterbox flyer, text message etc) of upcoming work days and activities.

"Monthly reminders 'It's Bushcare Day!'" Marlen

Create a simple website for your group.

"Remember that not everyone is on email. Talking is still allowed." Leigh



Sharing ideas at the 2009 Community Forum.

Have a good strategy

A clear and achievable work strategy will help focus the group's efforts and keep people motivated.

"Have a bigger vision and strategy that the smaller projects fit into." Lynda

Involve all group members in the planning of work.

"A clear goal." Anne

Make sure everyone understands and agrees on the overall strategy. Talk about how and why certain tasks need to be done.

"Ensure all volunteers feel they are learning something about the site, the plants and the methods of working towards the final outcome." David

Have a plan ready for each work day, so that people can arrive and start working straight away.

"At each work day, point out objectives for the day at the start. Summarise achievement at the end of the day." Jon

"Ensure techniques used on a bush regeneration site are working. Volunteers get despondent quickly!" David

"Work as a team. Each member contributes." Sandy

"Have a short and long-term plan, and flexibility as conditions change." Michael



Be organised

Having a dedicated group leader and a well organised group helps things run smoothly for everyone involved.

"Having an enthusiastic and dedicated team leader/co-ordinator." Deborah

Support the group leader and supervisor. Long-term group leaders and members have valuable knowledge and history about the site.

Encourage group leaders to share the load and mentor others.

"Plan your succession of management ie nurture the sense of ownership and the skill base to keep the group going." Rosemary

"Sharing of duties, passing on the baton." June

Keep good records of volunteer attendance, weather, unusual sightings, tasks completed, natives planted, successes and failures over time.

"Have a reminder about Operational Health and Safety at every work day and emphasise safety." Linda

"Be organised – make sure the equipment works." Paula



"Do the paperwork during tea break."
Mike

Promote your group

People like to hear about good news stories and they may want to support you or even join in! Let other people in the community know about the good work your group is doing.

"Promote your group within the local community so that others know you exist and may come along." April

"Branding – a good name, distinctive t-shirts, visibility." Alison

Ask your local council/ land manager to provide t-shirts and hats.

Lobby for educational and interpretive signs at your site.

Hold open days and invite people from the local community to come and find out about the group. Use this as an opportunity to "show off" the group's achievements and encourage new volunteers.

Regularly promote work days and open days through local newspapers, local radio announcements, shopping centre noticeboards, council newsletters, calendars and websites.

"Report to others on the successes of the group." Nick



"Put an A-frame sign out when the group is working so people passing by can see and make enquiries."
Jan

Seek extra support

There are many organisations and groups out there who can provide support. Your group is one of thousands of environmental volunteers working all over Sydney.

"Regular communication with council/ national parks staff and encourage them to visit the site and interact with the volunteers." Warren

Seek support from local businesses. Some may be interested in providing sponsorship to pay for food, tools, signs or plants or putting information about work days in their shop or office windows.

Link with other volunteers and groups to share knowledge and experiences.

"Getting involved with other groups with similar interests and providing feedback to members of our group (the bigger picture) at morning tea." Brian

Connect with other local groups where people are already coming together - community groups, schools, scout groups, cultural and religious groups.

Link with larger support networks such as the Sydney Metropolitan CMA "Mambara" newsletter, Sydney Nature Carers "SNaC" email network and the National Landcare Directory.

"Gain grants which result in volunteer encouragement, as they feel they have the support of catchment bodies and government to facilitate regeneration in difficult areas." Marlen



"Stay close with the council support staff."
Connie

Celebrate your achievements

Celebrating your achievements (no matter how big or small) helps boost volunteer motivation and a sense of satisfaction in knowing that you are making a difference.

"Regular reinforcement of progress made including photographic records. Positive feedback!" Mike

Take before and after photos of the site to track progress over time and promote the group's efforts.

"Satisfaction in the results of work done." Ann

"Rewarding to see dramatic changes. A sense of achievement." Vera

Use achievements and milestones (such as 1000 plants planted) as catalysts for promotion and articles in the local paper.

"A sense of accomplishment. Mini projects that are completed." Bronwen

"Keep a sense of perspective and enthusiasm: results may take time, nature has its own pace, a well run group will achieve results and new volunteers will appear and inject new energy." Elisabeth



The Sydney Metropolitan CMA would like to thank all the people who attended the 2009 Community Forum and shared their ideas, experiences and wisdom. The people who attended represented the following volunteer groups and programs from all over Sydney:

Badangi Bushcare group
Ballast Point Campaign Committee
Balls Head Bushcare group
Balmain High Bushcare group
Banksia Creek Bush Regenerators
Bankstown Bushland Society
Bankstown City Council Bushcare
Birds Australia
Blue Mountains Bird Observers Club
Callan Park Bushcare group
Canada Bay Sustainable Cities Committee
Carters Creek Bushcare group
Cataract Scout Park
City of Canada Bay Bushcare
City of Ryde Bushcare
Conservation Volunteers Australia
Cooks River Valley Association
Dyin Caribere Aboriginal Womens Landcare Group
Ecodivers
Ermington West Landcare
Fox Valley Bushcare group
Fred Hollows Reserve Bushcare group
Friends of Duck River
Friends of Lane Cove National Park
Friends of the Bush
Friends, Residents and Rate Payers of the Gully
Gandangara Local Aboriginal Land Council
Garigal National Park Bushcare
Greening Woolloomooloo Inc.
Harry Howard Bushcare group
Hill Road Bushcare group
Hornsby Conservation Society
Hornsby Shire Council Bushcare
Impeesa Reserve Bushcare
Inner West Environment Group
Jasper Road Public School Abors group
La Perouse Coastcare Alliance
Lane Cove Bushland and Conservation Society
Lane Cove Council Bushcare
Leichhardt Council Bushcare
Maandowie Reserve Bushcare group
Marrickville Council Landcare
Marrickville Native Nursery
Mermaid Pool Restoration Group
Moores Creek Bushcare group
Mt Annan Bushcare group
Nielsen Park Bushcare group
North Sydney Council Bushcare
Parramatta City Council Bushcare
Pennant Hills garden club
Pittwater Climate Action Group
Pittwater Council Bushcare
Pittwater Natural Heritage Association
Randwick City Council Bushcare
Reid Park Bushcare group
Rozelle Bay Native Nursery
Ryde Hunters Hill Flora & Fauna Preservation Society
Save Manly Dam Catchment Committee
Short Street Bushcare group
Sisters Bay Bushcare group
Strathfield Municipal Council Bushcare
Sutherland Shire Council Bushcare
Sylvan Ave East Lindfield Bushcare group
Ted Horwood Reserve Bushcare group
The Hills Shire Council Bushcare
The Mudcrabs
Walking Volunteers
Warringah Shire Council Bushcare
Western Sydney Aboriginal Landcare
Willoughby City Council Bushcare
Wolli Creek Preservation Society
Wombeyan Caves Landcare group
Woollahra Municipal Council Bushcare

The Community Forums are an annual event hosted by the Sydney Metropolitan CMA as an opportunity for community environmental volunteers from around Sydney to get together and share ideas and experiences. For more information on upcoming Community Forums, please visit our website at www.sydney.cma.nsw.gov.au



*"So many of us spend much of our time indoors
so on weekends we want to be outside."*

Jan



CARING
FOR
OUR
COUNTRY