



Landcare Notes

Using technology

Your group will be more successful if you use communication technology systems to find information and keep yourselves organised and efficient.

This Landcare Note outlines the different types of electronic communication tools that are available and ways of finding out about this new technology.

What is electronic communication?

We know communication is an exchange of feelings, ideas, and information (see Landcare Note 6.2: Key Principles for Effective Communication) but to be effective it has to be efficient. Computers and the internet are the technologies that can help your group communicate effectively and efficiently.

Why use electronic communication?

If communication is the basis of cooperation, anything that improves communication is worth considering.

Modern communication technologies allow very fast access to people and information – and, importantly for your group, the range of information on the internet increases all the time.

In this note we look at electronic mail (email), internet sites (the World Wide Web), global information systems (GIS) and global positioning system (GPS).

How to use them

Joining the World Wide Web

Before you have access to email or information from the World Wide Web, you need to have a computer and link it to the internet or use a computer that is connected. Most libraries have computers with internet connection that members of the public can use, or you could consider getting an internet connection at home.

There are many ways to get 'online' and there is always a trade-off between the speed of the connection (you need a powerful connection for big files and photos) and cost. The internet can be used in many ways and this may determine the best way to connect, but the fastest technology available to most of us is 'broadband'.

Types of internet connections

Internet connection options are:

- Dial-up connection (an ordinary phone line connection, like a fax machine)
- ADSL (asymmetric digital subscriber line) – a form of broadband using your telephone lines through a designated exchange
- Wireless broadband
- Cable (broadband)
- ISDN (integrated services digital network)
- Satellite.

You must also be aware of computer viruses that can be transferred via email (and destroy your computer system and your contacts), and ways that people can illegally access your computer from outside via the internet.

Electronic mail (email)

The increased use of email has been phenomenal over the past 10 years. It's one of the most used services associated with being connected to the internet, allowing large quantities of information to be exchanged between individuals and groups.

Documents (written, audio, images) can be attached to the email and sent with the message anywhere in the world, instantly accessible to the person concerned as soon as they connect to the internet and check their electronic mailbox.

Email is a very useful tool for Landcare groups, allowing fast communication between members as well as being a great way to seek



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information from technical experts, grant providers, government staff and others.

Producing and sending a newsletter to an email distribution list is quite simple and the Victorian Landcare Gateway (www.landcarevic.net.au) has plenty of useful advice.

However, there are things you should be aware of if you are sending emails to a group of people and these are some helpful protocols:

- Inserting images and attaching documents can mean the email becomes a large computer file. A big email may result in your internet connection struggling to send the file and it could be difficult for the person at the other end to open the file. Always check how big the file is or make it a group policy not to attach documents over a certain size.
- When using email, be careful to send the appropriate information regarding privacy or sensitive subjects because emails can be easily forwarded to other people who weren't supposed to receive the material.
- Many groups establish a 'group' email address to be used on their forms, brochures and websites rather than a personal email address, so this is worth considering. If you are promoting email as a way of communicating with your group, you should check the group email address as regularly as you would check your letter box.

Finding, collecting and sending information

There are many internet sites which will be useful to you. The Victorian Landcare Gateway (www.landcarevic.net.au) is an excellent starting point for Victorian Landcare groups, and it has links to many other useful sites, while the Landcare Australia Limited site (www.landcareonline.com) gives a national view on Landcare activities.

Group website

Having your own website is one way of providing information about the group, explain what you are doing, and outline the messages you want people to know.

It is possible to set up an internet site through a local service provider. Going it alone is an option but there are costs involved in both the setting-up and ongoing maintenance and updates. Viewers often rate a site on its freshness (maintenance) as much as its content - old information is not good information.

The Victorian Landcare Network provides information which will help you create your own website within the Landcare Gateway.

Global information systems (GIS)

Global information systems are computer-based software packages which allow people to look at maps, create and edit maps, and to gain information on a geographic basis.

There are many software packages available to use this electronic mapping and they are very useful for planning, recording and reporting your activities. However they are quite expensive and can need a high level of skill to operate.

There are a couple of internet-based map systems which contain Victorian data and are available free to your group and the Victorian Landcare gateway gives links to these websites. The Department of Sustainability and Environment has a range of mapping information online that is free to access. Other sites such as 'Google Earth' provide free online access to aerial photos of any area in the world.

Global positioning satellite (GPS)

Global positioning satellite receivers are used to accurately locate sites on the ground, using longitude and latitude coordinates. A GPS is commonly used to record site works, map land and locate specific features for mapping purposes.



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GPS units are commonly available and often used by Landcare groups. The best place to start in terms of evaluating whether GPS would be useful for your group, and what the best unit would be, is through the Victorian Landcare gateway.

It's also worth contacting your local Landcare facilitator to see if they can lend you a GPS unit.

A note on the gateway

The Victorian Landcare gateway (www.landcarevic.org.au) is a website specifically for Victorian Landcare groups.

It contains information on news and current events, conferences and forums, newsletters and magazines, funding opportunities, group operating systems, technical methods and ways of monitoring and evaluating your projects.

The Victorian site also provides the opportunity for you to build your own group website with assistance on the steps involved on developing

the site and setting up a photographic library as well as offering a range of email tools.

Further references

Australian Academy of Science (2006) - *GPS - And Never Having To Say 'Where Am I?'*:
[http://www.science.org.au/nova/066/066key.h
tm](http://www.science.org.au/nova/066/066key.htm)

Landcare Australia Limited:
<http://www.landcareonline.com/>

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 6.2: Key Principles for Effective Communication

Acknowledgements

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

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