

Planning and coordinating

Do you need to start a community monitoring group?

A particular issue in the community can often spark a new project. An individual or group may realise that they need more information and/or that resources are available that could be used by a community group.

The first step is to do some research:

- Contact SA MDB NRM Board staff to determine if a similar community project is underway. It is possible that someone is doing something about your issue and you can link with them rather than set up another community monitoring group.
- Find out if your issue is identified in other planning exercises, such as SA MDB NRM Regional NRM Plan, Local Action Plans, Wetland Management Plans or Water Allocation Plans.
- Look at NRM reports, for example from the SA MDB NRM region - do they support the need for monitoring data about your issue

If it appears there is a good reason to set up a new community monitoring group, now is the time to do some planning. Here are some questions to help you think about planning:

- Why do you want to monitor the issue?
- Where do you plan to undertake the monitoring?
- When you are going to do the monitoring?
- Which method will you use to monitor?
- Who will be affected, who will be involved, who needs to know about the project and your results?
- What data quality do you want?
- How will the data collected be stored and managed?
- How will the collected data be analysed?
- How will you communicate your results to users?
- How do you intend to make this happen, for example funding sources, technical support, training?

You may not be able to answer all these questions straight away and this is where the Toolkit can help including getting a monitoring group established.

Your group needs a monitoring plan, primarily for itself but also for users of data/information collected by your group. Without a plan your group may:

- be less likely to go forward together as one organisation, with one vision
- be unclear about whether or not you are achieving

your objective

- seem less credible to others
- run into difficulties that could have been avoided.

Tips for established groups

Your group may already be taking action and monitoring. There may be some ways that you can enhance the value of your community monitoring group, which can lead to funding, training or technical support.

You may be tackling an NRM issue identified in other planning exercises, such as SA MDB NRM Board Regional Plan, Local Action Plan, Land and Water Management Plan, Wetland Management Plan, Water Allocation Plan. Other groups may also be interested in your monitoring data for NRM condition or performance reports. If either of these situations apply then you have identified potential users of your monitoring data and they can be listed in your communication plan.

If your group does not have a monitoring plan then there is an opportunity to develop one to ensure your monitoring meets your needs. Later on in this section you will find a monitoring plan template to help you get started.

If you already have a monitoring plan then there may be value in reviewing your plan and reflecting on whether it is as effective as it can be. The Toolkit has a later on evaluating and revising your monitoring plan. This includes examples of evaluation questions and approaches you might use to answer these questions. A template is provided containing mock questions and answers, which can be incorporated into your monitoring plan. You can also use the decision trees to help determine the parts of your plan that need revising.

Remember to inform people of the results of your evaluation. For example the SA MDB NRM Board are interested in what you learn, so make sure this is included in your communication plan.

Tips for recruiting and retaining volunteers

Members of your community monitoring group may come and go. However, there are some things you can do to help recruit and retain volunteers.

Participation in an environmental monitoring program can be fun and educational. To encourage people to join in with the monitoring activities it is important to think about what makes participation easy and

worthwhile. The experience from many programs implemented by volunteers shows that there are a few fundamentals to recruiting and retaining volunteers and the key steps to recruiting and retaining volunteers in an environmental monitoring program are listed in Table 1.

Table 1 Key steps to recruiting and retaining volunteers

Step	Because volunteer members...
Identify the tasks	want to know what is required of them and what they can contribute
Make contact	need to be encouraged that they are wanted and will be valued
Match tasks to interests and motivation	will be more engaged and likely to continue if the tasks suit them well
Explain time commitments	are likely to stay involved if they can plan their time effectively
Provide training	value learning opportunities and want support to do a good job
Seek feedback & ideas	are the ones who can best advise you about the rewards and obstacles to making a voluntary contribution

Step 1: Identify the tasks

Be sure to have a description of the activities of the group and the tasks you would like new participants to join in with. Meeting the expectations of volunteers is an important part of keeping them involved so you want them to know exactly what they are being asked to do and approximately how much of their time it will take. Don't assume that volunteers will understand what is required of them if you don't define and explain it for them.

Written instructions can be helpful for both recruiting volunteers and retaining new volunteers. Without written instructions, an individual may decline to volunteer - or may volunteer to do the job, but misunderstand exactly what it is he or she agreed to do and drop out after a short time.

A task is more likely to be completed and on time when your volunteers know that their contribution is important and that others are counting on them. So let them know the importance of what they are doing and how the job fits into the groups' overall goals. The following will assist:

- Have a job description outlining the list of activities that the volunteer can get involved with (see page 10 for an example).

- Follow up verbal commitments with a thank you note that includes a summary of the agreed activities.

Step 2: Make contact

When someone is thinking of joining your monitoring group they will also be thinking about the kinds of people they will be working with. Therefore, it is important to give them some information about the people in the group and some confidence that they will be welcomed and valued. This can best be achieved through the personal approach. Think about developing a plan for recruiting and retaining members. Recruits may come from a number of sources and it may be worth spreading your effort.

Here are a few general tips that might improve your success rate:

- Have a few members of the group working on recruitment. This will mean that you will start with a much bigger network to draw on.
- Have some information on the general activities of the group ready to give to people who show interest.
- Set a time in the year when you encourage new people to start. There may be a time that suits people in your community and potential members will be encouraged to join at the same time as others.
- Encourage new people to join with a friend and let them know there are other members new to the group.
- Reach out to as many people as possible who may be interested. You could use attendance sheets from information sessions or workshops you have conducted or results from interest surveys conducted by the group to get a starting list of names.

General or mass recruitment is useful for spreading the message about your need for volunteers as widely as possible. This form of recruitment can help to increase the numbers up but does not guarantee quality. These methods can communicate the idea that anyone can do the tasks and that new members may not be individually valued for the skills and experience can offer. Monitoring of the environment can be technical and not all people have an interest in contributing, to managing the natural environment, will want to be involved in monitoring. However, development and implementation of a successful monitoring program involves many skills such as communication and recruitment.

Recruits from general or mass campaigns should be well informed of the program of activities to avoid wasting the time and energy of the recruits and the

existing group members. Recruitment of this kind can use:

- general announcements in newsletters or meetings
- distribution of brochures or posters
- use of advertisements of stories in the mass media.

Targeted or select recruitment is a good way to enlist people with particular skills and interests that are needed or desirable. This is a more intensive recruitment effort but offers the benefit of expanding the capability of the group. It is beneficial to:

- decide what skills and interests are needed in the group/monitoring program
- identify where people with these skills and interests can be located
- find a method of approaching and encouraging the new people to join the monitoring activities of the group e.g. prepare general information on the monitoring program, prepare a specific a 'job' description and identify the benefits of participation for the individual.

The best place to start to look for people with specific skills or interests is in the 'inner circle' of people who are already connected to current members of the group. Encouraging person-to-person recruitment means everyone in the group can play a role but it also means that group members need to understand the responsibilities and processes of recruitment. When this method is the sole source of recruitment the group should be aware of the risk of becoming 'in-bred', ie. having a membership with too narrow a range of views and experience. Starting points for inner-circle recruitment are:

- current volunteers in the group or related groups
- friends and relatives of current group members
- professional staff of NRM agencies and organisations who may be happy to get involved

Step 3: Match tasks to interest and motivation

The level of motivations for participation that potential members have will depend on their current level of interest and their understanding of the responsibilities and benefits of participation. The easiest way to draw on the motivation of potential members is to understand their interests and match these with specific tasks within the group or monitoring program. Motives can vary widely and may include looking for a challenge, self-improvement, and interest in meeting new people or concern for the environment.

Take time to speak with prospective and new members about why they want to participate. This can help to identify the tasks that they may find

rewarding. For example, whether people:

- prefer to work alone or in a group (people who prefer groups may enjoy field days, people who are comfortable working alone may be happy entering data etc.)
- are interested in water quality, plants and animals etc. to help to define the component of the monitoring program which may suit the volunteer
- have training or specific expertise e.g. chemistry or statistics
- are interested in getting some training in monitoring techniques.

Step 4: Explain time commitments

Volunteers are more likely to continue to participate in the activities of the monitoring program if they have a clear understanding of the commitments involved and can plan their time. It is worth explaining:

- number and dates of monitoring activities
- time taken for different monitoring and associated activities (eg. data collection, equipment maintenance, data entry)
- number and timing of other meetings and events of the group

A good monitoring program will also have clear objectives and be focussed on management decisions which need to be made in the future. Explain this to new members and provide an end-point for the current monitoring program if one can be agreed. Motivation may be higher for some people if they know there is a clear purpose and a set time for the activity they are contributing to. For example, if monitoring has been implemented to examine changes in water quality downstream of a new development, 1 or 2 years of monitoring may be enough to make reliable judgements about the impact of the development.

Time commitments can be written into the volunteer job description to ensure that everyone is clear about the expected commitments being made.

Step 5: Provide training

One of the key motivation for people to participate in community based monitoring of the environment is interest in the natural world and a desire to protect and manage it. Good quality training can contribute to the benefits and satisfaction volunteers receive from their involvement in a monitoring program. They can learn about the natural environment and also build skills and confidence in areas interest.

Training should be matched to the experience, needs and activities of the volunteer and can be supplemented by providing copies of monitoring

manuals, procedures or notes from previous monitoring events. Think about the full range of training that might help group members. Training in data collection is usually readily available with support from NRM officers but there may be opportunities to develop or access training in:

- planning
- science of the environment or monitoring
- data analysis and interpretation, or
- communication.

New members may bring specific skills which can be shared with the group through a workshop or training session and members should be canvassed to determine if such expertise is available. It may also be possible to discuss training needs with other groups with similar needs and interests and develop joint training opportunities. Also try to stage training to closely follow the recruitment program to ensure that people who need the training are fresh, involved and ready to act with their newly acquired knowledge.

The training required for new members to contribute effectively to the group's activities can be written into the volunteer's job description.

Step 6: Seek feedback and ideas

It is good to keep a continuous check on the activities and satisfaction of members. Checking on the progress of tasks can provide an opportunity for feedback: from the new members to the group/leaders and from the group/leaders to the new members. Encouraging new members can help them to see their value to the group and sustain their involvement. Checking on tasks can be a chance to identify where additional support is needed but should not be arranged to measure volunteer effort or success. Opportunities can be made to get ideas from new members on how to run the program better or refocus efforts. Remember that new members may eventually become long-term members and leaders of the group.

Above all it is important to show appreciation and recognise the efforts of volunteers. This can be difficult when all members of the group are volunteers and employed project officers might be encouraged to take on this role. Simple ways of recognising the contribution of volunteers include:

- recognising volunteers publicly in newsletters or at meetings
- setting aside some time at an annual social function of the group to recognise or award people who make a substantial contribution.

Developing a monitoring plan

A monitoring plan should outline the why, what, when, who and how of your monitoring activities. The preparation of a plan will serve as a useful exercise to clarify the intent of the monitoring and can be used as a resource for the community group to evaluate their monitoring effort. A monitoring plan template has been developed to assist your group. A completed example is provided in Appendix B.

Monitoring Methodology

The Plan requires details about the methodology used when collecting the data. If you are unsure of which methodology to use you can look at the list of monitoring methods (page 17 onwards). If you are already using a method, ensure it is documented and note where it can be located.

Purpose of monitoring

What is important it to have a clearly documented purpose for you monitoring.

There are many reasons why groups choose to monitor:

- increasing knowledge and understanding of natural resources for the community, decision makers and scientists
- influencing decision making at the local level to manage natural resources to determine appropriate management actions
- detecting change over time that may identify the requirement for changed management practices or assess effectiveness of management interventions
- contribute towards the needs of data/information users at a higher level, for example sub regional, regional, State Government, Australian Government.

Table 2 Example of a Community Monitoring Volunteer Job Description

COMPONENT	EXAMPLES
<p>Purpose A general statement that identifies what the job is and why it is necessary.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor surface water quality to inform management of the wetland
<p>Responsibilities List each duty and responsibility of the job. Be as specific as possible.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attend two field monitoring days per year • Organise other volunteers for monitoring days • Maintain the monitoring equipment • Participate in meeting about the monitoring results and future wetland management
<p>Qualifications List the skills, knowledge and attitudes you seek. Be careful not to over-qualify the position - you could lose some excellent volunteers. This may also be an opportunity to identify training needs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • interest in wetlands and water quality • ability to communicate • ability to delegate responsibility • ability to maintain monitoring equipment
<p>Relationships Who the volunteer reports or is accountable to.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • responsible to the wetland management group • communicate with project officer and other monitoring personnel
<p>Time Commitment Expectations regarding time demands of the job. Be specific! i.e., weekly, monthly, long-term basis, flexible, self-determined.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 field monitoring days per year • attend 2 wetland management group meetings per year
<p>Benefits What's in it for the volunteer? What is to be gained personally by doing the job?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increased knowledge of the wetland and knowledge and skills about for wetland monitoring • personal satisfaction • opportunity to meet new people • opportunity to effectively improve the quality and management of the wetland

Job Description:

COMPONENT	
Purpose	
Responsibilities	
Qualifications	
Relationships	
Time Commitment	
Benefits	

Monitoring Plan Template

1. Objective of Monitoring

Why is the monitoring being done? Is it to inform local planning, as a formal part of regional monitoring against targets, for the interest of the participants?

2. Other Related Monitoring and Associated Activity

Record other projects which may influence or interact with the monitoring activities described in this plan. This may include activities of the group, other stakeholders, and activities which are planned but not yet started.

3. Methodology Used

What methods are used, where are the methods described? How often is data collected and when, who is responsible for making sure the monitoring happens and who is willing to participate?

Use the QA/QC guidelines and quality control sampling to help complete this table and determine the quality of the data that will be collected. ?

Method	Reference (where are the methods described?)	Timing	Responsibility	QA/QC checklist

4. Location of Monitoring

Include as much detail on the location of the monitoring sites as possible, eg. GIS datum (e.g. GDA94), GPS location (or GPS points of a polygon that describes the area), map reference, diagram or map of the location

5. Data Storage

In what format will the data be stored (eg. excel spreadsheet, government or web-based database, paper-based files), what data will be stored, where will the data be stored, who is responsible for storing the data. Refer to other sections of this toolkit including data management and contributing to online databases.

Format	Data to be stored (eg. Fields, maps, photos)	Location of data storage	Responsibility

6. Data Analysis Reporting

Who will do the analysis, what analyses will they use, how will it be presented, who will it be presented to? Refer also to data display control plots (page XXX) and monitoring quality assurance and quality control.

Analysis tool	Responsibility	Presentation	To Whom

7. Additional Metadata

Use the categories below to record additional project metadata required for others to understand and use the data you have collected.

Refer also to data management guidelines.

Category	Element	Metadata
Dataset	Identifier	
	Title	
Custodian	Custodian	
	Jurisdiction	
Description	Abstract	
	Search Word	
	Geographic Extent Name	
Data Currency	Beginning Date	
	Ending date	
Dataset Status	Progress	
	Maintenance and Update Frequency	
Access	Stored Data Format	
	Available Format Type	
	Access Constraint	
Data Quality	Lineage	
	Positional Accuracy	
	Attribute Accuracy	
	Logical Consistency	
	Completeness	
Contact Information	Contact Organisation	
	Contact Position	
	Mail Address	
Meta-data Date	Meta-data Date	

8. Communication Plan

Who do you want to communicate your message to, how will you communicate the message most effectively, when do the different tasks of communicating need to be undertaken and who will be responsible for each?

Refer also to the communication section of the toolkit including examples of media releases and briefing papers.

Communication Objectives:			
Target Audience	Communication Tool	Timing and Frequency	Responsibility (including deadlines)

9. What Support is Available / Required?

What technical support resources, volunteer assistance etc is available to assist with the monitoring?

Refer also to the toolkit section on recruitment tips.

10. Evaluation and Reflection

Choose components of the project which should be reviewed and/or evaluated to ensure that the project is on track and that learning is captured. Methods for answering these questions should be chosen to be easy to implement and provide simple unambiguous answers which require minimal processing. The group should decide when the most appropriate time is to evaluate selected stages of the of the project management cycle, who should be involved and what methods will be used.

See later section more information and templates relating to evaluation and revision of your monitoring plan.

Overall Objective:				
Project Component	Evaluation/Reflection Question	Timing and Frequency of Evaluation	Source of Information	Future Actions

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